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of Ontario



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Jeudi  
25 novembre 2021

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Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott  
Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott  
Greffier : Todd Decker

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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
OF ONTARIO**

Thursday 25 November 2021

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE  
DE L'ONTARIO**

Jeudi 25 novembre 2021

*The House met at 0900.*

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

*Prières.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** We'll now have a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

**ORDERS OF THE DAY**

**WORKING FOR WORKERS ACT, 2021**

**LOI DE 2021 VISANT À OEUVRER  
POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS**

Mr. McNaughton moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 27, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters / Projet de loi 27, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'emploi, le travail et d'autres questions.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Further debate?

**Hon. Monte McNaughton:** I want to say good morning to all of my colleagues. I'm really happy and excited to rise today for the third reading of Bill 27, the Working for Workers Act, 2021. Mr. Speaker, I'll be sharing my time with the member for Mississauga–Malton, my outstanding colleague and parliamentary assistant at the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

I want to begin just by giving a shout-out to workers across the province, in particular all of those blue-collar workers who are working every single day to build our province, those workers who shower at the end of the day. I want to thank you for everything that you're doing to build our province.

My colleague and parliamentary assistant will speak more about the details of our proposed legislation in the latter half of our time here this morning, specifically how we're supporting our hard-working front-line delivery drivers and immigrants from regulated professions.

Before I begin, I want to reiterate my thanks. My parliamentary assistant provided critical support on these reforms. We truly have been working in lockstep to support and protect the hard-working women and men of our province. I'd also like to thank and acknowledge our Premier for his leadership and support for this legislation.

These are historic reforms we're making to stand up for workers and put them back in the driver's seat of Ontario's future. In fact, as all members will know, many of these reforms in this proposed legislation are the first in Canada, and some are the first in all of North America.

Earlier this month, I was proud to join and stand with the Premier, my parliamentary assistant and the Minister of Finance as we stood alongside labour leaders, including Jerry Dias, president of Unifor, and Smokey Thomas, president of OPSEU. Together, we announced that our government is raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour starting on January 1.

As our partners in the labour movement recognize, this increase will help about three quarters of a million workers here in Ontario, and it will mean that a full-time minimum wage worker could see a raise of almost \$1,400 next year. That's good news for workers, their families and all of our communities right across Ontario.

This includes the thousands of front-line workers in grocery stores who braved it all to keep us safe during the pandemic. It's because of them that shelves were stocked and our families had food on their tables. I want to thank these workers for their dedication and for their perseverance. I know, and we all know, it hasn't been easy. Many of these front-line heroes make minimum wage, and while many of us worked from home at points during this pandemic, they have been needed at their workplaces throughout the pandemic.

Our paycheque increase will also include liquor servers as we make the standard minimum wage apply to these jobs. Servers work hard. Many lost jobs or faced reduced hours because of COVID-19, yet they can currently make less than standard minimum wage. It's only fair that we fix that.

We know these workers have bills to pay and kids to feed, and their costs have been rising rapidly. They can't wait another year for an increase. That's why, starting in January, these workers will receive a higher wage to recognize their efforts and help them make ends meet. When our workers are stronger, they build strong families and even stronger communities, and that's good for all of us.

The Working for Workers Act, 2021, builds on these and other efforts by our government to protect, support and attract the best workers to Ontario, give businesses a hand up, and ensure Ontario remains a top destination to live, work and raise a family.

I've mentioned many times that our government is on a mission to chart a path forward for Ontario workers that includes bigger paycheques, better workplace protections and more opportunities. This means taking action now, today, to plan for the future, and not waiting to see how other provinces or even other countries around the world will act.

So, while many jurisdictions are just starting to rebuild from the pandemic, we are already thinking ahead to what

the next 10 and 20 years will look like. We're thinking about the workplaces of the future, what kind of future we're building for our children and what their job prospects will look like.

The world of work has obviously been changing for decades, but the pandemic has dramatically accelerated the rate of change here in Ontario and everywhere around the world. Changes that were happening slowly or that many predicted but that hadn't yet become a reality, happened all at once. I know many families, including my own, had to balance this new reality with online school and other mounting responsibilities. Nearly two years later, some of us have returned to the office, but many continue to work remotely or have adopted a hybrid model.

Other trends, like automation in workplaces, have also sped up, with many employers adopting new technologies to create safer working environments in sectors like manufacturing, distribution, retail and transportation. Some of these changes are temporary and will soon be gone as we fully return to normal, but many of these changes will continue to transform how we work long after the pandemic ends.

Our government knows that we need to look ahead to stand up for workers to ensure our laws continue to protect their basic rights, that they are treated fairly and with respect, and that Ontario remains a top destination for workers and businesses outside our borders, and our economy remains strong. That's why, in June, we appointed the Ontario Workforce Recovery Advisory Committee. We asked them to provide recommendations to position Ontario as the best place in North America to recruit, retain and reward workers.

Let me start off by thanking the chair, Rohinton Medhora, and other committee members for delivering such a thoughtful and thorough report. They did what we tasked them to do, and more.

#### 0910

To understand the current landscape and challenges associated with our changing workforce, the committee undertook an extensive engagement process. They hosted over 150 stakeholder meetings, considered over 550 written submissions and surveyed more than 2,000 people in every corner of this province. Based on their research and discussions, they provided expert advice on how to adapt to the changing workforce, lead economic recovery and help workers reach their full potential.

While we continue to review the committee's advice, I'm proud to say that with this bill, our government is already moving forward on several key recommendations. I'd like to highlight some of these recommendations now.

First, as I mentioned, the pandemic has resulted in historic changes in the way we live and work. For many of us, the lines between work life and home life became blurred, as many office workers shifted to remote work overnight. As our front-line workers fought bravely to contain the virus and keep essential goods flowing, many of us did our part simply by staying and working from home. This meant that for many families, including my own, homes became offices, daycares and schools. It

wasn't uncommon for kids or family pets, as we all know, to interrupt a Zoom or Teams call during the day. An unintended consequence of working from home was that, without a commute, it became even easier to work much longer hours, and even when off the clock, many of us keep an eye on emails, making it hard to relax at the end of the work day, on vacation or when spending the weekend or evenings with our families.

Speaker, all of us are more than our jobs. We're moms, we're dads, volunteers for charitable and community organizations, members of faith communities, hobbyists and so much more. Ontario cannot be a place where workers face burnout and only have time for one part of their life. And if the pandemic has taught all of us anything, it's the importance of mental health. It seems the people of Ontario agree.

According to a recent Ipsos survey, over 95% of people believe those who work from home should have the right to disconnect from their employer at the end of the work day. We've seen this done successfully in other jurisdictions, including Ireland and France, and it's time we stood up for workers here in Ontario. That's why we're proposing to require many employers, meaning those with 25 employees or more, to establish policies so workers can unplug from their devices at the end of the work day.

Speaker, I'm really happy and glad to see the support this measure has already generated. Jerry Dias, who I mentioned earlier is the president of Unifor, had some comments. One of the things I'm really proud of, by the way, is the new relationship our government has forged with labour, standing shoulder to shoulder with workers across Ontario.

Jerry Dias said the introduction of legislation that would require companies to develop disconnect-from-work policies is a welcome start to improve work-life balance for Ontario workers: "Technology has" obviously "increasingly blurred work-life balance, a situation exacerbated during COVID-19 as people turned their home into their job site, with workers expected to be reachable and available 24/7. This legislation is a first step towards establishing clearer boundaries between personal and work time to improve both physical and mental health outcomes."

Ontario will be a leader in protecting the right to disconnect, and that will help with other aspects of life, with mental health and even with productivity, when everyone is back on the clock.

Our next proposal would, if passed, ban employers from using non-competition agreements. These agreements basically prevent an employee from leaving one company to take a new job at a direct competitor for a period of time after they leave their current job. While they are almost never legally enforceable, employers often use them to intimidate their employees. They prevent workers from seeking better and more meaningful opportunities. This limits workers from pursuing exciting opportunities that could help them grow professionally.

We want Ontario to be a place where workers can advance their careers and where businesses can easily

recruit the talent they need. We've seen this done successfully in several other jurisdictions. California banned non-compete agreements many years ago, and yet Silicon Valley has flourished. Hawaii banned them in the tech sector in 2015, and following that there was an 11% increase in labour mobility in the sector and a 4% increase in new-hire salaries.

Banning these agreements would increase the mobility of workers and it would improve Ontario's ability to attract top talent. That's what we need here in Ontario now: top talent from new industries to help us strengthen our economy and our resilience.

I would like to take a moment to address a concern that was raised after the introduction of this bill. In a November 1 article, prominent employment lawyer Howard Levitt agreed that there are serious problems with the use of non-compete agreements. Specifically, he cites their detrimental impact on employee mobility and on costly, but often frivolous, litigation. But he also cites examples where non-compete agreements can be appropriate. In very specific contexts they can even be useful. Without them, he writes, "In hiring an executive, a company would be reluctant to entrust them with knowledge of its corporate opportunities or to develop close relationships in the marketplace if they risk that employee moving with those contracts and knowledge to its major competitor."

Creating an exception for senior executives would address that concern, and that's why earlier we put forward a motion to exclude executives from the ban on non-compete agreements. To clarify, "executive" would mean only those who hold the office of CEO, president, chief administrative officer, chief operating officer, chief financial officer, chief information officer, chief legal officer, chief human resources officer, chief corporate development officer or hold any other chief executive position. Simply put, our bill is focused on helping those on the shop floor, not those in the corner office.

I thank the committee for helping us refine and improve this element of the bill. We've landed a balance that would help workers make the most of their careers and help Ontario's growing companies expand and create more jobs, without including the few people where non-competes do make sense. And there are already other ways for businesses to protect intellectual property.

This measure will help Ontario compete with Silicon Valley and with businesses anywhere in the world, because if we support them and convince them to come or to stay to work here, Ontario workers can compete with the very best anywhere. With these changes, we can make Ontario known worldwide as the best place to live and work, a place that respects you, your work and your workplace wherever it may be, and a place where the future works for you.

Speaking of respecting and attracting the best workers, we've seen a sharp increase in temporary workers over the last decade, particularly during the pandemic. Many of them worked on the front lines in sectors like construction, manufacturing and transportation. They kept goods moving, built critical infrastructure and brought us to and from

our destinations safely. While most temporary help agencies are upstanding operators, the pandemic has shown us that some have profited from exploiting workers. They're not paying minimum wage, not paying holiday pay or overtime. With this bill, we're sending a message that this is unacceptable and it stops here.

The plan we're proposing is the most comprehensive in Canada. Our plan, if passed, would require agencies and recruiters to get a licence, pay a security bond and be listed on a public online database. Those who fail to get a licence or choose to use an unlicensed agency will face the highest fines in the country and possible jail time. We're putting vulnerable workers and honest employers first while shining a light on rule-breakers.

In committee, an important question was raised. I thank the members who asked: "Does this measure have teeth?" The answer is, yes, it does. They asked: "Will there be real consequences for those who exploit workers?" Yes, there will. We're taking real action to protect our workers, and those who violate those provisions will face a strong deterrent.

#### 0920

Penalties would apply not only to underground agencies but also to employers who use them. Where multiple agencies are involved, they will all be held accountable. So a local agency will still be held to account if they work with companies overseas that commit abuses or charge illegal fees. As I mentioned, offenders will face the highest fines in Canada and possible jail time.

And our ministry inspectors will be on the job, as they are every single day across Ontario. In 2020-21, they focused on the use of temporary help agencies in farms, retirement homes, food processing and warehouses. They discovered over \$3.3 million were owing to workers. Speaker, I want to thank the hard work of our inspectors. Close to half of these funds have already been recovered.

With these proposed changes, we're sending a clear message that breaking the law is not a cost of doing business in Ontario. If you're not following the rules, we can and we will shut you down. These steps will protect young people, women and newcomers, who are often the most exploited by these bad agencies.

Part of supporting workers means supporting the businesses they work at and ensuring our economy and labour market remain strong. All of the legislative changes we're proposing would, if passed, strengthen Ontario business and our competitiveness as a province. This is needed now more than ever.

While our economy has rebounded, and demand for workers is rising across many sectors, we know many shopkeepers and merchants are still struggling. Many were forced to close during the pandemic. Thousands of workers were laid off, especially those earning minimum wage. Because lower-paid workers were more likely to be laid off, the average industrial wage in Ontario actually went up during the pandemic. This resulted in a spike in the average industrial wage, which is used in calculating WSIB premiums. The spike didn't reflect a real increase in pay or economic activity, just the distorting impact of

the pandemic. Our government acted quickly to prevent employers from seeing significant premium increases at a time when many were struggling to keep the lights on. You'll recall, Mr. Speaker, we passed Bill 238, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, to limit the unexpected spike in premiums for 2021-22. This gave businesses essential relief and assurance when they needed it most, while maintaining benefits for those injured workers.

That brings me to the additional changes we're proposing through this bill, Bill 27. As North America's third-largest insurance company, the WSIB brings in billions of dollars in revenue every year, all of which comes from premiums paid by employers and returns from investments. The board currently has a surplus of over \$6 billion, and it's never been in a better financial position than it is today. At the same time, as I mentioned, Main Street is struggling. Thousands of businesses are still reeling from the impacts of the pandemic. They've lost staff, endured long closures, in some cases, and had to adapt to new safety measures to keep staff and customers safe.

This excess money in the WSIB's account should be going back into the pockets of small businesses in our communities. That's why we're proposing to require funds to be returned to those employers when the WSIB's surplus reaches 125% of the funds they need, and we're giving the WSIB the option to return monies early when the fund is at 115%.

The legislation, if passed, would allow for a significant portion of the WSIB's current reserve, currently valued at \$6.1 billion, to be distributed back to safe employers. This will give employers a hand up to reinvest the funds as they work to recover and grow their businesses. That's hundreds of millions of dollars that can be reinvested in new jobs, technology, and health and safety protections.

At the same time, I want to reiterate that these changes would not affect the benefits and services that workers and their families rely on.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Deeming.

**Hon. Monte McNaughton:** I know the members opposite often point to a drop in the overall amount of compensation paid to workers between 2009 and 2015. But this is because there was also a drop in lost-time injury claims. The number of claims being allowed remained stable. Benefits per person per day remained stable. Health care spending per person even increased slightly. Only the overall spending went down, because fewer injuries were reported.

Speaker, the safety and health of every single worker is my top priority. It's our government's top priority. The day we work towards is the day when no payments need to be made because every worker has gone home safely to their family. That is—

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Deeming.

**Hon. Monte McNaughton:** —obviously the goal. But—

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I'd ask the minister to take his seat.

We're debating third reading of Bill 27. Members will have an opportunity to participate in the debate when they get their turn and they're recognized by the Speaker. Thank you.

Sorry to the minister. I apologize.

**Hon. Monte McNaughton:** But until we achieve that, benefits to injured workers will be fully maintained. By returning funds to our main street shopkeepers and merchants who pay them, we'll help these businesses recover from the pandemic, which protects jobs and helps build our communities.

Speaker, you may recall that our government announced these measures last month at a local bakery in Hamilton. We also shared some additional good news: that in 2022 the WSIB is reducing workplace premiums by \$168 million. This is yet another tax cut to give employers across Ontario a hand up that they deserve. With this rate reduction, premium rates have now dropped by more than 50% since we formed government, leaving more than \$2.4 billion in local economies across Ontario.

We're also proposing changes to make paying WSIB premiums easier for employers. Currently, employers must pay premiums directly to the WSIB and separately send payroll deductions to the Canada Revenue Agency. We are now proposing to allow the WSIB to reduce the red tape and improve customer service by partnering with the CRA to create a one-stop shop. This change would, if passed, streamline operations and reduce administrative burden for businesses by enabling them to make payments to both organizations in the same place.

Speaker, our government is all about making processes easier for businesses so that they can focus on rebuilding, serving their customers and creating jobs for people in our communities. This bill would, if passed, do just that, by creating a simple process similar to what Nova Scotia and Quebec have in place. We continue to hear that these changes are going to make a huge difference along Main Street.

Rocco Rossi, the CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, commented, "At a time when Ontario is looking to stimulate recovery, lower operating costs will help businesses get back on their feet faster." He called it "welcome news for workers and employers in all corners of the province, as the savings can be better spent on job creation, new technologies, infrastructure, and safer work places."

Speaker, before I hand this over to my parliamentary assistant, I want to emphasize that these legislative proposals build on the work we have done as a government to make Ontario known worldwide as the best place to live and work.

With that, I'd like to thank my colleagues across government who have shown incredible leadership in charting a path forward for the people of Ontario. That includes historic investments in our transportation system to ensure our communities are connected and people have choice in where they live and work; increasing funding for high-speed Internet across Ontario to meet a need that was made all the more pressing during the pandemic; and supporting

our health care system and its workers by implementing virtual visits to allow physicians to meet with patients safely during the pandemic, just to name a few.

**0930**

My ministry has also taken historic actions to help protect workers' health and safety, particularly over the past two years. We ramped up our health and safety inspections of workplaces across Ontario. To date, we've now visited more than 70,000 job sites and workplaces, issuing COVID-related tickets and stopping unsafe work related to COVID where necessary. We hired 100 additional health and safety inspectors, creating the largest force in our history, and created more than 200 sector-specific workplace resources, including guidelines endorsed by management and labour to keep workplaces and job sites safe.

We introduced paid sick days for workers so people who needed to self-isolate, get tested or get vaccinated can call in sick and help stop the spread while still getting paid, and supported employers by reimbursing them up to \$200 per day for each worker through a program delivered through the WSIB. We extended that program until the end of this year.

Finally, we're planning for the future by looking at trends, like the looming shortage of skilled tradespeople, and working now to fill that gap. Earlier this week, we announced an increased investment of over \$90 million to attract more young people into the skilled trades. As part of this, we are moving forward with a new action plan to break the stigma that can be associated with the trades and increase financial supports for youth, especially those from under-represented groups, while simplifying the apprenticeship system and encouraging employers to hire apprentices, so young people have access to more opportunities and quality, on-the-job training.

Earlier this week, I was proud to stand beside our Premier and the Minister of Finance again as we announced additional support for workers by expanding the Second Career program. We're helping people hit hard by the pandemic. We're making sure help is there for people who need to upgrade or expand their skills, including more people on social assistance, youth, those who are self-employed, gig workers, newcomers and others who need a hand up. Our Second Career program will provide up to \$28,000 to help workers pay for tuition and living expenses for short-duration training, so they can get back to work quickly for in-demand jobs close to home in their own communities.

We're also proposing to extend the temporary Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit to 2022, to help workers affected by the pandemic find new jobs. And because the tax credit is refundable, it will help whether or not you owe Ontario personal income tax.

By taking these actions now, we're not only supporting the future success of today's youth, we're investing in programs that will connect more people across our province to meaningful careers and financial independence that will enable them to build better lives for themselves and their loved ones. And we're investing in our economy by

ensuring that employers have the tools they need to train the next generation of skilled tradespeople.

Speaker, I will conclude by encouraging and calling for all in this House to support Bill 27, the Working for Workers Act, 2021. The future of work is already here and, to protect workers and jobs in our province, our laws need to keep up. If passed, this bill would ensure workers' basic rights are protected, that Ontario remains the destination of choice for workers outside our borders, that businesses have a competitive environment that sparks innovation and growth, and that our economy remains strong in the years to come. I'm confident that the measures outlined today that are in Bill 27, the Working for Workers Act, if passed, would ensure Ontario continues to be the best and safest place to live, work and raise a family.

Madam Speaker, I am now happy to turn it over to my parliamentary assistant. Again, the parliamentary assistant, the member for Mississauga–Malton, has done an incredible job of leading the charge to bring forward these historic reforms to put workers in the driver's seat here in Ontario, and I'm looking forward to listening to your remarks today to highlight a number of the initiatives that are in Bill 27.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** The minister is sharing his time. I recognize the member for Mississauga–Malton.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you Madam Speaker.

*Interjections.*

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you for that applause. That applause is for Ontario. That applause is for the hard-working staff from the ministry and the hard-working members in this chamber, all of us.

Thank you, Minister. It is a pleasure to rise today for the third reading of Bill 27, the Working for Workers Act, 2021. It is an act to rebalance the scales for workers and put them in the driver's seat.

Before I begin, I want to thank my colleague the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development for detailing the actions that our government has taken, and continues to take, to put workers first. Minister, you have shown incredible leadership in ushering in some truly historic reforms for workers at a time when they were needed most, whether it was raising the minimum wage to give a hand-up to the front-line workers, introducing one of the most robust paid sick day programs in the country, and overseeing tens of thousands of inspections to keep workers safe as we battled a global pandemic.

There is no question that the past 20 months have been tough for all of us. At a time when we were unable to go into stores or restaurants, we relied on ordering food and essential items online. To all the courier drivers, truck drivers and food delivery workers, each one of you have played a critical role in the supply chain, so I want to acknowledge and I want to thank the 240,000-plus workers who made that possible. Simply put, we could not have done it without you, so thank you so much.

That is why, Madam Speaker, our next proposed item, if passed, requires business owners to allow workers who are delivering or picking up items to use a washroom at

that business. I want to say thank you for the feedback from residents Shahid Mughal, Satinder Singh and many more drivers who told me it is not uncommon to drive for six, seven or eight hours straight to make a delivery or pickup. Many of these locations are in industrial areas and don't have public washrooms or a café nearby, and as you know, during the pandemic these restaurants were closed. So to take a break, drivers often have no choice; they have to use the washroom at the business where they're picking up or delivering goods.

As my colleague the minister mentioned, we appointed a panel of experts to our Ontario Workforce Recovery Advisory Committee in June. They spoke with workers, employers and unions about how we can better support our workers in this changing landscape of work. One of their findings was that workers who deliver goods are often denied using the washroom at businesses. As I said, I heard the same from the drivers.

I do remember, recalling—when I got this call from Satinder Singh, I actually called the minister. The first reaction from the minister was, “That’s shocking. How is it possible?” And not just saying it’s shocking; to my surprise, he actually took swift action right away. He reached out to the Minister of Transportation and we had a conversation. Thank you, Minister, for that swift action. We can see in the legislation the change. But I will be talking about what we did at that time under your leadership.

Madam Speaker, I want to share with you about one of my friends—I won't name him; I don't want to get into trouble—who drives a truck for a living. He told me that one day he was in such a dire need of a washroom that he had no choice; he had to go to the woods—and think about the situation. I'll quote what he said: “When I was in the woods, I was thinking, am I in the best place in the world? Have I gone forward or have I gone backward?” We're proud of our country of Canada, we're proud of the people of Canada for standing up for right, and we're proud of the electoral body of Canada as well, who always listens and acts. This is a great example here that we can see, Madam Speaker.

I think we can all agree that this is not the way we should be treating our front-line heroes. They deserve our respect and they deserve to have reliable access to washrooms during their workdays. I'm glad to share some of their feedback we've received on this measure. I'll report that FedEx noted that this measure is a way to “acknowledge the role our drivers are playing to respond to this crisis.” Thank you, FedEx.

Purolator thanked us for supporting the well-being of their employees. The Ontario Trucking Association thanked our government “for recognizing our drivers as the ... heroes they are” and called our action “a solution that will no doubt serve as a model for other areas across North America.”

**0940**

Speaker, you will recall that at the start of the pandemic our government opened rest stops to the couriers and truck drivers, even when they were closed to the general public. That was because of the conversation we had, and thank

you to the ministers for their swift action. But we didn't stop there. This change takes those measures a step further. Giving people access to a basic facility like a washroom is not only a matter of common decency; it is a public health concern. I urge all members to support this bill and show these workers that we have their backs and we appreciate them.

Moving on: Madam Speaker, as you know, due to the last 20 months, the world of work is changing, and it's changing rapidly. We have seen a rise in remote work, and new technologies are disrupting industries across the globe. What the pandemic has done is accelerated these changes. As we look to the future, we need to ensure that our workers and our labour laws are ready to meet these changing demands, which means giving workers the training they need to adapt to the emerging technologies and shifts in the market, pointing our young people in the direction of in-demand and well-paying jobs, particularly in the skilled trades, and ensuring Ontario continues to be a top destination to work, live and invest—and I always use the word “thrive.”

As you know, Speaker, we rely on immigrants. In 2020, immigrants made up about 33% of Ontario's workforce. The fundamental reason is because we have a ratio of 2.4 to 1 to the workers, and a healthy ratio is about 4. In order to fulfill that ratio, we need people to come here and help prosper our province and help prosper our country.

With more workers set to retire over the next decade, we will need to continue to attract professionals to Ontario to fill in-demand jobs, so it is essential that we make Ontario a welcoming and attractive destination for the people. The vast majority are not working in the fields that they are trained in. For example, in 2016, 75% of internationally educated immigrants in Ontario were not working in the regulated profession they trained and studied for.

I firmly believe that Ontario is the best place in the world for families to live, work, build a new life and thrive. I came to Canada in 2000, and my family and I are so grateful for the opportunities we've been given.

Each year, our province continues to open our doors to thousands of internationally educated professionals and their families. I want to say thank you to those who take this step and their entrepreneurial skills so that they come here and work with us, and we work with them and we build a better, stronger Ontario.

The reality is, many of our policies impacting these immigrants are outdated and far from welcoming. When I came to Ontario, for example, I had an undergraduate degree in chemical engineering. The first thing, when Puneet Sharma picked me up from the airport and brought me home, he told me, “By the way, you cannot work as an engineer and you cannot use the word ‘engineer.’” I was shocked. As you know, as a new immigrant you have to pick between upgrading your skill set or putting food on the table for your family. I know, like many other immigrants, I picked putting food on the table for my family.

I want to say this: 20-plus years later, the barriers that I faced, or many of us faced—I actually heard a similar story from MPP Sheref Sabawy, who had a team he was

leading back in Egypt, and when he came here, he had to work at Tim Hortons. We're not saying that we don't like to work when we started the first career. We are still thankful to the people who gave us that opportunity. I'm still thankful to my boss Paul Kuzmenko for the trust that he'd shown. What I'm talking about—Speaker, think about a situation: If I was allowed to work at that time in the field where I was educated, I would have been able to contribute more to our province and to my family. But thankfully, everything turned out well, so I don't have complaints, but that doesn't mean we cannot do more. We still need to do more.

What we need to do is—when it comes to the regulated professionals like engineers, architects and accountants, many of those workers can't afford to go through the administrative hurdles to transfer their professional credentials. Even if they do, these processes can be confusing and time-consuming. Many newcomers need help to manoeuvre through complex assessment and registration processes, and the language assessment they have to go through can be expensive and duplicative. Think about it: You're coming to a place where you don't have a job and you're looking for work. Then you want to upgrade your education, you want to get into licensing, but it's going to cost you. It's like you're in a vicious cycle. What do you do first? These steps can take a long time.

We need to make it easier for these people to settle and find jobs in their fields. If we do so, it is a win-win situation, Madam Speaker. Newcomer families will have more financial stability. They will be able to contribute more. They'll be able to pay more taxes. They'll be able to buy more goods and services. That will increase the revenue for the government, it will increase the revenue for the businesses, and that will generate more prosperity for all of us. So I think that when the minister said it's a win-win-win situation, Minister, you are absolutely right.

It is predicted—it's not just a word, it's not just a line that we talk about—it's actually predicted that connecting newcomers to the jobs that match their qualifications would increase Ontario's GDP by \$12 billion to \$20 billion for the next five years. What can we do with that money? We can throw that money back into the services that are needed the most. We can throw that money back into health care, we can throw that money back into the education, we can throw that money back into the worker.

That's where our proposed amendments come in. If passed, it would help cut through a number of unnecessary hoops to help make it easier for internationally trained professionals to make a living here in their chosen fields. First, we are proposing to eliminate Canadian experience requirements for professional registration and licensing, unless an exemption is granted because it's a necessity for public health and safety. Let's be clear: We're not saying that we have to do whatever it takes—no. Public health and safety is paramount and that's what we have to protect first. But if it is not the case, then we are proposing to eliminate the Canadian experience requirement for professional registration and licensing.

We're also proposing changes that would, if passed, enable the creation of regulations that could streamline

language proficiency test requirements. Newcomers would not be tested again and again and again: when they immigrate, and again when they're going through the process to become registered with a regulated profession. We're also proposing changes that would, if passed, enable the creation of regulations to speed up the time in which regulated professions are required to make a decision.

Madam Speaker, what happens is that sometimes we put in these pieces and there's no deliverables, there's no time. It takes, say, two years, and then you have again conflicting priorities. What do you do in this case? You tend to refocus yourself, sometimes even if you've gone ahead and you have started it. You had intent, but because the action takes so much time, the impact is not there. We want to make sure that there's an intent and there's an action, and intent and action becomes an impact. We want to make sure that we ensure expedited registration processes are implemented in emergencies, like what we're going through, like a pandemic as well.

Speaker, not only do these proposed changes help to get these people working in their chosen field, they would also help to speed up the process. To be more specific, reducing the number of hoops that need to be jumped through means that the labourers start working in the field more quickly.

We're not the only ones saying this, Madam Speaker. I want to quote Tonie Chaltas of Achēv: "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." And I couldn't agree more.

**0950**

Virender Rathi, a first-generation immigrant and lawyer from my riding, praised the action of our government for helping many immigrants reach their Canadian dream faster.

Elise Herzig of Jewish Immigrant Aid Services called these measures "bold, impactful and meaningful."

Speaker, I would like to respond by thanking the many people and organizations who participated in these consultations and in our committee hearings or otherwise provided their insights on these problems and our proposed solutions. To you, thank you so much. You have made a real contribution to this work.

These proposed amendments, if passed, would help also give Ontario an edge over other countries and help us to attract top talent. They would help give newcomers the pride of continuing their careers here, all the while knowing that they are welcome and are supported.

Speaking of supporting our workers, Madam Speaker, I want to highlight some of the actions we're taking to plan for the future. As I mentioned, we're seeing a looming skills shortage in the labour market, particularly in the skilled trades. With many workers set to retire over the next decade, it is expected that the construction sector alone will need as many as 100,000 additional workers—100,000 well-paying jobs.

I know that earlier this week, the Premier and the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development

announced new supports for people looking to pursue a new career. First, led by the Minister of Finance, we are extending a tax credit to help workers get the training they need for a career shift, to retrain or sharpen their skills. The Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit is a temporary refundable personal income tax credit where you get up to \$2,000 in relief for 50% of personal eligible expenses in 2021.

Again, Madam Speaker, I use the words “intent” and “impact.” This credit is not just an intent; it is impactful as well. This credit will provide \$260 million, which, in other words, will go to support 230,000 people in Ontario.

In addition, the ministry is expanding the Second Career program to reach more people. This program helps workers who need a hand up to get the skills they need to qualify for in-demand jobs. Traditionally, the program targeted unemployed or laid-off individuals who needed a hand up to get back in the labour force, but during the pandemic, we have seen that our program rules excluded a lot of people who needed a hand up finding a job. While our program rules have made sense for many years, we took a hard look at them and decided we can do better for our workers and job seekers in Ontario. That is why our government is investing an additional \$5 million, for a total of \$87 million, this fiscal year to help more people access the training they need to find a new job. As a part of that, we’re expanding the program to people with little to no traditional work history.

What will that mean? I want to give you an example of that, Madam Speaker. I have the greater Toronto airport in my riding. Before the pandemic, there were about 50 million visitors who used the airport. At the peak of the pandemic, it was only 10 million. What did that mean? The people who were working outside—taxi drivers, for an example—when you have 100 people, let’s say there are 10 taxi drivers to serve them. When you have only 10 to 25 visitors, you don’t need 10 taxi drivers; you probably need maybe two or three.

We’ve seen that the taxi drivers were hit hard. And the challenge they had is that’s all they did. I know one of my residents, Harlene Toor, called, and she was very upset. She said, “Look, I don’t know what I should do. All my dad did was drive a taxi, and he was proud of doing this. He raised us. Both the kids are doing extremely good. But now we have a challenge. There’s no work, and he doesn’t want to sit idle. He wants to contribute, but he doesn’t know what to do.”

So, Harlene, this is the solution: What we’re doing is we’re expanding the program to people with little or no traditional work history. This change will open up new training opportunities to those who are struggling to get their foot in the door, as well as more recent newcomers, social assistance clients and people with disabilities. It will help people who have been working in non-traditional ways, such as gig workers or freelancers, including those who lost work due to the pandemic. It’s a practical problem and there’s a practical solution, and that is what we’re doing now.

I know my colleague on the other side is very passionate about the WSIB. I just want to say this: We are

stepping up to close the loopholes and ensure that businesses—and I’m going to use the word—like Fiera Foods, which we heard about, do not hurt workers. What we’re trying to do in the proposed amendment—only the safest employers will benefit from our proposed changes to WSIB premiums. Outsourcing work does not allow for outsourcing responsibility. The proposed changes to WSIB would not impact any of the compensation, benefits or services provided by WSIB to the workers who become injured or ill on the job.

I do want to thank all the members on the social policy committee and all the presenters for their feedback. I’d like to assure you that the minister, ministry staff and I will continue to work to improve workers’ protection. We’re always working hard to ensure, to create opportunities for better jobs, and thus creating bigger paycheques.

Madam Speaker, I just want to talk about—before I close—our province. I’m not sure if I’m allowed to show it like this, but it is called “Unleashing Ontario,” a document which I have. I’m just going to go through this. The reason I’m going through this is I’m just going to talk about how good we are as a province: “We are ... younger than the rest of the G7. Millennials, those aged 18 to 34, are the largest generation in many of our largest cities, including Toronto, Ottawa, and Kitchener-Waterloo. We’ve welcomed people from more than 150 countries,” with over 200 languages.

So what are we? We’re actually a global village. You don’t have to look anywhere else. This is the place; we are a global village. If you are a big company anywhere in this world and are looking for a second headquarters, there’s no better place than the GTA, than Ontario, right here. Why? Because, if you say an example: If you want to go to Brazil and want to work with Brazil, all you have to do is—we have a consulate here. We have a high commissioner in Ontario. We have a chamber of commerce. All you have to do is come here and we’ll give you the whole world.

But we’re not just saying it; we’re actually working to make sure that we give you the support that you need to expand. And it’s not just a word; it’s a magic number: The number is seven. Seven is the number, Madam Speaker, which is the \$7 billion in annual savings. This is what we have been providing to the businesses who want to come here, invest here and grow and thrive. And it is not just a one-time \$7 billion; it’s actually \$7 billion of savings every year. This is a game-changer for Ontario and that is the reason we are seeing over 300,000 jobs which are unfilled today. Why? Because they know. This is the place where we have seen both domestic and foreign direct investment continually coming to us, throughout the pandemic, even.

I don’t have much time. I still have to close, but before I close, I just want to talk about the “By the numbers,” where do we stand in Ontario. The reason I’m saying it is because, to me, when more Ontarians, more Canadians, more global citizens come here, invest here, what is that going to that mean? That is going to mean more opportunity for our workers, more jobs, higher-paid jobs. The

more they get paid, the more revenue comes to the government. The more revenue that comes to the government, the more we can invest back into the services that Ontarians need.

**1000**

We're the "second-largest automotive manufacturer in North America." We're the "second-largest IT cluster in North America." We're the "second-largest financial hub in North America." We're the "second-largest centre for food processing in North America." We have "70% of adults have post-secondary education." We have "55,000 STEM graduates every year." Probably not many people know this, but when you take a plane and when the plane is landing, those gears—every three landing gears out of four are manufactured here in Ontario. That is our strength. As you know, as we are going towards the electric vehicles, we have the resources required to produce the batteries. If we're looking at the world and they're trying to invest, we are the place where you can actually invest into electric vehicles and manufacture here. Why is it important? Because more investment means more job growth for our workers.

Madam Speaker, I'll close by urging all members to support our government's Working for Workers Act. It stands up for the front-line heroes who worked tirelessly through the pandemic to keep Ontario running. It supports businesses that are struggling to get back on their feet. And it builds a better Ontario for the workers of today and tomorrow, by ensuring that their basic rights are protected and our labour laws keep up with the changing world of work. These actions build on our ongoing work to support these workers and businesses, from introducing paid sick days to hiring the largest team of inspectors in our province's history. This bill sends a clear message that our government will continue to have their backs long after the pandemic ends.

Madam Speaker, by taking these steps now, we can ensure Ontario remains the best place to live, have a meaningful career, raise a family and thrive. That is why I urge every member in the House: Let's support Bill 27, the Working for Workers Act, 2021. Let's build a prosperous, stronger, better Ontario.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Questions and comments?

**Mr. Jamie West:** The heart of this bill, one of the biggest issues in this bill is the \$6.1 billion the Conservatives want to give back to their big box stores in WSIB. The last time we had a surplus, the Mike Harris Conservative Party turned that into unfunded liability that took us 17 years to pay off. Because of that, right now, one in five injured workers live on less than \$10,000 a year. Injured workers have faced four times the rate of poverty than anyone else in this province.

My question to the parliamentary assistant: Is he comfortable with the members of his riding who were injured making less than \$10,000 a year?

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Madam Speaker, I know to get through this pandemic it was tough, and we understand

that the workers need our support, and we'll always be there. That is why this Bill 27, the Working for Workers Act, will give workers a hand up to get better jobs and bigger paycheques. This is one of the things which we're talking about. Talking about those injured workers, I actually looked at the data. In 2019, 88% of those workers actually got back into their jobs with 100% income in less than one year.

Madam Speaker, I said it earlier and I'm going to say it one more time: Do we need to work more? Do we need to do more? Absolutely, yes, and we will continue to work to make sure the workers in this province are protected, the workers in this province are having backing from our ministry.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Further questions?

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Speaker, through you to the minister and through him to his PA, I just wanted to applaud the minister for all the work he's done in the area of apprenticeships; returning workmen's compensation premiums back to the employer, who then can reinvest back into employees; and all of the work they're doing in the ministry to encourage our labour and our trades. We are going to have looming shortages if we're not careful, Madam Speaker, because other governments did not do enough to train workers.

We've always heard about the lack of the ability to get a job because you don't have the experience and you can't get experience if you don't have a job. So it's great to see that he's changing that, particularly in the area of PSWs, doctors, nurses, the skilled trades and professionals. We hear all the time, in all of our ridings across Ontario: There are more jobs than there are people.

I believe that is going to be a huge help—just down the road in the next riding of Huron–Bruce—

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Question?

**Mr. Bill Walker:** —the life extension of Bruce Power and, in your neck of the woods, Darlington. We're going to need considerable trades.

I would like to ask the PA if he can elaborate a little bit more on getting rid of that requirement for Canadian experience, so when someone has done their job in another country, they can come here and they can get to work.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you to the member. Thank you for your electrifying voice for the residents of your riding.

You're absolutely right when we were talking about this bill. You could see it: We have the most diverse caucus in the history of our province. I'm not the only one of our members who, when we came here, had to go through jobs which were not in the field we were trained in. Thankfully, the minister and our Premier are taking action, which was much needed for the longest period of time. That's what we're proposing: that these foreign credentials be recognized.

It's not only just in one or two; there are 23 trades and 14 professions which will be helped out through this, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the question.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Further questions?

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I listened very closely to what was said about an hour ago. There were some quotes which are fair and reasonable, because I think there are some things in this bill that are good. But there are no quotes from the Ontario Federation of Labour, which represents 1.2 million workers. When you look at the bill, it's says "working for workers." Two out of the three words in your bill title talk about working for workers—workers are named twice—yet 1.2 million workers from the OFL, which represents unions right across the province of Ontario, weren't even consulted.

ATU: no quotes from them. No quotes from education workers, no quotes from health care workers, no quotes from the building trades and also no quotes from injured workers.

I'm going to say—I've said this while I was in committee and I know that member knows all too well about schedule 6—deeming has to come out of here. Injured workers who are deemed: 50% live in poverty. They're losing their homes. They're losing their families. They're losing their community.

I'm saying to that member: Will you take schedule 6 out of this bill and support my bill, Bill 119?

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you to the member opposite for that question. As I said earlier, when it comes to the WSIB, this bill does not propose that compensation should be reduced or that services or benefits should be reduced. It does not touch that. The workers will continue to get the same service, the same compensation, the same benefits. We're not touching that. What we're talking about is not about that.

But having said that, one thing I absolutely agree with is that we need to support our workers and we need to continue to help them. That is why we have expanded our Second Career program to help these people, especially people with disabilities, to find work. That is why we have expanded it to many other fields as well, where you can actually get \$28,000 for tuition, plus support for living expenses. We have got a plan to build back a better Ontario.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Further questions?

**Mr. Mike Harris:** I just want to say a big thank-you to the member from Mississauga–Malton. He's been doing some fantastic work in his new position with the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development. I'll be quite honest: I can't think of anybody better to do the job.

I wanted to touch on something that the member talked about. I know it's one of your favourite subjects because you stood here in the House and talked about it many times, Madam Speaker, and that was using the washroom. It was a fantastic debate that day.

My riding is home to Erb Transport. It's one of the largest refrigerated-trucking companies here in Ontario. They service all of Canada and they're a fantastic resource when we're talking about things around shipping, trucking and moving goods across our province. I did hear from several workers there that they were having problems

getting in to use washrooms. I think it's something that really resonates with people, and I'm hoping the member can explain a little bit more about what this actually means for the people of Ontario.

1010

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Madam Speaker, through you, I want to thank the member from Kitchener–Conestoga for that question. That's something that is very close to my heart because, as you know, the region of Peel is a hub of the transportation industry. We've got a lot of friends and family who are into trucking.

But it's not just for trucking. It's actually the Uber driver; it is the people who are delivering food. Everyone is included in this bill. As an example, if you are picking up or delivering to any commercial place—sometimes it's like five, six or seven hours—and you don't get to a washroom? That's not acceptable in the province of Ontario under the watch of this Premier and under the leadership of Minister McNaughton. It is not acceptable, and that's why we're doing this. We're changing that now, today. Thank you for that question.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Time for one more question.

**Mr. Gurratan Singh:** They often say that if you want to see a doctor, take a taxi or take an Uber, because of the amount of people who are foreign-trained doctors who come to Canada and don't have their education or their profession recognized. But the Conservative government has decided to once again leave out those foreign-trained doctors in this piece of legislation. Why is the Conservative government leaving those people behind?

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Through you, Madam Speaker, to the member opposite: I know that we were at an event a couple of weeks back and the member opposite talked about working together, so I want to thank the member opposite for that gesture of working together.

Yes, we talked about the foreign-trained professionals whose professions have not been recognized for decades. I'll give you an example. I came 21 years back, and nothing has happened in the last 20 years. So that is why we're trying to change that today. We want to take the first step. What we're trying to do is, we're trying to start with 23 trades and 14 professions, such as lawyer, engineer, architect, plumber, electrician, accountant, hairstylist, teacher and early childhood educator. We are making sure that more of these professionals can work in their own field—not just work but can thrive and give back more to our province's prosperity.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Thank you.

*Third reading debate deemed adjourned.*

#### WEARING OF SCARVES

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Am I recognizing the minister on a point of order?

**Hon. Merrilee Fullerton:** Thank you, Speaker. If you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to allow members to wear purple scarves in recognition of the Ontario

Association of Interval and Transition Houses' Wrapped in Courage campaign to end violence against women.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services is seeking unanimous consent to allow members to wear purple scarves in recognition of the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses' Wrapped in Courage campaign to end violence against women.

Is it agreed? Thank you.

## MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

### HOMELESSNESS

**Ms. Jill Andrew:** On any given night, over 10,000 people in Toronto are experiencing homelessness, with over 50% being chronically homeless for over six months. Many are hungry, battling mental health and addictions. It's getting cold out there, and in our community of Toronto—St. Paul's we're worried because the effects of food insecurity and housing instability only get worse in the cold winter months, and our overnight Out of the Cold programs have been on hold due to the pandemic.

I'm deeply thankful to the Holy Blossom Temple's Out of the Cold program team in my community. They're running a hot meal pickup program from November 18 to April 7 next year between 4 p.m. and 5 p.m. On certain weeks, there will also be toiletries and warm clothing items given out too.

I ask anyone who may need this support, or who knows someone who needs it, to reach out to Holy Blossom Temple or to my office and we will connect you. There's no stigma or shame in needing help.

There are other local St. Paul's community-based programs, such as our friends at Wychwood Open Door run at St. Matthew's United Church, which I volunteered at; St. Michael and All Angels Church Beeton Cupboard, which I've also supported; and the Churches on-the-Hill Food Bank sponsored by Calvin Presbyterian Church, Christ Church Deer Park, Deer Park United Church, Grace Church on-the-Hill, Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church, St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Latvian Church, Timothy Eaton Memorial Church and Yorkminster Park Baptist Church.

The generosity in our community is overwhelming, but community generosity should never and can never replace government responsibility. The issue of food and housing insecurity will not go away by itself. It requires political will. If not now, when?

### JOE VAN KOEVERDEN

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Thanks for the opportunity to rise and speak about another friend of mine from the Peterborough area. When I started to write this statement, I thought, "How do I describe him?" Humble, caring, intelligent, committed—and then it dawned on me that I can sum it all up with this phrase: "Joe is an exceptional human being."

I'm talking about my friend Joe van Koeverden. Some of you might be saying, "That name sounds familiar." Yes, you're right. Joe is the father of four-time Olympic kayak medalist Adam van Koeverden, and I have forgiven Joe for letting his son grow up to be a Liberal.

Why is Joe an exceptional human being? Joe has Parkinson's disease, and yet he consistently gives back to our community without ever having to be asked. He's part of a research project with Trent University looking into the effects that an active lifestyle has on people with Parkinson's. Fitness forums, boxing, dancing and walking are all activities Joe takes part in for the active living research.

I mention walking in particular because of the Parkinson Canada SuperWalk. Joe's goal last year was \$10,000 and an astonishing one million steps. For those of you with Fitbits, you know that your goal is 10,000 steps a day, so let's put that into perspective: That would be 100 consecutive days of hitting your Fitbit goal.

If you want to learn more about Joe and his journey with Parkinson's, you can find more at [www.joewithpd.com](http://www.joewithpd.com).

### VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** As we mark the beginning of 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, I want to thank the staff and volunteers who work tirelessly every day to end gender-based violence in Waterloo region and across Ontario.

It is my privilege as a member of provincial Parliament to recognize the ongoing work of local women leaders in KW, including Elizabeth Clarke at the YWCA, Sara Casselman at the Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo, Jen Hutton at Women's Crisis Services and, of course, Zonta KW. In the callous absence of leadership and adequate funding by this government, these women have stepped up to fight for supportive housing and anti-human trafficking resources, and they've stretched their budgets to support women who have been raped and whose innocence has been stolen.

When survivors have the courage to come forward and ask for help, the resources should be there to help them. When the Ford government cut the funding back in 2019, they turned their backs on survivors. Funding and resources available to agencies doing this vital work remain insufficient, especially with the substantial impact of the pandemic. We have a shadow pandemic where violence happens in the dark and survivors are barely holding on. At SASC, counseling requests have gone up by 55%; for Family Court support calls, 158%. Staff are burnt out.

My colleague MPP Lindo and I will not rest until we see women supported through the court system, through supportive housing and counselling, and until women in Ontario no longer have to live in fear.

### ANNUAL TORONTO POLICE AUXILIARY TOY DRIVE

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** Residents in Scarborough—Rouge Park are always looking out for each other. I saw this first-hand, especially during the peak of the pandemic,

as the community came together to give back and look out for their neighbours and take care of our seniors. The Toronto Police Service is always giving back to the local community, whether it be through food drives to support local community organizations or picnics to foster community spirit.

Today I rise to speak about the Toronto Police Service coming together to put smiles on children this holiday season: 41, 42 and 43 divisions are coming together to host their annual auxiliary Christmas toy drive. Toys will be distributed to families within Scarborough who reside in shelters or have been identified as having a need.

The TPS toy drive is accepting new and unwrapped toys. Toys can be dropped off at both 42 and 43 divisions or can be purchased online and mailed directly to 42 and 43 divisions. Toys will be accepted up until December 14 at 12 p.m.

**1020**

The spirit of the season is all about giving back. I encourage you to do your part in giving back to your local community, to those who are most in need. I want to thank, again, all the three police divisions, 41, 42 and 43, for serving and protecting our residents.

#### PROSTATE CANCER

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I rise today to say that I once again tabled legislation to have OHIP cover the cost of PSA testing in the province of Ontario. This year, it is estimated that 1,500 men will die of prostate cancer in Ontario, yet we know that if diagnosed early enough, there is an almost 100% chance of survival for those who have prostate cancer. If allowed to get to stage 4, this cancer only has a 25% survival rate.

Residents in Ontario can get an early warning of this disease by having a PSA level test early, but they must pay for the test out of their pocket unless they have been already diagnosed with prostate cancer or ordered by a doctor. So why, then, is this life-saving PSA test not covered by OHIP?

My good friend Larry Gibson of the Fort Erie golf course hosts a tournament every year to raise money to cover the costs of these tests for those who need them. Gibby himself is a person whose life was saved when he paid out of his pocket for a PSA test which showed his levels far above normal. Had he forgone this cost, he wouldn't have been diagnosed until the situation was much worse.

Do you know that one in nine men will get prostate cancer in their lifetime? PSA testing is already covered in provincial health programs in eight provinces and three territories. My motion would save lives, save money and keep people out of the hospital. I hope the government will join me, support this motion, and get it done for Ontario. We can all grow moustaches like mine—it's also important—but if we don't pay for the test, men are going to die in the province of Ontario.

#### CHARLIE FISHER

**Mr. Bill Walker:** I rise today to recognize a very special occasion for a very special person in the great riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. On November 5, cherished and dedicated veteran Mr. Charlie Fisher of Owen Sound celebrated his 107th birthday. I am truly honoured to know him, and I had a chance to visit Mr. Fisher on his birthday. I can say without a shadow of a doubt that it was a very special day for Mr. Fisher and his entire family.

Mr. Speaker, he was teaching his eight-year-old neighbour to sketch, and gifted me one of his sketches, which I will cherish always. Can you imagine, when that young person reaches our age and reflects on the fact that this special person, almost 100 years older than her, had taught her to sketch.

It was terrific to see the entire community recognize Mr. Fisher's birthday and strive to make it a very memorable day for him. Students from Owen Sound District Secondary School, family and neighbours joined together to sing Happy Birthday to Mr. Fisher and also present him with 250 birthday cards from local students. Mr. Ryan McManaman's grade 12 history class at Owen Sound District Secondary School started the birthday card effort and it soon spread to other classes throughout the school.

Mr. Fisher is a decorated veteran of the Second World War, and on his birthday the Billy Bishop Museum brought over his Kodak Bullet camera, his medals and his leather jacket from his military service, all of which are on loan to the museum, and I encourage everyone to go see.

Mr. Fisher enlisted in the military in Owen Sound and joined the Fifth Canadian Armoured Division, RCASC, in Aldershot. He was a driver with the transport corps and brought food, supplies and materials to our troops. He participated in the defence of Britain, the Italy campaign, and in France, Holland and Germany. During his service, Mr. Fisher took hundreds of pictures, and some of those photographs can be seen in displays at the Billy Bishop Museum in Owen Sound.

Mr. Speaker, I've never seen anyone more positive than Charlie Fisher. He bought a tablet at the age of 105—with a full warranty. I want to congratulate Mr. Fisher for a tremendous milestone and thank him for his many years of service in defence of our great nation and for all that he has contributed to our community. He is a true hero and an inspiration. In his words, "Never quit."

#### VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

**Mr. Jamie West:** Speaker, today is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and the purple scarf that I'm wearing and that all the members in the House are wearing is a symbol of the courage it takes women to leave their abuser.

During the month of November, we wear our purple scarves to show people identifying as women and their children that the community supports them and that they're not alone.

It's especially important that we do this as men, because every year in Ontario, 20 to 30 women are murdered by their current or previous male partner. When we include other family members and men known to women, that number rises significantly. It's the number two reason for calls to emergency police services.

Because it takes the support of the entire community to end violence against women, I'd like to acknowledge a few of the agencies within my riding that are assisting women experiencing emotional, physical, sexual, financial or spiritual abuse: YWCA Sudbury, Réseau Access Network, Sudbury and Area Victim Services, Sudbury Counselling Centre, Centre Victoria pour femmes, Sudbury and district health unit, the Victim/Witness Assistance Program, the Voices for Women Sudbury Sexual Assault Centre. And I want to highlight Sudbury Women's Centre. I'm just proud to brag it was a place where my mom loved to volunteer when they were founded more than 40 years ago.

As a member of provincial Parliament for the riding of Sudbury, I want survivors to know they're not alone. I see you. I stand with you and with all survivors across Ontario.

#### GUN VIOLENCE

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Gun violence is both a public health and a social issue that leaves long-term impacts on our communities, and we must do more to break cycles of violence and support communities to heal.

Exposure to gun violence has mental and physical impacts that extend far beyond the victim. It results in long-term effects on communities marked by feelings of fear, anxiety and hopelessness, and, without access to long-term supports, can lead to generational trauma.

Just last week in my riding, our community grieved the tragic death of a young man just 23 years old. Unfortunately, these occurrences are far too often. This month alone, Toronto Police Service's 43 division responded to seven shootings, and 32 so far this year.

Gun violence is a serious problem and a crisis that cannot be ignored. It's an issue we see in more marginalized communities, rooting from underlying systemic inequalities in our communities. It's a problem that my private member's bill, the safe and healthy communities act, would bridge. It would declare gun violence a public health issue. It allows for counselling services for survivors of gun violence that would be covered by OHIP and for all boards of health to develop programs and services aimed to reduce gun violence and assist those affected. I will table this legislation next week.

We have an opportunity here to intervene before that bullet is trafficked or pointed at our neighbours. We can solve this root issue. I call on the Minister of Health and the government to do the same and to support this legislation.

#### HOSPITAL FUNDING

**Mr. Norman Miller:** Today I rise to express my gratitude to the Minister of Health for her commitment to

addressing the inequities in how small and medium-sized hospitals are funded in Ontario. I've spoken many times about the challenges faced by medium-sized hospitals like those in Parry Sound–Muskoka. Under the previous governments, these hospitals were chronically underfunded and had to ask the ministry each year for top-up funding to make it through to the end of the fiscal year. This made it very difficult for these hospitals to plan for the future in the same ways as larger urban hospitals. But Ontarians who live in smaller communities deserve equal access to hospital services.

Increasing the base funding to our hospitals means that they can plan for future initiatives, and stabilize operations and budget more effectively. After the additional funding was announced this summer, Natalie Bubela, CEO of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare, told me that for the first time in more than a decade, her hospital was predicting a balanced budget for the next five years. This is great news. It means Natalie and her team spend their time planning for the future rather than writing requests for additional funding and planning on what to do if those requests aren't approved.

On behalf of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare and West Parry Sound Health Centre, and on behalf of everyone who relies upon these great hospitals, thank you to the Minister of Health for addressing this long-standing issue.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** This concludes our members' statements for this morning. I see the clock at 10:29 a.m.

#### TRANS DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** As provided by the Trans Day of Remembrance Act, 2017, the assembly shall now pause and observe a moment of silence in honour of trans people who have died as a result of anti-trans violence. I'll ask the members now to rise and observe a moment of silence.

*The House observed a moment's silence.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Thank you. Members may take their seats.

1030

#### COVID-19 DEATHS

**Ms. Andrea Horwath:** Point of order, Speaker.

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

**Ms. Andrea Horwath:** I seek unanimous consent for the House to observe a moment of silence for the 31 Ontarians who have succumbed to the COVID-19 pandemic since we last paid tribute to the victims.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The Leader of the Opposition is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to observe a moment of silence for the 31 Ontarians who have succumbed to COVID-19 since we last paid tribute to the victims of the pandemic. Agreed? Agreed.

Members will please rise.

*The House observed a moment's silence.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Members may take their seats.

#### VISITORS

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I'm pleased to inform the House that one of our page captains today is page Alfie Tabachnick, from the riding of Davenport, and we have with us today at Queen's Park his mother, Nadia Sapiro, and his father, Scott Tabachnick.

We're also joined by Chandra Noronha, the mother of our other page captain today, Serena Noronha, from the riding of Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill.

Welcome to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. We're delighted to have you here.

#### QUESTION PERIOD

##### CHILD CARE

**Ms. Andrea Horwath:** Speaker, my first question this morning is to the Premier.

We all know that families are struggling with pretty much the cost of everything, like child care, for example. Toronto, in fact, has the highest child care costs in the entire country—after 15 years of the Liberals, of course. But this Premier has also not made child care a priority in the province of Ontario. BC signed a deal on child care with the federal government back in July; as we all know, Alberta did so just last week. This Premier is just now being dragged to the negotiating table and, shamefully, warning families to expect even further delays at getting a deal.

Why has Premier Ford never made affordable, \$10-a-day child care a priority here in Ontario?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** To reply, the Minister of Education.

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

On the contrary, the Premier of this province has made child care a priority from our first budget.

It is ironic, though, that the member opposite would oppose the very measures to increase access and decrease costs for working parents in Ontario, as the Liberals did three times in this House.

We put in place a billion dollars of investment to build tens of thousands of child care spaces. I was joined just two days ago by the Minister of Infrastructure where we announced an additional 3,000 child care spaces within publicly funded schools in all regions of Ontario. That's going to make a difference.

We are at the table with the feds, making the case for a better deal, a fair deal for Ontario families that actually gets us to \$10 a day, because we know, as the member opposite rightfully mentioned, that child care rose by 400% under the former Liberal government—unacceptable, indefensible. The Premier is resolved to bring those costs down and get a sustainable deal that is good for all families in this province.

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

**Ms. Andrea Horwath:** Well, Speaker, here's what happens when a province actually does make child care a priority. Saskatchewan, for example, does make it a priority and families there are actually expecting retroactive rebates for the fees they've already paid; in some cases, likely to be over \$2,000. Some Alberta families will have their fees literally cut in half early next year. BC is already implementing \$10-a-day child care. In fact, by the end of next year, they'll have 12,500 spaces in place. In Manitoba, child care workers are actually earning \$25 an hour as a starting wage. In Ontario, we have no deal whatsoever because child care for hard-working families has just never been a priority for the Ford government.

Why has this Premier not been able to get a deal like all of those other provinces? How long are families in Ontario going to have to wait before they can see child care costs reduced to \$10-a-day?

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** The obligation of the Ontario government is to stand up for Ontario families at the national government. If we'd accepted the first deal, as the New Democrats and Liberals would have done months ago, this province would have been shortchanged. It's not an exercise from an accounting perspective. It's simply that we wouldn't get to \$10-a-day at any point over the course of the five-year deal.

What responsible leader would sign a deal that ensures Ontario pays more per child than every province, east and west? That's just simply something we're not going to accept, which is why we're at the table making the case for increased investment over a longer period of time, with greater flexibility to support all parents. We're at the table designed to get a deal, but it had better be a good deal and a fair deal for the people we represent in the province of Ontario.

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

**Ms. Andrea Horwath:** Speaker, it's not an exercise at all. It's about getting families the affordable child care that they've needed for decades here in this province.

This Premier has not made affordable child care a priority, and everybody knows it. The evidence is clear. He hasn't even mentioned the words "child care" in this Legislature for over a year and a half. It's a clear signal to families that he just doesn't have their backs. The cost of everything, Speaker, as we know, is going through the roof. They need hope. Families need hope, and they deserve a break on their child care costs. They deserve that financial relief.

When will this Premier actually make \$10-a-day child care a priority, make sure that Ontario families can access affordable, not-for-profit, \$10-a-day child care right here in their home province of Ontario?

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** We're very much committed to getting a fair deal for the people of Ontario.

The irony is not lost on members of this House. When the New Democrats and Liberals had a chance to ensure even incremental affordability for Ontario families through

the introduction of the Ontario Child Care Tax Credit, which the Premier put in the first budget, preserved in the second budget, enhanced in the third budget, each and every time Liberals and New Democrats stood united against affordability and opposed those measures. That would have made an incremental difference. When the Premier put a billion dollars in a capital plan to build 30,000 accessible, affordable child care spaces in Ontario schools, the New Democrats and Liberals united again to oppose that effort.

We are doing everything we can to make the case to the federal Liberal government, to Prime Minister Trudeau's government. We deserve a fair deal that truly brings down costs and gets us to \$10, which we believe Ontario families deserve.

#### AFFORDABLE HOUSING

**Ms. Andrea Horwath:** My next question is also for the Premier. But everybody knows that tax credits for rich families don't make child care spaces available to other families, nor do this government's policies create spaces. In fact, we've lost child care spaces under this government's watch.

But look, it's not just the cost of child care that's a problem. It's not just the cost child care that's stretching families to the limit, Speaker. The cost of housing is rising rapidly, and it's becoming completely out of reach for so many Ontarians. House prices have reached significantly increased costs over the last couple of years, but certainly this pandemic has made it much, much worse.

1040

The deputy governor of the Bank of Canada says, "A key concern here is that financially stretched households have little breathing room." The government has its head in the sand. The Premier is busy polling for political solutions to the housing crisis that he hopes will help him, instead of implementing changes to help families afford a home.

Why has the Premier been so busy looking out for himself instead of looking out for Ontarians who should be able to afford a home in Ontario?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** To reply, the Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Thank you to the member opposite for that question. I don't think this Premier would say to the member opposite that the 760,000 people who got an increase, those on minimum wage, have their head in the sand. In fact, this Premier and this government have been there for people across this province. The minimum wage—an increase for 760,000 people at or below minimum wage, for many workers in this province. Join us and vote for the bill, because it supports those hard-working Ontarians who had our back throughout the pandemic, and now we've got their backs.

Mr. Speaker, we have the lowest personal income tax for low-income people in the country. That's putting more money back in their pockets, and that's what this Premier stands for.

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

**Ms. Andrea Horwath:** Speaker, this government is so out of touch. Nobody earning \$15 an hour, even if it's two members of the family of the household earning \$15 an hour, is ever going to be able to afford a home in this province, and that's what we're talking about.

Teranet, as a matter of fact, found that 25% of Ontario homes are being bought up by investors, not first-time homebuyers. Families are struggling to get into the market. It was really bad under the Liberals. There's no doubt about it. But it is even worse now. First-time homebuyers are literally being crowded out of the market. They're competing with wealthy investors and huge corporations who see real estate as an investment deal, not a roof over the head of a family. It's driving up prices everywhere in this province, Speaker, even in small towns.

Does the Premier think it's fair that first-time homebuyers trying to get into a home, the home of their dreams perhaps, have to compete with wealthy investors and big corporations? And if not, what's he going to do about it?

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Again, to the member opposite, let's stick to some of the facts. Prices are going up right across the country. They're coming up in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, this Premier and this government have done more to put the conditions in place to see housing supply increase, because the previous government, supported for three years by the member opposite's party, didn't increase the supply of housing and affordable housing in this province. In fact, just last year the conditions were put in place that 70,000 new homes were built in this province, the highest in 10 years. But it gets even better. Over 10,000 purpose-built rental units were built, the highest number since 1992, Mr. Speaker.

When you had the opportunity to do something, what were you doing? This government is building. This government is acting. This government is supporting the people of Ontario.

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

Leader of the Opposition, final supplementary.

**Ms. Andrea Horwath:** Speaker, building homes for wealthy investors and for corporations and for buddies of the Premier is not going to help everyday working families into an affordable home. That is the fact. It's no wonder that Ontario has seen the worst outmigration in 30 years, the worst since the 1980s, in fact. Some 85,000 people have left our province to go to places like BC, Alberta, Quebec—other provinces, basically—because it is absolutely unaffordable to live in the province of Ontario. And this Premier is making it worse with his low-wage policies.

It's time to help families that are competing with wealthy investors and corporations. Families need help to get into the market. It's time to increase, frankly, the speculation and vacancy taxes on wealthy investors and corporations. We need to help families get the homes that they can afford. Why won't the Premier implement these

policies to give hard-working families a break and get them a shot at owning their own home in Ontario?

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Mr. Speaker, again, let's look at some of the facts of people wanting to come to this great province this year. COVID was a tough year for people right across the country in terms of welcoming new people because of important restrictions to protect the safety and health of the people of Ontario. But this year we're expecting almost 180,000 people to come to this great province. Because of the work that this Premier has done, this Minister of Health and this whole team in preserving and protecting the health and welfare of the people of Ontario, it's now very safe to come to Ontario.

We're building more homes for every single Ontarian so they can live in a condo, they can live in a house, have a front yard, have a backyard, because this government supports families. This government is not going to just talk about it, like they did for 15 years over there. This government is doing something about it. Join us in building Ontario.

*Interjection.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Hamilton Mountain will come to order.

#### COVID-19 RESPONSE

**Ms. Rima Berns-McGown:** My question is for the Premier. There are almost 700 COVID cases in schools right now. Here in Toronto, hundreds of kids are at home isolating, and three of our schools, including Grenoble Public School in the east end, are closed completely. That means 15 schools in total are now closed across the province.

Parents are watching these numbers nervously. The last time we saw numbers spike like this, the province's cancelling of in-person classes wasn't too far behind, and absolutely nobody wants to go back to that.

Speaker, this government's lack of plans for vaccines and their refusal to reduce class sizes or invest in safer schools means that kids and staff continue to be at a higher risk than they should be. What is the Premier doing to stop this spike and keep our kids safe?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Minister of Education.

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** Speaker, the government has worked in partnership with the Chief Medical Officer of Health to ensure our schools remain open and safe.

The member opposite cited 15 school closures, of which five are closed due to operational reasons. That transparency should be cited when we speak and try to spark alarmism.

The Chief Medical Officer of Health said himself that schools have been safe, reflecting our community. We have now over 400 school-based clinics for our youngest learners in our schools that are now eligible for vaccines. We are proud to work in partnership to roll out the vaccine to as many children as possible. In this province, we have one of the highest vaccine rates for high schoolers and one of the lowest case rates in the country.

I appreciate that we have to continue to remain vigilant, which is precisely why we've introduced rapid antigen test kits for every child over the holidays. It's why we are the only province who have expanded PCR take-home tests, the only province in the nation to do so. It's why we've increased staffing by 2,000: more custodians, teachers and front-line staff to keep our schools safe, and we'll continue to do whatever it takes to achieve that objective.

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

**Ms. Rima Berns-McGown:** Those rapid tests should have been in schools and parents' hands in September.

This spike in cases and in closures shows just how important it is for us to get vaccines into as many kids' arms as possible, as soon as humanly possible. But instead of coming up with a plan to make that happen, the Premier just seems to shrug his shoulders, cross his fingers, and hope it all works out. That led to a broken vaccine portal that won't let parents register more than one child at a time, and an in-school vaccine plan that just doesn't work for a lot of working parents.

When is this government going to start taking this seriously? Or are parents going to have wait until every school is closed again before the Premier acts?

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

**Hon. Christine Elliott:** We have a very detailed plan for the vaccination of children aged five to 11. It's rolling out now.

I know we've heard from the other side about how other provinces are doing so much better, but I would note that British Columbia isn't even starting to vaccinate children until next Monday. We have been doing that for several days now. We have over 100,000 appointments already made.

Parents that wish to have more than one child vaccinated—we recognize many families have more than one child that falls into this category. They can simply call the vaccine line and they can make those appointments. This is not a problem. With over 100,000 appointments already made, we're well under way to making sure that we get all of the children aged five to 11 vaccinated that are going to be.

*Interjection.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Once again, the member for Hamilton Mountain will come to order.

#### ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

**Mr. Amarjot Sandhu:** My question is to the Minister of Education. Mr. Speaker, this week is—

*Interjection.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I'm going to warn the member for Hamilton Mountain.

I apologize to the member for Brampton West.

**1050**

**Mr. Amarjot Sandhu:** This week is Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week in Ontario. We know that far too many students in Ontario schools experience bullying, whether it be in the classroom or online, and one student

bullied is too many. In 2019, the Ontario government announced new measures to help prevent and combat all forms of bullying in schools. Part of that commitment was to review the definition of bullying in ministry policies to ensure it reflects the realities of today.

While this marked a significant step by this government to address bullying, we know there is more work to do. Can the Minister of Education share with the House what he is doing to address bullying and cyberbullying in Ontario schools?

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** I want to thank the member for Brampton West for his question on, I think, a very important topic that unites us all, because we have seen an increase in bullying and cyberbullying, victimizing young people based on their faith, their heritage, their sexual orientation, their place of birth, their colour of skin, and I think we can all agree that is reprehensible. There are children who have been bullied in our schools, online and in our playgrounds, and we have resolved, as a government, to do something about it.

The last time the definition of bullying was updated was 2012. And so, Speaker, we are proud, as a government, to announce that we are moving forward with a new, updated policy requiring every school in Ontario to have anti-bullying protocols in place. For the first time, this will require a new, enhanced definition. It will strengthen parental roles to prevent bullying and it will require boards to track reported incidents. We are doing this in partnership with our educators, strengthening the training of them to ensure we can prevent bullying in its tracks and save lives in our schools.

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

**Mr. Amarjot Sandhu:** I want to thank the minister for his answer. Parents across Ontario deserve to know that their government is taking a proactive approach to anti-bullying policies in schools across the province.

Mr. Speaker, we know that students with physical, intellectual and developmental disabilities face an elevated risk of bullying. Advocacy groups have called for greater supports in schools to help vulnerable children feel included, respected and safe. Can the Minister of Education tell this House how he plans to support these students as we look to combat all forms of bullying in Ontario schools?

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** When we conducted a student survey on bullying, 40% of children reported having been bullied themselves within our schools. We know this is a problem we are committed to fixing. It's why we're proud today to announce a partnership with the Rick Hansen Foundation and the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, leveraging their expertise and their leadership in training our educators to better prevent bullying in our schools, to increase access to culturally relevant resources, to ensure it has an impact on students and to ensure that we provide student-centric supports to children right across Ontario. These investments are going to help build safer, more inclusive classrooms. They're going to help give our staff in our schools the ability and the capacity to prevent and intervene early to save lives.

Mr. Speaker, we have increased investment to special education, because as the member from Brampton West rightfully noted, children with intellectual, developmental disabilities face an increased level of victimization. We are committed to protecting them and supporting all children within our schools.

## GOVERNMENT SERVICES

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** My question is to the Premier. Some of the province's biggest business and law firms are warning that Ontario's new online business registry system is so broken that they're now advising their clients not to incorporate or register their businesses here in Ontario anymore. In a scathing 12-page letter to the minister, they wrote that the Conservatives' new plan is so broken it is not only "negatively impacting our firms, clients and service providers"; it's "having a chilling effect on doing business in Ontario in general."

Does the Premier still think his champion of a minister is doing an all-star job here as he drives business out of Ontario, or will he step up and step in before things get even worse for Ontario businesses?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** To reply, the Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

**Hon. Ross Romano:** Thank you very much for the opportunity to respond, Mr. Speaker. What we have done is modernize a 30-year-old, paper-based process. Under the old system, Mr. Speaker—think about this for a second—a not-for-profit charity in that member's riding or a small business would literally have to fill out boxes of paperwork and then lug these boxes of paperwork in to service counters, wait in line, only from Monday to Friday, 9 to 5. That was it. That was the only option you had. Or you hired a lawyer at considerable cost. Think about those charities and those small businesses and all of the expenditures that go along with all of that work. That's the option. Under our new system, it is 24/7, 365 days a year. You can do a transaction now in 16 seconds that used to take 16 weeks, and you don't have to hire a high-priced lawyer anymore.

Why would this member not just simply prioritize protecting—

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

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Mr. Speaker, this minister is modernizing businesses right out of Ontario. That's what we're seeing right now.

This Premier has been so busy fighting for what's best for his buddies at Loblaws and Walmart that he might have missed the real concerns of Ontario-based businesses, so I'm going to quote some of them right now.

In their letter, the firms wrote, "The system shutdowns, technical glitches and substantive problems associated with the new OBR are causing significant disruption, delaying transactions and adding significant costs for businesses." To make matters worse, they also said that thanks to this Ford government they "have no confidence or as-

surances that year-end registrations and filings—the busiest time of the year for our law firms—can be completed without putting entire transactions at risk.”

So aside from the obvious political embarrassment for this government, getting this right actually is very important.

My question is simple: Does this really sound like a province that’s open for business to this Premier?

**Hon. Ross Romano:** Mr. Speaker, I’ll quote from the very same letter that the member opposite quoted. From Fasken law firm: “All of our law firms are familiar with complicated legal technology rollouts. They are never perfect nor error-free.”

Let’s just think about this for a second again. Let’s look at the proof, because the proof is always in the pudding. In the first 30 days, 120,000 transactions were processed—120,000.

I’m not sure what the member opposite has against a small business and a charity in her own riding being able to do a transaction in 16 seconds, as opposed to 16 weeks—considerable legal fees, or free of charge; the comfort of your living room anytime you want, when and where you want, or Monday to Friday 9 to 5; boxes of paper that you literally had to lug around, or modern-based technology.

Again, what does this member opposite have against protecting the little guy? I would not think that the member opposite would be so pro-big business.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, we are about protecting the little guy and ensuring that people matter most, get to do the things that they need to do most—

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

## ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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

The devastating floods in British Columbia and now Atlantic Canada highlight why it is so important to expand the greenbelt to protect all the river valleys throughout the greater Golden Horseshoe—places like Carruthers Creek, Duffins Creek, Holland Marsh and, of course, the Paris-Galt moraine. Your government has talked about expanding the greenbelt but has taken no action to date.

Yesterday I retabled my bill to protect the Paris-Galt moraine. The act would protect drinking water and reduce flood risk in our region of the province.

Will the government commit today to stop just talking about expanding the greenbelt and actually do it, starting with the Paris-Galt moraine and Carruthers Creek?

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

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

Speaker, it was under the leadership of this Premier that we embarked on the largest consultation to expand the greenbelt in Ontario’s history. It’s under this Premier that we’re expanding green spaces. And it’s under this Premier that we’re investing in public transit like we’ve never seen

before. We understand that Ontarians want to get active and get outdoors, and we’re supporting them in doing that.

I’m glad the member opposite talked about Holland Marsh, and I’m glad he talked about water and waste water. It’s a shame he voted against measures in the budget to improve water and waste water. It’s a shame he voted against measures to improve Lake Simcoe. He stood against the good folks on Lake Simcoe when we were trying to improve water and waste water with the Upper York bill we introduced.

I would encourage the member to have a change of heart and work with our government. Let’s improve the same water and waste water you just talked about. Work with us in doing it.

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

**1100**

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Speaker, I would encourage the government to have a change of heart and not pave over 400 acres of the greenbelt and 2,000 acres of prime farmland to build Highway 413, to not pave over the Holland Marsh and threaten the very Lake Simcoe the member just talked about by building the Bradford Bypass.

The government says they’ve conducted consultations on expanding the greenbelt, yet they have taken no action to expand it. Even though this House passed a resolution calling on the government to expand greenbelt protections to the Paris-Galt moraine and the Minister of Long-Term Care talked about expanding the greenbelt to Carruthers Creek, there’s absolutely no action from this government.

Will the government stop just talking about greenbelt expansion and actually start doing it today by committing to protecting the Paris-Galt moraine and Carruthers Creek before the end of this year?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Again, I’ll repeat what I said earlier: This government has embarked on the largest consultation of its kind, working with Ontarians alike across this province to expand the greenbelt.

I will also say that I’m glad he spoke about adaptation resiliency. It’s just a shame you voted against the first-ever climate change impact assessment that this government brought under the leadership of this Premier to fight climate change. That member talked about what we are seeing in BC, what we’re seeing elsewhere, yet you voted against and aren’t joining us in the climate change impact assessment. Your municipality spoke to me at AMO about that. Communities across Ontario want to see it, yet you voted against it.

You haven’t supported investments in transit—\$2 in transit for every \$1 in highways. For a young man or woman immigrating to this country to fill one of the jobs we’re seeing everywhere, that we need to fill in this province, who want the dignity of a home—you’re against them. You’re against more homes—

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member will take his seat. Stop the clock.

I shouldn’t have to remind the members to make their comments through the Chair, but I will.

Please start the clock. The next question.

### AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

**Mr. Will Bouma:** Through you, Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Agriculture and food processing are essential and strategic components of Ontario's food supply and economy. It is these businesses and their hard-working employees who are ensuring that grocery store shelves remain stocked and food remains on our tables. However, as we have seen in the media, through studies and in my own riding, growth in this sector is slowing. The Meat and Poultry Ontario survey found that financing was a barrier to growth for 64% of meat processing business services.

To the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs: What is government doing to spur growth and ensure food continues to end up on my constituents' tables?

**Hon. Lisa M. Thompson:** I'm very pleased to address the question I just received from the member from Brantford-Brant. I know he stands tall with all the food processing in his riding, especially Ferrero, a wonderful chocolate processing plant.

In all seriousness, I'm really glad that he referenced the survey that was conducted by Meat and Poultry Ontario because it also recognized that for every dollar a government invests in food processing, a 7-to-1 return is experienced. That's why I was so very pleased to work with the Minister of Finance in the fall economic statement to announce a \$25-million Strategic Agri-Food Processing Fund that will see growth in this sector.

We stand with our food processing industry throughout this province because, as the member for Mississauga-Malton mentioned earlier in debate, we are the second-largest food processing hub in North America—we being the GTHA.

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

**Mr. Will Bouma:** Thank you, Minister, and back to you: I am pleased to hear that the investments the government is making will help keep locally produced food on our kitchen tables. However, we continue to hear that one of the largest issues facing many industries, including this one, is a labour shortage. While this investment is welcome news, there are still concerns that the labour challenges in my riding and across the province will exacerbate the ongoing challenges with processing capacity.

Can the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs explain how this funding will address the labour shortages in Ontario's food processing industry?

**Hon. Lisa M. Thompson:** We don't want to keep our food processors down. I can tell you, they are absolutely enthused by the focus that our government is putting on their industry. We're standing with them, with our investment of \$25 million through our strategic processing fund. This fund will see processors and viable business plans that look to expansion and innovation and investment in capital move forward to the tune of a max of \$3 million per eligible business plan.

Why are we doing this? We recognize there is a labour shortage, so we need to keep moving forward and embrace

innovation, embrace technology, because we want to continue positioning Ontario as a place to do business for food processing. We've got the best farmers in North America, and we'll be able to work with those processors and make the GTHA the number one hub of food processing in all of North America.

### CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

**Miss Monique Taylor:** My question is for the Premier. The wait-list for youth mental health services in Ontario has ballooned under this government. There are currently 28,000 children on a wait-list for mental health services. It is an all-time high for this province, and it is simply unacceptable.

We know that youth mental health has suffered under the COVID-19 pandemic. A study coming out of SickKids reported that more than two thirds of children and adolescents experienced deterioration in their mental health.

Speaker, this can no longer be put on the back burner. We need to prioritize our children. Can the Premier tell Ontario families what he plans to do to address the wait times and save our kids?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

**Hon. Michael A. Tibollo:** Thank you to the member opposite side for that question. The health and the well-being of all Ontarians will always be our government's top priority. We know this pandemic has been an extremely difficult time for all the people in the province, especially our young people, and including the unique challenges of our students. That's why we invested \$31 million in new annual funding this year to improve access to specialized mental health treatment services, reduce the wait-lists and wait times, and support the mental health and well-being of children and youth. This includes investments such as \$20 million for an across-the-board 5% funding increase for all government-funded children and youth mental health agencies, and \$2.7 million at four new youth wellness hubs across Ontario, in Guelph, Renfrew, Timmins and Windsor.

Now, more than ever, it's critical that we make the necessary investments to support children in the province of Ontario, and our government is doing just that.

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

**Miss Monique Taylor:** Speaker, as you hear, this minister is talking a good game. But the average wait time for a child to receive mental health services in Hamilton is 710 days—completely unacceptable. Hamilton is amongst the top nine cities for the longest wait times for intensive treatment. The youth in my community need swift access to mental health services, and they're not getting it. And let's not forget, it's this government that cut \$330 million when they first came into government.

It's time for the government to step up to tackle this issue and help our kids. And it's not just about words any longer. We need real action and real investments. Will the

Premier commit today to clearing the youth mental health wait-list in Ontario?

**Hon. Michael A. Tibollo:** Once again, thank you to the member opposite for that question. Mr. Speaker, when this government came into power, the first thing we did was look at the importance of maintaining and developing assistance for mental health and addictions in the province of Ontario. That meant creating the Roadmap to Wellness and initiating investments that are building a continuum of care for children across the province. As I've mentioned before, the amount of money that's being invested is staggering, with more than \$525 million in annualized new funding going into the system.

Mr. Speaker, I will not take lessons from the member opposite, nor from the previous government, when they were they ones who, when they were in charge, voted no to more mental health beds in the province, and in fact closed 13% of Ontario's mental health beds. That's 9,645 hospital beds across the province of Ontario. In addition to that, they said no to—

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

Next question.

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## POVERTY

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** My question is to the Premier. Scarborough is one of the most food-insecure places in our province. When COVID hit and people had to stay home to save lives, organizations like Feed Scarborough and 5n2 Kitchens knew that food assistance would rise rapidly. These organizations had to adapt to having food programs out of food trucks and making deliveries where people live. These organizations and their volunteers stepped up and are another example of our pandemic heroes.

However, as the COVID crisis has become less acute in our ICUs, the same cannot be said for our food banks. The Daily Bread Food Bank Who's Hungry report showed that the use of food banks in my riding of Scarborough—Guildwood has increased by 43% alone. This is not sustainable.

Speaker, what is this government doing to ensure food security, and what is the Premier doing this month to make sure people don't go through the winter hungry?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

**Hon. Merrilee Fullerton:** Thank you very much to the member opposite for the question. Obviously, this is a very important issue that our government is committed to addressing, and continues to invest in. Last year, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services released our new Poverty Reduction Strategy, and I can tell you that we are continuing to work closely across government as we approach this very important issue.

There is a five-year strategy that will help support Ontario's economic recovery by connecting people experiencing poverty with training, health and other supports to set them on a pathway to jobs and financial stability,

while helping people keep more of their hard-earned money.

Clearly, the affordability of many things is rising. When we look to the federal government and understand the role that they have to play in this, I am pleased to say that I've been able to speak with my federal counterpart and understand how we can work together and impress upon the Liberal government the importance of providing a Canada disability benefit. We are working urgently to make that issue very well understood.

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

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Speaker, hunger cannot wait. Individuals, children and families who are hungry cannot wait, so let's talk about what this government under its responsibility can do to solve the issue. You could, for instance, issue another one-time top-up to OW and ODSP so that people have the adequacy that they need right now.

The Daily Bread Food Bank's Who's Hungry report was right when they stated that poverty is at the root cause of food insecurity. It is a community safety issue, but more importantly, it is a human dignity issue. As elected members, all of us in this House have a responsibility to help, and we cannot ignore any longer while we see people standing up in food lines.

Speaker, the Daily Bread Food Bank and I agree that a basic income is part of a solution to the poverty question. Will this government restart the Basic Income Pilot so that we can have the answers that we need to ensure that—

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

Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

**Hon. Merrilee Fullerton:** Again, I couldn't agree more with the member opposite, because I know this is such an important issue for people. We have invested more than \$1 billion in the social services relief fund. We have increased the rates to OW and ODSP. We did that rather urgently after inheriting a situation that really had been neglected for many, many years. We have improved the social services relief fund by \$1 billion, and that's on top of the \$8.3 billion—or more than \$8.3 billion—spent annually to provide these social services supports.

Our government values the commitment to people that are living in a situation where they need support. This is about giving them a hand up and getting them through a very difficult time. Food security is obviously very important to them. As part of Ontario's effort, we have put in \$8 million to Feed Ontario. We continue to add to the student nutrition programs. The basic income that the member opposite mentions would cost, and I think this is important for the member opposite to understand, \$80 billion a year.

## ELECTRONIC SERVICE DELIVERY

**Ms. Laurie Scott:** My question is to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services. My constituents and many Ontarians have long been asking for the phasing out of courtesy paper renewal letters in favour of more modern

digital reminders that make it easier, faster and more convenient. Now more than ever, Ontarians need our government to provide opportunities and to deliver in-demand digital services in a way that meets people's needs where they are and where they are going.

Could the minister please elaborate on how this new initiative is going to benefit Ontarians, like my constituents in Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, in the long-term?

**Hon. Ross Romano:** Thank you so much to the great member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock for the question. Our government has worked so very hard to find new and innovative ways to make services more accessible and easier to use. With the phasing out of paper renewal notices, we are taking the next big step forward. Mr. Speaker, this move is going to save the hard-working taxpayers of our province over the next five years \$29 million. We'll reinvest these savings into important services like education and health care.

This is not just good news for taxpayers, but it's going to save 80 million pieces of paper from ending up in landfills. That's over 362 tonnes of paper, which is the weight of 240 cars. And I love this statistic, Mr. Speaker: If you were to stack all that paper, it would be the height of six and a half CN Towers. That's pretty impressive, Mr. Speaker.

We're going to keep on moving forward to protect the environment and save time and money.

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

**Ms. Laurie Scott:** Thank you very much to the minister for his answer. This is great news for everyday Ontarians and our environment. I often hear from constituents who tell me they prefer accessing services online rather than dealing with paperwork. Times are changing, and the future is within reach. More and more Ontarians want a government that will make it easier to access important information such as licence renewal notices at home or on the go. But some of them still have questions.

Speaker, through you, could the minister please explain to the House how Ontarians can take full advantage of digital reminders and online renewal services?

**Hon. Ross Romano:** Thanks again to the member for the question. To ensure that Ontarians do not miss their renewal deadlines, we are encouraging them to sign up for free digital reminders. This is a very fast and convenient way to stay up to date: just a few clicks online at [ontario.ca/reminders](http://ontario.ca/reminders). You can choose to have it as a text or a phone call or an email.

This move builds on the progress that we have already made to make it easier for Ontarians to access services online. Ontarians can now access 40 services online through ServiceOntario 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, right from the comfort of their living room couch, which is going to make it easier to renew your driver's licence or your health card much quicker.

Mr. Speaker, our government was elected to modernize services and make them more accessible and easier to use. With this announcement, we are going to continue to do

that, and there is so much more to come, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much to the member again.

## ADDICTION SERVICES

### HOMELESSNESS

**Mr. Jamie West:** My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, the mayor of greater Sudbury sent an urgent letter to the Premier. He urged the Premier to finally step in with funding to help with Sudbury's growing homelessness and addictions crisis. The letter reads: "While we are doing our best to implement solutions, our municipal resources are simply not designed to provide assistance without provincial support."

When I spoke with Mayor Bigger last night, he told me that when the Premier was in Sudbury a month ago, the Premier gave his word that he'd follow up. Speaker, it has been 28 long days since that conversation, and the Premier hasn't done any follow-up at all. Imagine that, Speaker.

The north has the highest per-capita death rates due to overdoses in the province—no follow-up by the Premier, not a single recovery bed pledged by this Conservative government.

Speaker, my question is simple. It's the same question that I ask every single day: How many more people in Sudbury have to die before the Premier grows a heart and helps Sudbury?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** To reply, the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

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**Hon. Michael A. Tibollo:** Thank you once again for that question. No matter where a person lives in the province of Ontario, it's always been our mission, and the mission of the Premier as well, to ensure every Ontarian has access to high-quality mental health and addictions supports when and where they need them.

From the very beginning, our government has taken decisive action to address the mental health and addictions issues everywhere in the province, and that includes the north, the rural and the remote communities. Since the release of the Roadmap to Wellness, we've made unprecedented investments: over \$40 million in new and ongoing investments. These investments include new funding for in-patient mental health beds, mobile crisis services, both in-home and mobile detox services, and opioid addictions services in Timmins. We've made investments in children and youth mental health supports and residential detoxes in Thunder Bay.

Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to make investments in building the continuum of care to look after all the people—

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

The supplementary: the member for Nickel Belt.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Also to the Premier: The mayor of greater Sudbury is frustrated, and so am I. His letter to the Premier reads, and I quote, "You and I have spoken about this situation previously on several occasions. You have assured me that you understand our need and the

urgency of the situation, but no significant assistance has been forthcoming.”

The letter from Mayor Bigger describes strong solutions already costed out that are ready to be implemented in my city, and they would save lives. We need supportive housing. We need a supervised consumption site. We need emergency funding to help with the COVID outbreaks in our homeless population.

Speaker, it was minus 7 last night, it’s minus 15 this weekend, and 205 people, many with children, are living unsheltered, outdoors. They need to be housed. For that to happen, we need action from this Premier. Will the Premier answer the Sudbury mayor’s call for help and fund these urgent provincial programs for Sudbury?

**Hon. Michael A. Tibollo:** Thank you again for that question. Our government, this year, invested \$175 million for mental health and addictions services, which builds on our previous annual investments now totalling \$525 million in new annualized funding. This means over half a billion dollars in net new funding for the entire province.

Through this funding, we announced an historic investment of \$32.7 million in new, annualized funding that’s targeted for addictions services and supports across the province, including treatment for opioid addictions. This includes \$13 million in additional new annual funding to address urgent gaps across the continuum of care in northwestern Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, we’re aware of the issues. We are building that continuum of care, and we will address the issues relating to addictions and mental health in the province through our investments.

#### GREEN POWER GENERATION

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** My question is for the Premier. Climate pollution is going up, not down in Ontario, and no matter how much spin this government puts on it, it’s clear the Auditor General said that the government will not meet its weakened GHG-reduction targets. We must reverse course immediately, and the most practical and fiscally responsible way to do it is to electrify transportation, industry and building heat, but for this to work we need to maintain a clean grid. But the government is planning to ramp up gas plants, which would increase pollution by 400%, reversing one third of the GHG reductions Ontarians achieved by phasing out coal.

Speaker, I ask the Premier: Will you instruct your Minister of Energy to reverse the government’s plans to ramp up gas plants and implement lower-cost, cleaner solutions?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** To reply, the Minister of Energy.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Well, thanks very much, and I’m really energized to take on this question from the member opposite this morning. I appreciate the fact—and I know the member opposite can appreciate the fact as well—that our electricity grid that we have in the province today is 94% emissions-free. I know the member opposite, although he is leader of the Green Party, will know that the

Green Energy Act that was brought in by the previous Liberal government created chaos for the people of Ontario. It created an oversupply actually, which we currently have in Ontario. We have more electricity, we have more energy than we actually need.

But to the member’s point, we do know that as Pickering comes off-line in 2025 and as refurbishments continue at our workhorses in the energy sector, at Bruce and at Darlington nuclear facilities, we are going to have to balance the grid. That’s why we’re looking at various ways to do that. One of the ways is to use the natural gas fleet that we have, but another way is conservation programs. We’re really keen on encouraging people to take control of their energy bills, of their electricity consumption.

I’ll have more to say in the supplementary, Speaker.

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

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** It is true that we have a clean grid in Ontario, but with the government’s current plans, that grid will no longer be clean. There are cheaper and cleaner solutions than ramping up gas plants. The previous government learned the problems and challenges of gas plants; I would suggest this government not make the same mistakes.

Energy efficiency and conservation is far cheaper, helping people lower their utility bills and lower climate pollution. The government cut most of those programs.

Utility-scale renewable energy is one half the price of fossil gas. The government cut those.

Made-in-Ontario energy storage solutions—such as Hydrostor, which is getting contracts in California and Australia and around the world but not in Ontario.

Speaker, will the minister say yes to Ontario entrepreneurs and job creators and bring in low-cost, clean energy solutions, and say no to ramping up gas plants?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Well, in a word, Mr. Speaker, I’m happy to say yes. Actually, we’re looking at all options when it comes to energy and our supply mix in Ontario.

Yesterday, I had the opportunity to meet with Ontario’s Young Professionals in Energy. We had a great conversation. Shawn McCarthy, formerly of the Globe and Mail, was the moderator for it, with over 100 young entrepreneurs, innovative minds talking about the future of our energy sector in Ontario. They were delighted to know that I had written to the Independent Electricity System Operator, asking the IESO to look at ways that we could incorporate battery storage to provide that stability that doesn’t exist under the previous Liberal government’s Green Energy Act. The unreliability, the unsustainability, the price was outrageous. We had people paying way over market prices for electricity, and the biggest complaints that we got in our constituency offices were people complaining about their electricity bills.

We want to provide that reliability, affordability and sustainability for the member opposite.

#### PUBLIC TRANSIT

**Ms. Jill Andrew:** My question is to the Premier.

Speaker, this morning, the Toronto Star revealed that Metrolinx and Crosslinx Transit Solutions have come to an agreement on a new opening date for the Eglinton Crosstown LRT. The deal was made behind closed doors, and they're refusing to disclose this new date with the public. In fact, the only people who seem to be looped in on a transit project that the public is paying for are private corporations like Metrolinx, Crosslinx and Moody's credit rating agency. Why does the credit rating agency have more information than our local community on when we will see this transit project finally delivered?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** To reply, the member for Scarborough—Rouge Park.

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** Thank you to the member opposite for that question. Our government wants to see transit built, and we are committed to building smarter and faster transit.

I am disappointed and frustrated that this project is delayed. However, we are making significant strides towards completion. In June, Metrolinx began vehicle testing in both the east and west Scarborough areas, and these activities remain ongoing. Just recently, we reached another exciting milestone, completing all tracks along the new 19-kilometre line.

Mr. Speaker, I know that Metrolinx is working diligently towards a 2022 completion date and also working closely with businesses that require support during the remaining time in this period. We will continue to work to make sure that by 2022 the completion date will be there, and we are working with the stakeholders and the local businesses so that they get the adequate support they need.

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

**Ms. Jill Andrew:** My question is back to the Premier.

Sadly, our community doesn't quite believe the communications of the government, because there has been delay after delay.

The LRT has been under construction for over 10 years, and those years have been especially hard on my community in Little Jamaica, where Black businesses have been severely hit alongside residents who are afraid of being pushed out, quite frankly, by new builds which haven't prioritized inclusionary zoning. Hundreds of Black businesses have been forced to close down and our midtown small businesses and residents have also been hit hard. Residents have dealt with relentless noise due to the construction.

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This is the nature of private transit projects. They are expensive, delayed, and the only people who get hurt in the process are the people the area is supposed to serve. This is why last year, Speaker—you might remember—I had put forth a Little Jamaica small business economic health and community wellness strategy, demanding the government to stand up for Little Jamaica, to stand up for midtown and to stand up for inclusionary zoning, our small businesses and our BIAs.

My question is, when will the government finally step in, get this project built and provide concrete—pun intended—dates of the completion for my community?

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** The Eglinton Crosstown project will reduce, as we all know, travel times in the corridor by up to 60% compared to the current bus services. With 25 stations along the dedicated road, it will be easier than ever to live in Leaside and dine in the Upper Village, or shop in the Golden Mile and live in Forest Hill.

The Metrolinx priority in all their projects is the health and safety of workers and the public. And Metrolinx's goal has always been, and remains, to get the Crosstown project completed and open for the people of Toronto as soon as possible.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, I am unable to comment on specific matters due to—there are a lot of ongoing settlements going on right now. But one thing I can confirm to this House is that, over the last several months, Metrolinx and Infrastructure Ontario have been in discussions with CTS to reach—

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

## CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** My question is to the Solicitor General.

The government is going forward with a plan to build a massive 235-bed prison in downtown Kemptville. Our society needs more rehabilitation services and less punitive means of justice. While dangerous criminals need to be incarcerated to preserve public safety, many other offenders could be rehabilitated through community programs. This prison will be totally inaccessible by public transit, meaning that many inmates will not be able to receive visits from family. It would also require the municipality to pay the bills for extra policing and infrastructure.

My question is, will the government reconsider and listen to Kemptville residents who are opposed to the prison, and cancel the project?

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

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** I appreciate the question from the honourable member. It again highlights, as the questions from the Liberal Party do on a daily basis, the ineffectiveness of the previous Liberal government over 15 years.

Speaker, we have to invest in jails, in new correctional facilities because they were so underfunded under the previous Liberal government. Facilities that we have do not do the types of things that the member has asked for in the question. That is why we have to provide new facilities.

Now, we have always made a priority, on this side of the House, law and order. That goes without saying. But we do understand, and as the Minister of Mental Health has talked about on a daily basis, that there are more things that have to happen to bring a person back. It's not just about incarceration, Mr. Speaker. It is about ensuring that we have a proper facility, that we have the proper resources and the proper services in place to reintegrate people back into society effectively.

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

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Well, it sounds like the government wants to continue policies of mass incarceration instead of effective, just and humane responses to crime and its causes.

Mr. Speaker, dealing with the opioid crisis has become an obvious priority. It is impossible to ignore the devastating effect that substance abuse is having on all of our communities. Criminalization and incarceration of people who use drugs has not reduced drug use. It has resulted, instead, in increased health harms. Opioid addiction is a health issue, not a criminal one.

Would the minister share what strategy, if any, the government has to reduce incarceration and the need for more prisons, and increase access to evidence-based treatments?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

**Hon. Michael A. Tibollo:** Thank you for that question. That question goes to the root of exactly what our government is trying to do. We're trying to build a continuum of care. We're trying to invest in education and prevention. We're trying to ensure that people have access where there is a fragmented system, where there are gaps, where we address those gaps. A lot of those were left undone thanks to the—your—previous government. We are trying to build that system.

Included in that system is how we deal with corrections. There were investments that have been made by our government in cognitive behavioural therapy to be administered in the corrections facilities. And of course, when a person comes out of the corrections facilities, we've invested in transitional housing to provide them the opportunity to reintegrate back into society, and not become a cog in a repetitive wheel.

We have done that, Mr. Speaker, and we will continue making those investments, helping every Ontarian in the province.

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

Two members have informed me they would like to raise a point of order. I'll deal with the member for Hamilton Mountain first.

**Miss Monique Taylor:** Thank you, Speaker. Standing order 25(k) prohibits members of this assembly from being abusive or insulting. During question period, Premier Ford made a rude gesture directed at me. But more importantly, it was directed at people struggling with mental health. It is a derogatory and outdated gesture designed to belittle and mock people.

Will the Premier apologize to the people of Ontario for his rude gesture and further stigmatization of mental health?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I did not see the alleged gesture that was made. I can't comment on it as such. Any member who wishes to apologize at any time can do so, but I can't comment on it further.

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** I'm rising on standing order 59 just to outline the status of business for next week. Speaker, I'll also advise the House at this time that there will be no night sitting this evening.

On Monday, November 29, in the afternoon, there will be third reading of Bill 27, the Working for Workers Act. I would just like to thank all the members who participated in committee on that one. In the evening, on Monday, November 29, we will continue debate on the reply to the speech from the throne.

On Tuesday, November 30, in the morning, there will be third reading of Bill 13, the Supporting People and Businesses Act, and before question period we will have a tribute to former member Harry C. Parrott. In the afternoon, the third reading of Bill 13, the Supporting People and Businesses Act; and in the evening, PMB ballot item 16, standing in the name of the member for Mississauga—Erin Mills, which is Bill 42, the Ontario Religious Freedom Day Act.

On Wednesday, December 1, in the morning: third reading of Bill 13, the Supporting People and Businesses Act. In the afternoon, we will continue on with third reading of Bill 13, the Supporting People and Businesses Act. And in the evening: PMB ballot item number 17, standing in the name of the member for Spadina—Fort York. That bill has yet to be determined.

On Thursday, December 2, in the morning: third reading of Bill 37, the Providing More Care, Protecting Seniors, and Building More Beds Act. In the afternoon, third reading of Bill 37; and in the evening, PMB ballot item number 18, standing in the name of the member for Don Valley North, which is Bill 34, the Anti-Asian Racism Education Month Act.

Mr. Speaker, just to again remind members on all sides of the House that waiving of notice for PMBs will no longer be considered.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** There being no further business this morning, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

*The House recessed from 1139 to 1300.*

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

### TOTAL PEST MANAGEMENT SERVICES LTD. ACT, 2021

Mr. Dave Smith moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr57, An Act to revive Total Pest Management Services Ltd.

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

*First reading agreed to.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Pursuant to standing order 89, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

## STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

### INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

**Hon. Jane McKenna:** Today is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, a day designed by the United Nations to raise awareness on gender-based violence. Today, our government would like to acknowledge the work that has been done and recommit ourselves to action.

November 25 marks the launch of the UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign, 16 days of activism against gender-based violence that concludes on International Human Rights Day. This campaign, led by the United Nations, aims to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls here in Ontario and around the world. It calls for global action to increase awareness, promote advocacy and create opportunities for discussions on challenges and solutions.

The bravery of gender-based-violence survivors is around us, but it is often hard to see. That's why, throughout the month of November, we ask Ontarians to wear a purple scarf to show support for survivors who have had to endure gender-based violence in their homes, communities and workplaces. The purple scarf is a symbol of the courage it takes to seek support and safety from violence. Wearing a purple scarf also supports the Wrapped in Courage campaign, which is organized by women's shelters across Ontario every November to raise awareness of violence against women and children.

I want to thank the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses and their executive director, Marlene Ham, for this initiative and for everything they're doing to support victims of domestic violence and survivors of human trafficking.

Over the past 25 days, communities across Ontario have hosted events to raise awareness and support victims of domestic violence. As Ontario's Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues, I had the honour of attending a flag-raising ceremony this morning here in Toronto at Nathan Phillips Square. And this month, I've announced key investments by our government to support survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking, including \$2 million for the Victim Crisis Assistance Ontario program to ensure victims of crime and their families have access to the services and supports they need, and \$18.5 million over three years to support survivors of domestic abuse and human trafficking by increasing access to safe and affordable housing, employment assistance and child care through the Transitional and Housing Support Program.

Speaker, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the statistics on gender-based violence were grim: Approximately 137 women around the world are killed by their partners or a member of their family every day, and almost one in three

women globally—around 736 million women—will be physically or sexually abused by a partner in their lifetime.

We know that gender-based violence and femicide have not gone away during the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, it's gotten worse. This year in Ontario it has increased more than 52%, Speaker. This tragic reality has become so widespread that the United Nations now refers to it as a silent, lethal, shadow pandemic.

As a mother of five and grandmother of four and counting, this trend concerns me. In my role as associate minister, I'm proud to be part of a government that is committed to preventing and taking action to address violence against women and girls in all forms. That's why this year my ministry is investing \$202 million on important violence-against-women initiatives. These dollars will fund emergency shelters, counselling, 24-hour crisis lines, safety planning, child witness programs, transitional and housing supports and much more.

Our government also added another \$2.1 million over three years to expand victim and sexual assault services in rural and underserved communities. This is on top of the \$3.6 million we invested last year as part of our rural and remote enhancement fund.

Last year we launched our five-year strategy to combat human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of children and youth. This comprehensive, \$307-million action plan is focused on raising awareness, early intervention, protecting victims and holding offenders accountable.

Speaker, our coordinated approach involves multiple ministries and sectors coming together across government to provide a variety of programs and supports for survivors, their families and communities, services like:

- a 24-hour crisis line, offering telephone assistance, information and referrals;

- violence-against-women shelters, which provide emergency housing, counselling and supports;

- traditional housing supports and services to help victims of domestic violence and survivors of human trafficking find and maintain housing and help them to transition to independence;

- hospital-based sexual assault and domestic violence treatment centres that offer 24/7 emergency medical care, crisis intervention and counselling;

- a court-based Victim/Witness Assistance Program that provides emotional support, court preparation and other services for victims and witnesses of crime;

- a network of sexual assault centres that provide free counselling, information and supports for those who have experienced sexual violence;

- a 24/7 language-interpretation service to help victims of domestic violence, sexual violence and human trafficking;

- public education initiatives to raise awareness and prevent violence against women and youth; and

- training in communities and workplaces to help front-line employees and bystanders identify risk factors and how to safely intervene when they observe sexual violence or sexual harassment.

Our Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Minister Clark, has provided over \$700 million through the social services relief fund to support Ontario's most vulnerable, including those who are homeless, and women fleeing violence. This includes \$40 million under the COVID-19 Residential Relief Fund to help address increased residential costs at front-line agencies and emergency shelters, plus an additional \$1 million to help front-line agencies adapt to remote service delivery to ensure continued operation during the pandemic.

To address the calls for justice in the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, our government released Pathways to Safety, a strategy developed in close partnership with Indigenous communities, organizations and the Indigenous Women's Advisory Council. As part of this strategy, this year's 2021 budget included an \$18.2-million investment over three years to support 118 initiatives to help end violence against First Nations, Inuit and Métis women and girls.

We're working to address the crisis facing Indigenous women by increasing access to community supports; expanding resources for First Nations police services for sexual assault, human trafficking and domestic violence investigations; and building on investments we've already made to support community safety and provide additional supports.

### 1310

Under Ontario's Indigenous Healing and Wellness Strategy, we're also contributing an additional \$3.6 million in funding to Indigenous-led healing and wellness programs. This includes culturally responsive family violence healing and prevention programs in First Nations and urban and rural Indigenous communities.

Speaker, since I became associate minister in June, I've met with front-line workers, visited violence-against-women shelters and stakeholders, and asked for their advice on how we can better support those experiencing violence. I've heard from survivors on their journey to healing about the importance of wraparound services, including counselling and well-being supports, social assistance programs, employment assistance, schooling, child care, education and legal supports.

Our government is committed to helping women and children impacted by domestic violence and human trafficking. We're committed to giving women the support they need to walk away from every vicious act and never look back. Regardless of political stripe, I know that everyone in this House today shares our government's commitment to ending violence against women and girls in all forms.

I want to acknowledge and express my sincere gratitude to the incredible crisis counsellors, shelter workers, child protection workers and everyone who works day in and day out to support victims of domestic violence and survivors of human trafficking. Women in crisis look to you for comfort, healing and direction. Your kindness, empathy and tireless efforts to support women and children fleeing violence and abuse make a life-changing difference.

Speaker, violence against women cannot be tolerated in any form, in any context, in any circumstance. I am proud of the work we are doing across government and with our partners to break the cycle of violence, to do everything we can to ensure that everyone in Ontario can live their lives free of violence. This is very personal for me, Speaker.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Responses? The member for Toronto–St. Paul's.

**Ms. Jill Andrew:** I'm honoured to stand on behalf of my community in St. Paul's and also as the Ontario NDP official opposition's women's issues critic.

Today is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and the first day of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence. I'm deeply thankful to OAITH, Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses, and Marlene Ham and her team for their dogged advocacy against gender-based violence. Since 1995, OAITH has published an annual femicide list in partnership with Dr. Mavis Morton from the department of sociology and anthropology at the University of Guelph.

Women's experiences cannot only be wrapped in courage, but they must also be wrapped in wraparound services. That's how they escape violence. Sadly, today's numbers representing femicides—murders committed by men against women, children, trans women, two-spirited and gender non-conforming individuals—have seen a tragic increase of 47% in the last year. These women and children were someone's daughter, someone's friend, someone's mother, someone's grandchild but, of course, most importantly, they were human beings who may have been alive today if a multitude of systems were in place to protect them.

Only when you look at gender-based violence as a systemic issue can it be prevented. Prevention includes yearly investments in our community-based care, community agencies and their workers on the front lines—yearly. Assaulted Women's Helpline has received over 20,000 calls, nearly double the calls from the year before. That requires double the resources. It's simply math.

I'm deeply thankful organizations like METRAC, YWCA Toronto, Red Door, Yorktown Family Services, North York Women's Shelter and many others—Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres; of course, OAITH; Shelter Movers who are doing the heavy lifting. But we need a government to support them.

It is with a heavy heart we also remember all the lives lost this year alone to femicide, and I tell you, Speaker, there are 58 names in OAITH's femicide list. It was hard to see the names and to see so many BIPOC folks represented and children represented on that list. I beg of every member—because my five minutes does not allow me to read out all of the names slowly with the integrity and dignity they deserve—to read these out at home, say their names, remember them and share it with their communities.

According to the Canadian Women's Foundation in my riding, 67% of people in Canada know a woman who has experienced physical or sexual abuse.

Almost seven times more is the rate at which Indigenous women are killed compared to non-Indigenous women.

Three times more is the rate at which women with a disability are likely to experience violent victimization.

Transgender people are far more likely to have experienced violence compared to cisgender people.

In Ontario, one in three women experience gender-based violence—one woman alone is too much, I'm sure all of us would agree.

Speaker, the government has work to do. We all have work to do.

Just yesterday, Ford said no to our co-sponsored Bill 8, which would have provided permanent paid sick days, otherwise known as personal emergency leave, to 60% of workers without them, a figure that is far overrepresented by women. Let me express why the paid sick days are so important, sir. Those personal leave days are the very days that need to be paid to ensure that women can leave the violent homes that they are in, the violent situations that they are in, without having to worry even more about loss of income. So when the government said no to that bill, they were also saying no to providing another safety net to women who are experiencing violence, mothers who are experiencing violence, trying to leave their homes. And that's just one example.

Prevention starts at a young age. Our education system must include curriculum consistent in promoting healthy, consensual relationships.

We must say no to toxic masculinity, rape culture and slut shaming, a dangerous trifecta that paints feminized bodies as objects deserving of violence and abuse.

We cannot survive any more cuts to mental health funding. We must invest—not divest—in supports for those with addictions, and we must annualize funding to allow proactive planning that comes from knowing exactly what their yearly budgets will look like. In other words, these services need to have stable funding.

We cannot ignore that BIPOC and 2SLGBTQIA+ folks, people speaking different languages, people with disabilities have unquestionably been the worst hit with violence.

Last, but certainly not least, we have to realize that physical violence isn't the only type of violence we need to address.

We need to look at housing insecurity, and we must also look at economic insecurity, which disproportionately impacts women, children and their families.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Mr. Speaker, it's really good to see that this House stands united in our resolve to end violence against women in Ontario.

The pandemic led to a disturbing increase in violence against women, and we must take action to ensure it doesn't continue. This means setting up strong institutions to support victims. We need to be loud and clear about our determination to ensure that women who come forward with stories of abuse will be taken seriously and that abusers will be held accountable.

Violence against women and girls is an insidious and too often hidden behaviour that can be difficult to uncover

and address. That's why community organizations and women's shelters play an important role in providing victims with a safe place to go, and we need to support these sanctuaries and the important services they provide to fragilized women as a result of the abuse.

In our approach to confronting woman violence, we need to be sure that we are taking an inclusive and intersectional approach. We should remember that abuse is not just a white woman's problem, and that often those at the intersections of different identities are more vulnerable to abuse.

Violence against women is an abuse of power that is deeply rooted in our patriarchal history, where the men ruled the house. Abuse is not a random occurrence. It's part of a culture that objectifies women's bodies. The fact that women's abuse is still an important issue that needs attention is clear evidence that we have not broken free from its grip. Violence against women is clear evidence of abuse, but there are less obvious signs that we should pay attention to.

I want to talk here for a moment about dress codes in schools, because that's where it starts for many young people. These dress codes are extremely gendered and restrict how girls choose to dress. The reasoning is often based on the idea that girls cannot be distracting to boys in school. Girls are students, not distractions, and we need to nurture the sense of respect with our boys. We should be placing the onus on boys to be respectful, not on girls to hide their bodies.

#### 1320

Dress codes like this contribute to the cultural notion that a woman deserves abuse and is asking for it if she dresses a certain way. These dress codes only allow clothes according to an outdated standard of modesty and do not account for different cultures and mindsets. Students should be free to express themselves without being the target of inappropriate behaviour. As legislators, it is our job to ensure our policies reflect the values of a modern Ontario. Let's get to work.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** It's an honour to rise today and wear a purple scarf to speak out to end violence against women. We all have a responsibility to support survivors of gender-based violence and to do everything we possibly can to prevent violence against women.

The sad reality in our province is that one in three women experience gender-based violence in their lifetime, and, on average, 30 women a year are murdered. And, unfortunately, incidents of femicide and domestic abuse have increased during the pandemic.

In order to tackle the systemic issues of violence against women, we must address the underlying misogyny and patriarchy that exists in our society by empowering women. We must recognize that gender-based violence has a disproportionate effect on Indigenous and women of colour, as well as trans and non-binary communities and women with disabilities.

We must fund issues and projects that empower women, that lift women up, that provide them the supports they need, including transitional housing, shelters and

affordable housing; including permanent supportive housing with wraparound supports and services. We need to increase supports for rape crisis centres, and we must ensure that all women have access to the mental health supports they need.

And, Speaker, we need affordable, accessible, \$10-a-day child care in Ontario to address the she-cession and the fact that the pandemic has disproportionately affected women in today's economy.

I want to close by asking everyone who, like me, identifies as a male—anyone who identifies as a male in this province—to say that we have a special responsibility to speak out to other men to end gender-based violence in this province and to stand up for the empowerment of women in Ontario.

## PETITIONS

### NURSES

**Ms. Jill Andrew:** I'm pleased to present this petition from Ontarians who are concerned about the quality of care in the intensive care unit at Southlake hospital in Newmarket–Aurora, the health minister's own riding. There are 604 signatures on it. Thank you to the front-line registered nurses and registered respiratory therapists and members of the Ontario Nurses' Association for speaking out about the risk to patient care they're trying to prevent.

The petition is entitled "Petition to Stop Unsafe Patient Care and the Erosion of Quality Critical Care at Southlake Regional Health Centre in Newmarket.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas patients requiring critical care have complex and urgent care needs and their conditions are unstable, unpredictable, and can quickly change and deteriorate; and

"Whereas these patients need registered nurses with specialized education and training who are highly skilled and experienced, and anything less puts patient safety at risk; and

"Whereas Southlake's response to the RN staffing crisis in its intensive care unit is to hire RNs without providing full education and training in critical care nursing prior to these nurses working in the ICU; and

"Whereas existing expert RNs will be required to inter-vene to provide care to multiple patients when the appropriate level of care in an ICU is a 1-to-1 nurse-to-patient ratio; and

"Whereas while ICU RNs are exhausted from providing life-saving care during the COVID-19 pandemic, Southlake's plan puts patient and staff safety at risk and is driving away the expert and experienced ICU RNs this hospital can't afford to lose; and

"Whereas cutting skilled care means patients can suffer from unnecessary complications or death because of un-assessed care needs, delayed care, missed care, miscom-munication, or errors which erode safe quality patient care;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legis-lative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Stop the pre-sponsorship program in the ICU at Southlake Regional Health Centre—a program that does not provide newly hired RNs with full education and training in critical care nursing prior to working in the ICU;

"Immediately transfer any RNs who were hired into the pre-sponsorship program enrolment into the sponsorship program—a comprehensive critical care education and training course, the successful completion of which is required prior to working in critical care at Southlake;

"Cease the plan to implement 'team nursing' in the ICU at Southlake—a model that does not provide the appropriate level of care for critically ill patients, which is a 1-to-1 nurse-to-patient ratio;

"Cease any subsequent plans to implement a team-based nursing model of care in the cardiac intensive care unit and the cardiovascular intensive care unit at Southlake;

"Create increased opportunities for funded full edu-cation and training of new critical care RNs at Southlake;

"Commit to fund initiatives that retain existing special-ized, highly skilled, educated, and experienced critical care RNs at Southlake;

"Ensure this hospital recruits appropriately educated and trained critical care RNs to provide safe, quality care to patients who need life-saving care."

Good, goodness gracious, I am so thankful to the folks at Southlake, to our front-line health workers. I absolutely support this petition. I've signed my signature to it, and I'm passing it over to Ella for the Clerks.

### TENANT PROTECTION

**Mr. Joel Harden:** It's a great honour to present this petition on behalf of hundreds of residents in Ottawa Centre. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads:

"The Rent Stabilization Act: Pay what the Last Tenant Paid

"Whereas average rent in Ottawa increased 13.5% from 2018 to 2019, the highest rate of increase in any Canadian city;

"Whereas average monthly rent in Ontario is now over \$2,000; and

"Whereas nearly half of Ontarians pay unaffordable rental housing costs, meaning they spend more than a third of their income on rent;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assem-bly of Ontario to pass the Rent Stabilization Act to establish:

"—rent control that operates during and between tenancies, so a new tenant pays the same rent as a former tenant;

"—a public rent registry so tenants can find out what a former tenant paid in rent;

"—access to legal aid for tenants that want to contest an illegal rent hike; and

"—stronger enforcement and tougher penalties for landlords who do not properly maintain a renter's home."

I want to thank Rosslyn Robinson and the many neighbours who signed this petition. I'll affix my signature to it and pass it to Rishi for the table.

#### OPTOMETRY SERVICES

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** Petitions to save eye care keep rolling in from my constituents.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

"Whereas the government only pays on average \$44.65 for an OHIP-insured visit—the lowest rate in Canada; and

"Whereas optometrists are being forced to pay substantially out of their own pocket to provide over four million services each year to Ontarians under OHIP; and

"Whereas optometrists have never been given a formal negotiation process with the government; and

"Whereas the government's continued neglect resulted in 96% of Ontario optometrists voting to withdraw OHIP services beginning September 1, 2021;

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

"To instruct the Ontario government to immediately commit to legally binding, formal negotiations to ensure any future OHIP-insured optometry services are, at a minimum, funded at the cost of delivery."

I support this petition and will ask page Athisha to send it to the table.

#### OPTOMETRY SERVICES

**Miss Monique Taylor:** I would like to thank Dr. J. Nardone and Associates on Fennell Avenue in my riding for providing these petitions to save eye care in Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

"Whereas the government only pays on average \$44.65 for an OHIP-insured visit—the lowest rate in Canada; and

"Whereas optometrists are being forced to pay substantially out of their own pocket to provide over four million services each year to Ontarians under OHIP; and

"Whereas optometrists have never been given a formal negotiation process with the government; and

"Whereas the government's continued neglect resulted in 96% of Ontario optometrists voting to withdraw OHIP services beginning September 1, 2021;

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

"To instruct the Ontario government to immediately commit to legally binding, formal negotiations to ensure any future OHIP-insured optometry services are, at a minimum, funded at the cost of delivery."

I wholeheartedly agree with this, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to affix my name to it and give it to page Isabella to bring to the Clerk.

1330

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

#### WORKING FOR WORKERS ACT, 2021

#### LOI DE 2021 VISANT À OEUVRER POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 25, 2021, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 27, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters / Projet de loi 27, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'emploi, le travail et d'autres questions.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Further debate?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** It is a pleasure for me to rise today to participate in the debate on Bill 27 as the Ontario NDP labour critic. This was an interesting bill, Speaker, I have to say, but I do want to start by recognizing my colleagues the MPP for Niagara, who is the very passionate critic for worker health and safety, and the MPP for Scarborough Southwest, who is the NDP critic for foreign credential recognition, who sat with me, government members and an independent member on the social policy committee that considered this bill.

I also, of course, want to sincerely thank the organizations that appeared before the social policy committee and presented their input to this Legislature and expressed some concerns about the bill. In some cases, there was some support for the bill. It's always an interesting process to be on the receiving end of the input that is provided, and then to see what kinds of changes are made as a result. As you will hear, Speaker, as I go through my remarks today, very few changes were made as a result of the input that was received.

There was a lot of interest in this bill from organizations, unions, worker advocates and others across the province. There were 77 requests to appear before the social policy committee to speak to MPPs about this bill. Unfortunately, there were only 27 opportunities for deputants to come before the committee, so there were a lot of people who wanted to share their thoughts about this bill who weren't able to. I do want to recognize the 51 organizations who made a request to appear and the 26 individuals who made a request to appear, as well as the many other organizations and individuals who provided written input to the committee.

Speaker, I do want to make a note here about timelines. If we are serious about soliciting public input, listening to public input, analyzing public input and using public input to improve legislation, we have to provide timelines that make that process meaningful. In this case, we had public input on November 16 and 17. The deadline for written input was November 18, and the amendments were due November 19. Now, Speaker, I don't know about you, but that creates very rigorous time pressures on the ability of anyone to analyze the input that is received. Basically, it precludes any kind of opportunity to craft an amendment,

because when the deadline for written input is 6 p.m. on Thursday, November 18, and the amendments have to be filed the next day, you can't turn that around. You can't get legislative counsel to craft an amendment based on the input that is received. So I offer that feedback to the government, that they should think about this in the process of taking legislation before a standing committee to receive input. If you want people to spend their time preparing briefs about the bills that you are bringing forward, you should respect the time that they've spent. You should take a minute to read the submission that they have provided and look at whether it can be used to improve, strengthen and amend the legislation that is before the House.

But I tell you, Speaker, the official opposition did take some time to review the input that was provided to the committee, to read some of the briefs, and I'll be sharing some of the comments that were made to the committee, some of the content of the briefs that were received.

We brought 24 amendments to the Standing Committee on Social Policy. We brought two notices of motion—recommendations to vote against schedule 4 and schedule 6 of this bill—because that is what we heard loud and clear from people who came before the committee. But guess what, Speaker? Of those 24 amendments, of those two notices of motion, not a single one was accepted by this government. And that is kind of the *modus operandi* that we have seen across the way. It does lip service to listening and actually ignores the valuable input that was received that really would have made this bill so much stronger.

Speaker, I was here this morning when the minister led off this debate, and I listened to him say that this bill was in large part the result of a consultation process that was undertaken by the Ontario Workforce Recovery Advisory Committee. Apparently, that committee has issued a report to the minister and the minister apparently used the contents of that report to craft this bill. It would be nice to actually read that report. It would have been nice to have had worker representation on that workforce recovery advisory committee, so that as that committee was developing recommendations to present to the minister, there was a worker voice. That is important when you have legislation that's called "Working for Workers." You want to know what workers need, what their priorities are and what they would recommend the government bring forward with legislation, but there was no worker representation on that workforce recovery advisory committee, and there was no consultation, Speaker, with any unions, with any worker advocates, with any injured worker legal clinics. There was no consultation whatsoever with those organizations in the development of this specific bill that's before us today, Bill 27. So not only were workers excluded from the Ontario Workforce Recovery Advisory Committee, they were also completely excluded from the process of developing a bill that is entitled "Working for Workers." That is a big problem, Speaker. This was confirmed by the unions who came and spoke to the committee, that there has been no attempt by this government to reach out and consult with them.

Speaker, this morning the minister also talked about how proud he is of his government's new relationship with labour, and I have to say, Speaker, there are a lot of fences that need to be mended in terms of this government's relationship with labour. Immediately after this government was first elected, back in 2018, we saw them move to cancel the planned minimum wage increase to \$15. And, yes, three years later, they've made that announcement—three years in which \$5,300 has been taken out of minimum wage workers' pockets because this government did not proceed with that minimum wage increase at the time that it was promised. We also saw this government immediately move to scrap the two paid sick days—the two hard-fought paid sick days—that workers and health care experts and advocates across this province had mobilized for, had engaged in extensive lobbying and advocacy efforts for, which finally paid off with the previous Liberal government, just before the election, agreeing to move forward with those two paid sick days.

### 1340

Now, we know two paid sick days are not enough. It's nowhere near what experts say is needed, but it was something. It was something, Speaker. But this government decided that those two paid sick days were too rich for workers, too much for workers. Workers would take advantage of those two paid sick days, so this government eliminated access to those days.

We also saw this government decide that there was no need for legislation to ensure equal pay for equal work, to ensure that when a temp worker is brought into a company that that temp worker is paid the same wage as the worker they are working beside who is hired by the company. There is absolutely no justification, when two workers are doing the exact same job, but one is hired by the temp agency and one is hired by the employer, for those workers to be paid different rates and for the temp worker to be paid significantly less, but this government thinks that is fine. This government said to employers, "Go ahead. Keep paying temp workers less than the workers that you hire yourselves." What that does to employers is it incentivizes employers. Those employers are in high-risk sectors. It incentivizes those employers to continue to keep a constant stream of temp workers in the workplace.

The other thing we saw this government do right after it was elected was decide that workers had to prove they were employees and not independent contractors rather than the employers who had hired them. We know that many of the workers who are most frequently misclassified as independent contractors are denied the benefits and protections they deserve under the Employment Standards Act. Most of those workers are vulnerable workers. They are precarious workers. They are the workers who are least able to mount a legal challenge against their employer in court to prove that they are an employee so that they can get the benefits to which they are entitled.

Speaker, those are just some of the actions that we saw this government take right after it was elected. Despite the claims across the way about this new relationship with

labour, I don't think labour is buying it. I think labour sees right through what this government is all about and where their values lie. One only has to look at this bill, and I will get to that shortly.

I'm going to talk about each of the schedules in the bill—some at more length than others—and I'm going to focus particularly on schedules 1 and 2, schedule 6 and, to a lesser extent, schedule 3.

I'm going to begin with schedules 1 and 2. I was just talking about the equal-pay-for-equal-work provisions that this government decided to cancel, and that has a big impact on schedule 1 and schedule 2 because those two schedules deal with recruitment agencies who bring foreign workers into this province and also temporary help agencies. Those two schedules set up a licensing regime for both the recruiters who bring the foreign workers in and the temporary help agencies—not all of course; not all temp workers are foreign workers. However, many are immigrants, many are racialized and many are vulnerable. So we need to ensure that those temp workers who work for temp agencies have the strictest protections that are going to prevent them being exploited by unscrupulous temp help agencies.

In this province, a supply chain has been created that has seen many sectors rely, in great part, on foreign workers to deal with the labour demand. We see that in fisheries, in food services, in transportation and in tourism. Nannies—home child care services has been a big sector to bring foreign workers into this province. Bill 27 requires the recruiters who bring these foreign workers in to be licensed, and it says that employers must use licensed recruiters.

It also says that now, for the first time—and this is a positive step—recruiters are “jointly and severally liable” for any fees that are charged in Ontario or abroad, because some domestic recruiters work with offshore recruiters to bring these foreign workers into the province to meet those labour demands in those sectors.

Now, it has been illegal for a number of years in Ontario for recruiters to charge fees to foreign workers who are coming into Ontario, but that hasn't stopped unscrupulous recruiters from charging those fees. So now, holding Ontario recruiters jointly and severally liable, there is a hope that this may prevent those foreign workers from being charged fees.

The problem is, Speaker—and this was pointed out by numerous organizations and individuals who presented to the committee—that the licensing scheme that's proposed in schedules 1 and 2 deals only with the recruitment agencies and the temporary help agencies. It does not cover the employers who use those agencies. There is no liability for the employers who use those agencies. There is a requirement that employers cannot knowingly use unlicensed agencies, but as one of the presenters to the committee, Fay Faraday, said, the legislation says that employers “will only be subject to a penalty if they knowingly use people who aren't licensed.” That “means that they can just not ask, right? It's an incentive to not ask, to be willfully ignorant of the status and to continue without any penalty.

Right now, this legislation says that employers who use unlicensed recruiters are subject to either a compliance order or potentially a fine. And do you know what the amount of that fine is, Speaker? It's \$250—\$250. So an employer who uses an unlicensed recruiter has little incentive to not use that unlicensed recruiter because they know that there's no financial penalty for doing that.

Many of the deputants who appeared before the committee pointed to other provinces that created licensing regimes for recruitment agencies and temporary help agencies, and at the same time created a registry of employers to go along with that. Because, as I said, it is really employers who drive the foreign worker business model. It is that demand for foreign workers that creates the supply chain, so there must be some accountability for employers. This was one of the amendments that was brought forward by the NDP, to create this foreign-worker-employer registry, which is in place in many other provinces. It first was introduced in Manitoba, I believe back in 2008; it's in place in BC; it's in place in New Brunswick and in Nova Scotia.

Many other provinces have a foreign-worker-employer registry so that there is transparency in which employers are bringing in foreign workers, so there's transparency in whether there are inspection reports filed against those employers. Actually, if the Ministry of Labour was really interested in ensuring that foreign workers are not exploited by their employers, it would help the Ministry of Labour to have this employer registry so that they knew exactly which employers to target to make sure that foreign workers were not being exploited.

#### 1350

Another one of the amendments that we had proposed, along with the creation of the employer registry, is much more significant fines. I talked about the \$250 compliance order that an employer might be slapped with if they used an unlicensed agency. People came before the committee and said that the financial penalty should be at least \$15,000—at least \$15,000—because if you don't impose fines that are high enough to provide a disincentive, you're not going to get employers out of the habit of using unlicensed recruiters. If employers know that there are no consequences for using an unlicensed recruiter, they're going to continue do that. If recruiters know there's no consequence for not getting licensed, they're also going to avoid their responsibilities that have been imposed by this act.

I just wanted to share some of the comments that were made to the committee by a worker, Jhoey Cruz. She came to Ontario as an in-home child caregiver. She said that she paid \$2,000 in fees. That was in July 2016. There has been a prohibition on fees for over a decade, so she was illegally charged \$2,000 in fees. By the time she came here, she found out that she shouldn't have been charged, but she didn't have any evidence that she had paid this fee. Then, when she got involved with a network of other in-home child caregivers, she realized that she was one of the lucky ones; she only paid \$2,000. She said that others she met paid \$7,000 to \$10,000 each. Some of them paid \$20,000.

Most of them paid cash to their recruiter agencies and didn't receive receipts.

This is another big problem with this legislation. It says that the recruiter will be held jointly and severally liable if there is a fee charged to the foreign worker, but it requires the foreign worker to establish proof that they paid the fee. Unscrupulous offshore agencies are not going to provide receipts to these foreign workers to say, "Yes, you paid me an illegal fee that I charged." They're too smart for that. They're not going to do that. So one of the amendments that we proposed was to reverse the onus so that it's not the foreign worker who has to establish the proof that they paid the fee. Again, like every single other amendment that the NDP proposed during the committee, that one was also rejected.

I am going to deal with another related concern that came up during the discussion around schedules 1 and 2 but that actually relates to schedule 6. You'll see in a moment what I mean.

There is currently a section of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act—section 83, subsection (4)—that says employers who use temp agency workers will be held jointly and severally liable for any workplace injury or death that occurs to that worker. Right now what happens is, if a temporary worker is injured on the job, the WSIB data that's collected goes against the temporary help agency; it does not go against employer who has brought in that temporary worker into their workplace. This makes no sense. It makes no sense, because it should be—the place where the worker is working, that is the place where appropriate health and safety measures should be implemented. And if those measures are not implemented, then the person who is overseeing that workplace should be held accountable.

This government could have an opportunity to fix that—to fix that right now—because that provision is already in place. It was already written before this government was elected, but this government has decided that they are not going to enact that section of the WSIA that would hold employers of temp workers accountable for the health and safety of those workers.

Why is this important during the discussion on this bill? Well, we have a business here in Toronto, Fiera Foods—I think all MPPs in this chamber are familiar with Fiera Foods. Fiera Foods has been slapped with 191 orders for health and safety violations over the past two decades. It has been repeatedly fined and convicted under the Ontario Health and Safety Act. It has seen five temp workers die on their watch—die while they were employed with Fiera Foods. And yet, Fiera Foods is considered a model employer in the eyes of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board because all of the things that happen on-site at Fiera Foods, all of those health and safety violations, are recorded against the temporary help agency that supplied the temp workers. They are not recorded against Fiera Foods.

When I get to schedule 6, I'm going to share with you the big concern about schedule 6, one of the biggest concerns: that schedule 6 is going to rebate employers who

have clean health and safety records. It's going to rebate employers, which means that employers like Fiera Foods that, on paper, have this clean health and safety record will be in line to get a significant rebate from this government, from the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board.

Now I'm going to move on to schedule 6. Certainly during the committee, a great deal of the testimony was directed to schedule 6. I have to share the comments of Sylvia Boyce from United Steelworkers, who presented to the committee. These were her comments about the whole bill, the Working for Workers Act:

"The best that can be said of five of the six sections is that they seem to fall under that title, and even if they don't help workers, they may not hurt them.

"As for the sixth section"—schedule 6—"specifically the proposal to grant the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board the power to hand out refunds to employers while workers go without the help they deserve, it would let the WSIB write cheques to businesses with workers' money, opens the door to privatization of this government's support and has no place in this bill."

She goes on to say, "The minister claimed this bill would, 'put workers in the driver's seat,' but this proposal throws workers under the bus."

She also goes on to say, "The WSIB is not supposed to be a piggy bank for employers."

We heard that repeatedly during the committee, and the message that was shared unanimously from injured worker legal advocates and from unions that presented to the committee—the unanimous call was for schedule 6 to be repealed, to be removed from this bill. As Sylvia Boyce says, it has no place in a bill that is called "Working for Workers." It has no place in a province that is supposed to ensure that the most vulnerable workers among us are protected, especially workers who are injured on the job.

#### 1400

But many of the presenters who spoke to the committee pointed out that the WSIB has seen a year-over-year reduction in benefits for injured workers. In 2010, WSIB benefit payments to injured workers were about \$4.8 billion. By 2017, they had been reduced by half: \$2.3 billion was being paid out in benefit payments to injured workers. At the same time, there has been a reduction in premiums for employers. There has been a total reduction of premiums since 2008 of \$2.4 billion.

What this bill would do, what schedule 6 would do, by proposing to rebate employers, is that it would remove another \$1.2 billion from the WSIB, which this government describes as a surplus. It would remove another \$1.2 billion from the WSIB, and that is money that could be used to expand coverage, to respond to this government's own expert panels that have recommended universal WSIB coverage and that occupational diseases be recognized by WSIB.

Actually, one of the deputants pointed out that there are 3,000 occupational cancer cases in Ontario; 170 of those 3,000 cases have been recognized by the WSIB. Those other widows, those grieving families, those sick workers have been completely denied and excluded by WSIB. That

would be a helpful thing, Speaker: to look at expanding coverage, to look at dealing with the mental health issues that we have seen during this pandemic.

We heard a number of deputants who came and talked about the fact that 94% of mental health claims are denied by the WSIB. As we are coming through a pandemic that has seen skyrocketing rates of mental health illness among front-line workers, among those front-line heroes that this government pretends to care about, among nurses and PSWs who literally served on the front lines of a war zone and who have come out with extreme trauma and long-lasting impacts from having to live through that, when they go to WSIB to get their mental health illnesses or concerns treated and covered, their claims are denied. One quarter of all workers in this province have no WSIB coverage whatsoever, and yet this government is planning to redistribute \$1.2 billion to supposedly clean employers—at least that's what we had heard from the minister, that that is the plan.

This is not a surplus, Speaker. This \$1.2 billion is not a surplus. It is money that should be paid to injured workers. It is money that should be used to cover those legitimate WSIB claims that are brought forward by our front-line workers, by any worker in this province who has experienced illness or injury related to their work.

I want to quote the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council. They said:

“Since 2016, employers have generally gotten around 52% in reduction of premiums; in construction, the average premium rate has gone down 63%. Despite those reductions of premiums, the accidents haven't gone down, the critical injuries haven't gone down, the deaths haven't gone down. As a matter of fact, in 2020, with increased focus on COVID and increased inspections, there were 20 deaths in construction and 355 critical injuries. So guess what? Giving reductions in premiums and giving money back hasn't helped.”

We also heard from the IAVGO Community Legal Clinic. They raised a concern about claim suppression: “Allocating the WSIB's surplus back to employers could incentivize greater claim suppression. At a time when employers are trying to minimize costs in any way that they can, allowing the surplus to be returned to employers with a good track record in terms of workplace injuries motivates employers to keep the number of claims as low as possible.” And what's one of the ways that they can do that, Speaker? They can bring in temp workers, as I said at the beginning, when I was talking about schedules 1 and 2.

The legal clinic goes on to say, “The WSIB's most recent operational review report indicates that the WSIB failed to conduct sufficient claim suppression audits.... The report demonstrates that the WSIB does not have the adequate tools to assess claim suppression, which is an important metric of addressing workplace safety.

“How can it be said with any accuracy that the money will be returned to safe employers and not employers that are expertly hiding their claims?” That is a very good question, Speaker, and it is one of the reasons, as I said,

that the NDP pushed to get schedule 6 removed from this bill.

I also want to share some of the input that was provided by ONA. ONA was not one of the speakers to the committee, but provided a written submission. They point out the significant mental stress claims from front-line health care workers, the burnout among health care workers as a result of the pandemic, and the increased likelihood that nurses are leaving the profession. They actually quoted a report from RNAO that said that 43% of RNAO members were considering leaving nursing after the pandemic.

When you reflect back on the data I shared earlier that the WSIB only approves about 6% of the mental stress claims that are brought before it, you can see why nurses would want to be leaving the profession, in addition to Bill 124. Again, this is a government that claims to be working for workers and claims to care about our front-line heroes and yet is imposing a 1% cap on wage increases for nurses and other public sector workers. At a time when inflation is 4.7%, guess what? A 1% increase in wages is a cut in pay. That is a cut in pay, Speaker, and it's not the way that a government that cares about workers, that cares about front-line heroes should be treating our health care professionals.

I wanted to talk a little bit about another concern that ONA, the Ontario Nurses' Association, raised. They talked about the influx of claims from their members, from people who are suffering with long-haul post-workplace-COVID symptoms. We saw a report from the science table that said that 10% to as many as 20% of people who have recovered from the virus are long-haulers, which has significant implications for WSIB and for the need for WSIB to be able to support those workers, because we don't know about long-haul COVID. We don't know how long people will be unable to work and if they will be able to get back to work. So that is another concern about schedule 6.

#### 1410

Speaker, I wanted to now talk a little bit about schedule 2. I will just quickly reflect on this schedule because today, as we know, we're wearing purple scarves. Today is International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Schedule 2 is a schedule that prohibits non-compete clauses. That's a step forward. We know that non-compete clauses have generally not been held up by the courts, but imposing this prohibition is a step forward. But this government had an opportunity; I gave them the opportunity, Speaker. I brought an amendment to the committee that, in addition to banning non-compete clauses, would also ban non-disclosure agreements in cases of sexual misconduct.

We have seen more and more people, more and more women coming forward with experiences of harassment in the workplace. When they bring these stories forward, they are frequently asked to sign non-disclosure agreements. Now, 16 US states have introduced bills to limit the use of non-disclosure agreements in sexual misconduct cases. Eight of those states have put those bills into law. This would have been an opportunity for this government

to show some leadership on issues of violence against women, to put into practice its claims that they're concerned about labour mobility, because NDAs, non-disclosure agreements, provide the same kinds of barriers to labour mobility as non-competes. But this government chose not to take that opportunity.

I now want to talk a little bit about schedule 3. I have to say, Speaker, that schedule 3 was probably the schedule of the bill that got the most positive input from people who appeared before the committee. Schedule 3 eliminates the ability of regulatory bodies to impose Canadian work experience requirements on foreign-trained professionals who are coming into those regulated professions—except for health care. The regulated health care professionals were excluded from this bill, which was actually feedback that a number of the people who presented to the committee talked about. At a time when we are experiencing a significant shortage of health care professionals, this legislation should have looked at including regulated health professionals, as well as regulated professionals in other professions.

What's important to keep in mind is, Speaker, this is a significant step forward. Eliminating the Canadian work experience requirements will help foreign-trained professionals who come to Ontario enter the careers to which they were trained. But what this reflects, really, is a 2013 ruling of the Ontario Human Rights Commission that requirements for prior work experience in Canada amounts to discrimination. So it's positive that the government is moving ahead to operationalize, to implement, that ruling; it's unfortunate that it has taken this long.

It is also unfortunate—and I understand. I heard the government say that the plan is eventually to include regulated health professionals. It won't be in time to deal with the shortages we're experiencing during this pandemic, but hopefully it will happen soon. We heard from TRIEC, the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council. I think they said that there are 16,000 foreign-trained or internationally educated health care professionals who are unable to work in their profession in the province. So that is an important and valuable source of health care expertise that we are not able to tap into because of the barriers that exist.

At this point, Speaker, I wanted to reflect a little bit on the health care workforce in my community in London, and I know in all of the ridings that we represent, many of the health care workers who come as foreign-trained professionals to London are Muslim. We have a large number of Muslim physicians and physiotherapists and other health care workers. We have a large number of Muslims who work in some of the regulated professions that are covered by this bill. What is important—as well as eliminating those Canadian experience requirements—is ensuring that we have a province that is welcoming and inclusive for those foreign-trained professionals who come to Ontario.

Everybody in this Legislature will know that London, in June, suffered a horrific act of Islamophobic terror when four members of the Afzaal-Salman family were murdered

by a terrorist in just a shocking attack. Unfortunately, what we saw just a couple of weeks after that shocking crime, we got a report from London police that shows a 46% rise in reported hate crimes in 2020 compared to the year prior.

That is one of the reasons why the official opposition—and I understand there's support from other parties—is so committed to bringing forward the Our London Family Act. That is an act that, as we look at bringing in more foreign-trained professionals, as we look at bringing in more internationally educated health professionals, we have to deal with the rise of Islamophobia, the rise of anti-Black racism, the rise of hate-motivated attacks on the people who come to this province.

The Our London Family Act is a comprehensive piece of legislation that would include changes to the education system. It would include dismantling white supremacist groups. It would include a provincial hate crimes accountability unit. It would include bolstering the scope and the strategy of the Anti-Racism Directorate. It would include a targeted hiring initiative in the provincial public service to ensure that there are more minorities. And it would increase the limitation period for those seeking to file human rights claims in Ontario.

I hope that the government is going to be supporting the Our London Family Act when it is brought into this Legislature, because you can't be bringing more foreign-trained professionals into this province, you can't be bringing more migrant workers, more foreign workers into Ontario if we are not putting in place the measures that are going to enable them to live without fear, to feel that they have come to a place of safety in this province.

I just wanted to touch a little bit now on schedule 5. Time goes so quickly during a one-hour speech. Schedule 5 is about access to washrooms. We heard from a number of groups that, yes, access to washrooms is very important. UFCW came and talked about the fact that this is a small, positive step forward for workers. It's helpful to the food couriers who are picking up food in restaurants and taking it to people's homes to be able to access the washroom in the restaurant that they are delivering from.

**1420**

But the legislation has a major gap: It excludes transit workers. Speaker, if you could have been there and heard the presentation that we received from the president of the Amalgamated Transit Union—it was very uncomfortable and difficult for many of us to hear, but it is a reality. It is a reality that any transit worker who is menstruating, transit workers who are pregnant and older transit workers who may have medical conditions cannot access the washroom. They do not have the predictability of scheduling, the predictability of their routes that enables them to take washroom breaks when they need them, and yet they are excluded from this bill. Again, that was an amendment the NDP brought forward—to include transit workers as well as any worker who is providing a service to a business. Although this schedule covers some gig workers—it covers food courier workers, it covers Amazon delivery drivers who are delivering goods from one place to another—it does not include gig workers who are delivering people, for example. So it doesn't include Uber drivers

or Lyft drivers or other ride app drivers. It doesn't include taxi drivers. This is a major concern. For the dignity of every worker, there should be the ability to access washrooms.

At this point, I want to quote from a couple of the presentations to the committee. UFCW, United Food and Commercial Workers—I mentioned that they said that this was a small, positive step forward. They went on to say, “There are many more pressing needs that are a priority for workers in Ontario that this bill does not touch on at all. What would really work for workers are paid sick days; affordable child care; agricultural workers getting full employment rights, including the right to join a union; ensuring that gig workers and other precarious workers are treated with respect and also fully protected by laws and our social safety net.”

TRIEC, Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council, said, “New immigrants are overrepresented in precarious gig-work jobs and struggle for decent work conditions. The gig economy is here to stay. Moving forward, TRIEC hopes the government will further labour reform to be inclusive of workers in this sector.”

Well, Speaker, I have some good news for the government. I have done the work—unfortunately, they voted against it. But they have an opportunity at any point to pick up a private member's bill and bring it forward as government legislation. Last week, I brought forward the ending worker misclassification bill, which would be an enormous help for gig workers in this province, for contract workers in this province, who are often misclassified as independent contractors when the reality of the work they are doing shows that they are actually employees.

I want to share with members of this House the gig workers' bill of rights. This was created by gig workers and endorsed by Gig Workers United, Uber Drivers United from the UFCW, and the Ontario Federation of Labour. These are the top 10 priorities that they have identified. These are the top 10 things that they need to be able to improve working conditions and achieve decent work:

“(1) A worker is a worker; full employment rights with no carve-outs from minimum wage, sick leave, vacation pay and other minimum employment standards.

“(2) Payment for all hours of work....

“(3) Compensation for necessary work-related expenses....

“(4) Full and equal access to regulated benefits programs like” EI, CPP and WSIB.

“(5) Data transparency: access to ... data collected and how the algorithm affects workers....

“(6) Make all work count: Gig work must count towards permanent residency applications.

“(7) Put onus on employers to prove that workers are not employees, instead of workers proving that they are not independent contractors. Enshrine a clear test for employment status”—and that is what my bill, Bill 28, would do, so I really encourage the government to look at that.

“(8) Recognize gig workers' right to form a union....

“(9) Workers must have the right to negotiate for livable wages and benefits with their employer....

“(10) An end to arbitrary deactivations and fair compensation for glitches....”

If you were listening carefully to that list of the top 10 priorities that gig workers have identified, they did not mention access to washrooms, although I do not want to diminish that as an important and necessary right that all workers should have access to. Certainly in my conversations with Gig Workers United, they talked about everything they have gone through in the pandemic as we have relied more and more on food couriers and other delivery drivers, everything they have gone through for the past 20 months and the frustration they experienced when businesses would not allow them to use the washrooms when they were picking up or dropping off deliveries. And so, 20 months later—it's good that the government is finally doing something.

But I have to tell you, Speaker, one of the other concerns that was raised by people who spoke to this committee was the fact that the bill doesn't have any teeth. The bill provides so much room for exemption, so much room for businesses to say that the worker who is doing the delivery can't access the washroom. There is just so much room that it may not have any impact at all. We don't know what kind of impact it's going to have, because it just does not have any teeth and there are no consequences for businesses that don't provide that access.

I just wanted to go back to that other list of items that UFCW had pointed out as the things that really would be a priority for workers in Ontario, that would demonstrate that this government was working for workers. One of those things is paid sick days. Yesterday, Speaker, we saw this government vote against paid sick days, after 20 months in a pandemic when we saw workplaces become major sites of workplace transmission, when we know from all of the health care experts, from all of the medical officers of health and municipal councillors and other worker advocates that paid sick days are an important—it's a public health measure, for one thing, especially during COVID, but also for flu, for gastroenteritis and other kinds of communicable diseases that can be spread in a workplace when workers are in close proximity to each other, when they travel on public transit, in often crowded conditions, when they live in multi-generational housing, in densely populated neighbourhoods. And who are these workers that I'm talking about, Speaker? They are racialized workers. They are immigrant workers. They are low-income workers. They are among the most vulnerable in our province. And they are the least likely to have paid sick days from their employer, and that is why we have been advocating so fiercely to get permanent paid sick days implemented in this province.

**1430**

It was shameful to see this government dig in its heels and say Ontario can't afford paid sick days. Well, I tell you, Speaker, Ontario can't afford not to implement paid sick days because employers—Helmi Ansari from

Grosche International will tell you there's a growing number of employers who recognize that it is actually good for business. It's good for business. It supports stronger employee retention. It's good for customers to feel that they can go into a business and not have to worry that the person who's serving them has an infectious disease that they might be subject to. It's good for parents, whether or not they have child care—and they should definitely have \$10-a-day child care. It is good for all Ontarians.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** One more hour. One more hour.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** The minister will come to order.

Questions and responses?

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** I thank the member from London West for her presentation.

I have two quotes, as a preamble to my question, to begin. One is from Smokey Thomas, the president of OPSEU: "I'm proud to say, and pleased to see, that all our work with Minister McNaughton and his staff is paying off. So much can be achieved through conversation and collaboration, instead of just name-calling. This government is listening to us, and as a result, real working people will benefit."

Next, from Jerry Dias, national president of Unifor: "These fly-by-night agencies have damaged communities by exploiting the most vulnerable workers, including racialized workers, women, newcomers and migrant workers. We commend the government for listening to advocates and community members and introducing these changes." He's talking about, as did Smokey Thomas, the temporary help registry that's a part of legislation.

Can the member opposite please explain why she and her colleagues are saying no to increasing workplace health and safety for these vulnerable workers in this—

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Thank you.

Response?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I hope I was clear in my remarks related to schedules 1 and 2 that licensing recruitment agencies, licensing temporary help agencies—yes, it's a good thing to do, but unless you also combine that with a registry of employers who use recruitment agencies and who use temporary help agencies, you're not going to put those protections in place that those most vulnerable foreign workers need.

So from my perspective, what the government has proposed is a half measure. It doesn't do the job that Ontarians have a right to expect it to do.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Question?

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** Speaker, through you to the member from London West: Thank you for your intro on this third reading.

When you stood to speak on this legislation during second reading, you spoke about this government's role in reducing workers' premiums while they took care of the employers. I still have residents fighting to get justice from a complex and underserved system for workers.

Can you expand on where this government could have helped fix a broken system instead of just making it easier for employers to pay less to keep workers safe?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I appreciate the question from my colleague the member for St. Catharines. I know she has also been a passionate advocate for worker health and safety.

I highlighted during my remarks the fact that 94% of mental health claims to WSIB are denied. So looking at why that is—why, at a time when we are seeing an unprecedented rise in people reporting mental health concerns, is the WSIB denying 94% of those claims? Why are 25% of workers in this province excluded from any WSIB coverage whatsoever? That is where we should be looking. We should have been looking at universal coverage. We should have been looking at fixing WSIB, so that workers who have mental health injuries can get the support that they deserve.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Further questions?

**Mr. Mike Harris:** I'm just going to read a quick quote here, and then would like to get the thoughts of the member from London West on this. This is from Chris Albinson, the president and CEO of Communitech:

"Communitech is pleased to see Ontario level the playing field for workers, including tech workers, compared to other jurisdictions like California. Canadian founders are in a global competition for talent, so we are grateful to see Ontario setting conditions to help innovators attract and retain the best workers in North America to keep our economy growing."

What he's referring to is a clause in this bill that will actually remove non-compete clauses and allow workers from, say, Silicon Valley to relocate in Waterloo and help bolster what's happening with the fantastic tech economy that we have in the region.

So I would like to get the member's comments on that. I did actually listen quite intently to her hour, and I thank her for filling that time, but I didn't hear a whole lot about that part of the bill, and I would just love to hear a little bit more.

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I appreciate, I guess, the question from the member for Kitchener–Conestoga. I did actually reference the prohibition on non-compete clauses, and I heard the minister talk about the fact that this is going to be a way to help draw that global talent that Ontario is looking for. We don't have a problem with that. The courts have already said that non-competes are basically unenforceable.

What we do have a problem with is the fact that this was such a missed opportunity. The government could have also put a prohibition on non-disclosure agreements in sexual misconduct cases, which are also recognized as a barrier to international talent recruitment and retention.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Further questions?

**Ms. Jill Andrew:** To the member from London West: Thank you for your one hour discussing the Working for Workers Act. I'm wondering if you can share with the

public why the process of deeming is so incredibly anti-worker, quite frankly—anti-injured-worker—and if you can explain why it is concerning that the so-called surplus is going back to employers and not to injured workers.

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I really appreciate that question from my colleague the member for Toronto—St. Paul's, because it is definitely something that we heard repeatedly at this committee. I know my colleague the member for Niagara Falls will talk more about this, but all of the injured-worker advocates who spoke to the committee talked about the urgency of eliminating deeming.

What deeming does is to say that an injured worker is deemed to be qualified to do a job that doesn't exist. It is a phantom job, and that is used as a justification to reduce that injured worker's benefits. The result is that half of injured workers are living in poverty. Many of those are workers who have been deemed to be able to do those phantom jobs that they can't get and they can't do.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Further questions?

**Mr. Billy Pang:** The opposition continues to say that they support getting people into good jobs, and yet they vote against a bill to simplify the skilled trades system, break the stigma and engage employers. They talked about training workers who need to bridge into jobs here in Canada, but they vote against funding bridge training programs and language training for upskilling. So why is the opposition not supporting training to help people get into better jobs, keeping Ontarians at the minimum wage?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I'm so glad that the member asked about bridge training programs. Before I was elected, I was a researcher, and I actually did a major study on bridge training programs for internationally educated health professionals. There were a lot of recommendations that came out of that study that dealt with access to clinical placements. It dealt with stable funding for those programs, because many of those bridge training programs are given pilot funding and then they only exist for a year or two, and it's hard to develop any kind of sustainability in terms of the faculty that teach in those programs.

1440

There is a lot that we could do. The official opposition are big supporters of bridge training programs for internationally educated professionals, and we have a lot of ideas on how those bridge training programs could be improved and strengthened.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** There isn't enough time for another back-and-forth.

Further debate?

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** It is a privilege to rise this afternoon and speak in support of Bill 27, the Working for Workers Act, 2021, brought forward by my friend and colleague the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

Before I begin my remarks I would like to thank the Minister of Labour, his parliamentary assistant and the entire team at the Ministry of Labour for all that they have done and are doing to give Ontario workers a hand up. Thank you.

I also want to take this time to thank many essential workers from my riding of Scarborough—Rouge Park. They have shown incredible resiliency over the past 18 months and were not afraid to step up during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. We owe it to those workers, in my riding and across all of Ontario, to rebalance the scales and put them in the driver's seat.

The way we work has been changing, and the recent pandemic has accelerated this change. In a rapidly changing world Ontarians expect a forward-thinking government that has their backs. They expect that, when the world of work changes, our laws keep up to protect them. This is a bill by, for and about the people who work hard and put in a good day's shift and take pride in a job well done.

Madam Speaker, Ontario is a province of opportunity, where your work pays off and dreams are made a reality. It's time to level the playing field and lift everyone up. Our government has the plan to build the future of this great province and lead the way.

The future of work is already here. That's why our government is introducing legislation based on the important recommendations from the Ontario Workforce Recovery Advisory Committee after consulting with workers, employers and unions. The proposed measures found in the Working for Workers Act will position Ontario as the jurisdiction that has the most competitive framework for workers and businesses to both benefit from our new world of work.

These legislative measures are in addition to the broad range of actions our government is taking to help people work anywhere, such as improving and expanding transportation to and from work by investing over \$84 billion in transportation projects across the province, led by my colleague the Minister of Transportation. We are investing in fast, rapid and reliable transit to link our cities and regions and provide long-awaited relief to workers who commute to work on transit. This includes a historic, \$28.5-billion plan to get shovels in the ground on the largest subway expansion in Canada's history; \$5 million to bring back northeastern passenger rail service after it was shuttered by the previous government; and delivering a historic, multi-billion dollar GO rail expansion plan to provide increased service levels and reach two-way rail service to our communities in the GTA.

Additionally, our government is expanding, rehabilitating and building more highway infrastructure so that workers who rely on their car to get to work will continue to have a reliable and fast commute, even as our province reaches our full growth potential.

In order to help people work from anywhere, our government is continuing to work to bring high-speed broadband Internet to rural and underserved areas. This initiative, led by the Minister of Infrastructure, had funding increased to it by nearly \$4 billion in the most recent budget. We are delivering on our plan to bring Internet access to all communities by 2025.

The Working for Workers Act also builds on our government's efforts at the start of the COVID-19

pandemic to protect the health and safety of our workers. Whether it was hiring over 100 new inspectors to visit job sites or introducing paid sick days through the worker income protection benefit or the over \$200-million investment to worker training projects to help fill the shortage of skilled workers in Ontario, our government is working to support workers, businesses and job seekers who are looking for new careers.

In addition, the Working for Workers Act builds on our government's action to help workers keep up with the cost of living through an increase in the minimum wage. Our government is proud to be working for workers by putting more money into their pockets by increasing the general minimum wage to \$15 per hour, effective January 1, 2022. Under the proposed changes, the special minimum wage rate for liquor servers would be eliminated and they would be entitled to the general minimum wage. Students under 18, home workers, hunting, fishing and wilderness guides will also see an increase in their special minimum wage rates. Our government is ensuring workers who need our help receive their fair share of the economic pie. We will continue to use every tool in our tool box to help workers in our province find meaningful careers that let them earn themselves bigger paycheques and build better lives for themselves and their loved ones.

Madam Speaker, as all members of this House know, Ontario is one of the best places in the world to work, live and raise a family. Just take a look: We are home to a highly educated workforce, the second-largest automotive manufacturer in North America, the second-largest IT cluster in North America and the second-largest food processing centre. We are home to a province full of endless potential, which is the very reason that makes Ontario a destination for many newcomers who are in search of great economic prospects and the prosperity to help themselves and their families.

Madam Speaker, as a first-generation immigrant myself, I'm thankful for the opportunities that the province has given to my family and I, and the many generations of immigrants who came before us. But I know, like many others that have come before me, that more is needed to be done to help integrate newcomers into the jobs that match their skills, because newcomers create businesses in our communities. They fill much-needed roles in our society and they spark our entrepreneurial spirit. They account for 33% of Ontario's labour force.

In 2016, only one quarter of internationally trained immigrants in regulated professions were working in jobs that matched their level of qualification, and more recently about 300,000 jobs were going unfilled across the province, costing billions in lost economic output. To create a clear path for newcomers to fully apply their skills in a meaningful way, the Ontario government intends to propose changes found in the Working for Workers Act that would help remove barriers for newcomers to get licensed and find jobs that match their qualifications and skills.

Removing these barriers would help more newcomers find jobs and significantly boost Ontario's economy so that they can support themselves and they can support their

loved ones as well. Reducing immigrant unemployment and helping them find good jobs could increase Ontario's GDP by \$12 billion to \$20 billion in each of the next five years, Madam Speaker. Again, I want to emphasize that by reducing the immigrant unemployment rate, Ontario GDP will grow by \$12 billion to \$20 billion each year in the next five years.

**1450**

These changes, if passed, will build on the work that the province is already doing to help highly skilled internationally trained immigrants find work in their field of expertise. The Ontario government is investing \$68 million to help internationally trained immigrants access programs designed to bridge their experience with the needs of employers in their community. This would impact 23 trades and 14 professionals, such as lawyers, engineers, architects, plumbers, electricians, accountants, hairstylists, teachers and early childhood educators.

These changes were a need that was communicated throughout the extensive consultations that went into this particular bill. Over a dozen stakeholders representing immigrants have expressed that the work experience requirement and the bureaucratic process are hurdles that are making it harder for new Canadians to get connected to the jobs that match their skills.

Madam Speaker, these are long overdue measures that will make a life-changing, meaningful difference for newcomers and new Canadians as we unleash Ontario's economic potential and build back a stronger province. That's why we're acting and taking the steps necessary so that newcomers can continue their careers and contribute their expertise to a knowledge-based economy. With a province full of diverse talent, it is vital that we connect everyone to a job that they are qualified for so that we continue to empower our newcomers and their families and support their strong communities. Once again, I thank the minister for these changes to support newcomers.

I have personally met many new Canadians who are doing jobs that are not matching their expertise and their experience. When they heard about the changes coming from this government, they expressed their interest and also their thanks to the government for finally being the first jurisdiction in Canada—in fact, in North America—to bring such changes so that they can apply their expertise and their experience into their matched skills and professional jobs right here in Ontario.

Madam Speaker, another aspect of this bill is how it gives back to our truck drivers, to couriers, to delivery workers. During the pandemic, all the truckers, couriers and food delivery workers acted as our heroes on the road. Since the start of the pandemic, these workers stepped up and made sure that the shelves were stocked, medicines were delivered, made sure that our supply chains remained strong. They were there for us. It's time for us to be there for them.

Bill 27 proposes to make it law for business owners to let delivery workers use their company's washroom facilities if they're making a pickup or delivery. It's great to see the right thing being done for these drivers, as during

the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Minister of Transportation and I heard directly from truck drivers and their carriers who were telling us that washroom access was being denied to them. I was truly shocked that our heroes on the road during the global pandemic were being treated this way, especially as our government led by example. I want to thank the Minister of Transportation for her swift action in keeping ONroute centres open for our delivery drivers and opening additional temporary truck parking and rest facilities near the highways.

Allowing these workers washroom access in the businesses they serve is a matter of decency and is the right thing to do, full stop. Our government will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with our delivery and truck drivers and take all steps necessary to give them the dignity and the respect that they deserve.

One of the ways our government is working for workers is by focusing on the health and safety of every worker, including those employed by temporary help agencies. It is unacceptable that some temporary agencies are paying people below the minimum wage and denying them other employment rights while also gaining a competitive advantage over law-abiding agencies by undercutting rates. To protect these workers, our government is intending to propose legislation that would, if passed, require temporary help agencies and recruiters to have a licence and pay a security deposit to operate in Ontario. This proposal would also require companies to use agencies and recruiters that are licensed. Before licensing is implemented, Ontario is forming a dedicated team of officers to identify temporary help agencies and recruiters who are exploiting workers. This team would crack down on illegal practices and recover unpaid wages for the exploited workers.

The proposed changes would help protect vulnerable workers and help them ensure businesses can feel safe addressing their staffing needs through licensed temporary help agencies and recruiters. Workers need assurances that their government is looking out for them, and by stepping up to close these loopholes, we are going to hold the bad actors accountable and have the backs of the most vulnerable workers.

Mr. Speaker, the Working for Workers Act also puts workers first by prioritizing their mental health and time with their loved ones. Ontario cannot be a province where people burn out from endless work and their family time comes last. Because when workers finish for the day, we need to give them a chance to unplug, take a break and enjoy their precious time with their loved ones.

Ontario would be the first jurisdiction in Canada to establish policies that help workers disconnect from their employment responsibilities. These proposed legislative changes would require businesses with 25 employees or more to post a written disconnect-from-work policy. Employers would also be required to provide a copy of the written policy to each of its employees within 30 days of preparing or changing the policy.

This is another small change, informed by the Ontario Workforce Recovery Advisory Committee's consultations

that can help make a big difference by supporting healthy workplaces, a strong work-life balance and benefit vulnerable workers who usually spend more time on unpaid work. As work has changed to a work-from-anywhere model, it is vital that we protect the flexibility that employees have gained over the past few months and put workers' mental health first.

Mr. Speaker, the Working for Workers Act contains a number of unprecedented moves that will give Ontario the most competitive framework for workers and their businesses. The world of work is continuing to shift, and it is vital that our laws keep up with these changes. Because we know that workers want certainty, they want a well-paying job and they want an environment where they can grow, thrive and contribute. If passed, this legislation will help ensure that our economy remains resilient and strong in the years to come, but most importantly, that the basic rights of workers are protected as these changes occur.

Mr. Speaker, whether it's protecting the drivers, whether we are protecting the delivery workers, the temporary agency workers or helping employees unplug, all the measures are unprecedented—the first in Canada happening in this province. So I want to take this time to thank the team behind the ministry, the minister and the PA, and everyone who contributed to these changes—a huge thanks, because it will definitely have incredible, life-changing impacts on so many Ontarians, and we can already hear good feedback across the region.

**1500**

As our province continues to grow and build, we are taking the side of workers. That's why I'm very proud that I am standing up here today to debate on this bill, so that as legislators on this side and all sides, we can support this bill and make sure that we bring these changes into practice so that many Ontarians are able to receive the benefits of this bill.

I'm looking forward to getting questions from both sides of this House, and I'm also looking forward to supporting this bill. I encourage all members of this House to support this bill.

**The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker):** Questions and responses?

**Miss Monique Taylor:** I sat and listened to the member from Scarborough–Rouge Park, and I heard him use buzzwords like “front-line workers” and talk about how we must take care of them, and talk about workers' mental health. And yet, Speaker, earlier in the year, I put forward a bill to amend the workers' safety and insurance act for access to mental health support for front-line workers, for essential workers, and this government turned it down. I'll quote one of the government members: “Providing essential workers with presumptive access to WSIB benefits for mental health injuries sustained at work during COVID-19 would be the most expensive standard in Canada.” That was the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore.

Why does the government not think that supporting WSIB benefits for mental health for workers is important within this bill?

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** Thanks to the member opposite for that question.

As a government, we are stepping up to close the loopholes and ensure that businesses, especially the bad actors, do not desert their workers.

The proposed changes in this bill to the WSIB would not impact the compensation or benefits for services provided by WSIB to workers who become injured or ill on the job.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the member opposite: There is no change to WSIB benefits. In fact, this bill is enhanced to protect the mental health of our workers, and also protects access to many benefits for our workers, including truckers or delivery workers.

Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

**The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker):** I recognize the member from Ottawa West–Nepean.

**Mr. Jeremy Roberts:** Thank you to the member for Scarborough–Rouge Park for his remarks on the Working for Workers Act. I know the member is a passionate advocate for workers in his riding, so I appreciated listening to his comments.

Speaker, during committee and the public hearings, it was really made clear that the removal of the Canadian work experience factor is going to greatly help foreign-trained professionals start their careers in Canada, and we heard this time and time again from witnesses. So I'm wondering if the member could speak a little bit more to that and how this change is going to help us attract and get the right people in the right jobs in Ontario.

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** Thanks for that great question from the member for Ottawa West–Nepean, and thanks to him for the incredible work he does for his constituents.

Mr. Speaker, our government is proud that Ontario is a destination for many newcomers who have come to Canada in search of greater economic prospects. Newcomers create businesses in our community, they bring entrepreneurial skills and they account for 33% of Ontario's labour force.

As a matter of fact, only one quarter of internationally trained immigrants in regulated professions are working in jobs that match their level of expertise. Right now, as we all know, we have a shortage—300,000 jobs unfilled in the province of Ontario.

I just want to give an example. Reducing immigrant unemployment and helping them find good jobs could increase Ontario's GDP by—

**The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker):** Thank you.

Questions and response?

**Ms. Jill Andrew:** The member from Scarborough–Rouge Park said that this government wants to invest in protecting workers and encourage a better work-life balance. I'm just wondering, how do you create a work-life balance for workers, as this Conservative government, if they're saying no to paid sick days? That is at the epitome of being able to have a work-life balance where you stay home and get better surrounded by the love of your family.

Secondly to that, they have spoken ad nauseam about the disconnect benefit in schedule 2. I'm wondering how

the ability to disconnect benefits employees who may be low-wage employees, ones who may be on the front lines, who may not even have had a work phone, let alone an email, to communicate with their employers. How do they disconnect?

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** Thanks to the member opposite for that question. Since the start of this pandemic, we have had workers' backs. We were the first to introduce unlimited job-protected leave so that nobody had to choose between their job and their health, Madam Speaker.

When it comes to the disconnect clause in this bill that will protect workers, what I mean by it is that there are a lot of workers who had to go into unpaid hours of their job, even after after-hours. Ontario cannot be a province where people burn out from endless work and, again, put everything else, like family time, last. That's why this government is introducing this clause so that the proposed legislative change would require businesses to have this note in front of their employees, or directly sent to employees, where they don't need to spend these unpaid hours after their job hours.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Further questions?

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Madam Speaker, first of all, I would like to congratulate the member from Scarborough–Rouge Park for the incredible job you're doing as the PA to the Minister of Transportation. I would ask a question relevant to this bill but towards the Ministry of Transportation: We heard loud and clear from many, many, many truck drivers that they could not find washroom access. I do remember reaching out to the Minister of Labour. The Minister of Labour reached out to the Minister of Transportation. So I just want to ask the member, what are we doing to provide bathroom access to help these truck drivers?

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** Thanks to the member from Mississauga–Malton. Being a PA at the Ministry of Labour, thank you for your contribution to this bill and for the great changes.

Madam Speaker, during this time and era, not just truck drivers or courier delivery personnel but even food delivery workers, during the pandemic, have been working hard on the road. They're also known as the heroes of the road. One of the challenges they have faced, especially the truckers—we've heard directly from them—was that whenever they are on the road to fill the shelves at the marketplace or to bring medicines to hospitals, when they take a break there is no place for them to access washrooms. That's the same case not just for truck drivers but for all delivery workers. That's why having this clause to have the businesses where they deliver or pick up goods have accessible washrooms for these delivery persons will help them.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Further questions?

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** Today, the minister said that a \$6.1-billion surplus in the WSIB fund would be going back to employers. What do you say to Stephen, a resident who lives in St. Catharines and who had a severe

blunt force trauma injury at work and has to endure the appeals process that's broken within the WSIB system, that even the WSIB operation review report confirmed is slow and complicated? How do you defend this lack of access to justice for workers from a system that is broken, while you give billions back to the employers?

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** Thanks to the member opposite for that question. Just to be clear, the proposed changes would not reduce any compensation or any benefit or services provided to the workers. As a matter of fact, this bill is all about rebalancing the scales and putting workers in the driver's seat.

**1510**

We are leading the way, not only just in Canada but across North America. We're a province of opportunity where hard work pays off and big dreams come to life. That's why workers across Ontario are from all different backgrounds and ethnicities. They come to Ontario to find better economic prospects. We have a plan to build a future for all Ontarians. Thank you for the opportunity to answer, Madam Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Further debate?

**Ms. Jill Andrew:** I'm honoured to stand once again to add my voice and the voice of our constituents in Toronto—St. Paul's on this bill, Working for Workers Act, put forth by the government.

First and foremost, I want to make it clear that the title, Working for Workers Act, is misinforming, because it does not work for workers. This week, the government had an opportunity to say yes to the PMB put forth by our London West labour critic, Preventing Worker Misclassification Act, 2021, tabled last week, that would have classified gig economy and contract workers as the workers they are, giving them the rights listed in the Employment Standards Act, such as minimum wage, guaranteed vacation days etc.

Gig or contract workers represent thousands of workers across this province who we relied on more than ever throughout the pandemic, including delivery drivers and riders, workers in nursing homes, cleaners, personal service workers, rideshare drivers and many folks in food production and packing facilities and so much more. These workers have been purposefully misclassified so that powerful, profitable companies can avoid any onus or cost of the worker protections they should be taking on as employers. Instead, they get to exploit even more profits off the backs of these workers, who could be paid minimum hourly wages, paid sick days, guaranteed vacation time and benefits.

I would be remiss if I didn't remind the government again that when we talk about gig economy and precarious workers, we're often talking about women. We're often talking about members of the BIPOC community. We're often talking about new immigrants, newcomer workers, international students. I could go on and on—and also workers with disabilities.

We also want to remind the government that every single amendment that the official opposition—our side, the NDP—put forth on this bill, Working for Workers Act,

was denied. Of course, each and every one of our amendments was done in consultation with actual stakeholders, with actual labour advocates, with actual workers. That's a novel idea.

These companies, the exploitative rich companies, can afford it. They're among some of the richest in the world—not just Ontario, the world. And this government's blocking of the member from London West's bill has made them richer. Their workers? It's placed them in even more precarious positions by failing to implement the ABC test listed in our member from London West's bill, a test that puts the onus on the employer from the start, not on the employee only once allegations arise, as a pre-emptive measure to prevent misclassification rather than a reactionary measure, as it currently stands.

So what does this bill, Working for Workers Act, provide to gig workers instead? Access to a washroom. I can say, as a person who lives with certain health issues, access to a washroom is really important. I get that. But it doesn't apply to all gig workers, only those who deliver for restaurants or work in places where there is a washroom. What about rideshare drivers or transit operators, who are noticeably omitted from this schedule? What about them?

I've got to say, as well, I keep thinking of the LRT construction along Eglinton. I think about the drivers along Eglinton, some of whom are actually family members of mine. If they're stuck in gridlock during rush hour, you can literally be holding your bladder for 45 minutes from Oakwood and Eglinton to Eglinton West subway station—45 minutes for something that could take a minute and a half, if it weren't for construction, delays and congestion. This is significant—if our transit operators don't have access to a washroom when they need it, not to mention the fact that this schedule is non-binding, offered as guidelines or future regulations, rather than a provision backed by meaningful enforcement. Also, this requirement becomes optional in a number of wide open, qualifying circumstances.

Speaker, I'm not negating that access to a washroom isn't a great idea—it is very much a right one; what I'm saying is that it's not enough. If that is this government's version of working for gig workers, the bar is set rather low, and much lower than we should accept.

What did gig workers need and deserve access to? The Employment Standards Act. That's what the member from London West's bill looked to do. That's what this government said no to. And it's not the only one.

Just yesterday, the government also had an opportunity to say yes to workers and to say yes to our co-sponsored bill demanding that the government legislate 10 permanent paid sick days and 14 pandemic days in the province within the ESA. I proudly stood here alongside the MPP for London West, the MPP for Brampton Centre and the MPP for Scarborough Southwest as we put forth this co-sponsored bill demanding permanent paid sick days, demanding 14 pandemic days; demanding a yes from this government that would have actually been a yes for the very same workers they claim to say they care about and say are heroes etc.

I'd be remiss if I forgot to say that every single MPP in this room has access to permanent paid sick days. We have access to staying home when we are sick. We have access to staying home when a family member is sick and needs our support. We have access to staying home when our pet is sick and needs to go to the vet. So it's shameful to think that this government has a piece of legislation called the Working for Workers Act that doesn't allow for workers to stay home when they are sick.

And, again, I'd be remiss if I didn't remind us that today is a day of significance, when we are of course remembering all of those who are deceased due to femicide, all of those who have been survivors or are surviving in homes where they have experienced violence, particularly against women, 2SLGBTQIA, Black, Indigenous etc. Those paid sick days, those personal emergency leave days would have been crucial and are crucial for folks who need to leave the home but can't afford to do so because leaving the home, losing pay, losing income puts them in an even more precarious situation, and therefore they stay a while longer—and we know that sometimes that hour longer, that day longer, that night longer can literally mean their death.

Speaker, approximately 60% of Ontarians go without paid sick days. That means 60% of people, at some point in their working lives, will have to choose between being sick and getting to rest and recover with the peace of mind of knowing they can keep a roof over their head, or going to work sick and spreading the flu, the virus—including COVID-19—to fellow workers.

On Monday, I joined a demonstration organized by the incredible teams at Decent Work and Health Network, Justice for Workers, and Workers' Action Centre. The Conservative government was invited, and I must say that they were the only party that didn't show up. Picture it: We've got a peaceful rally happening, very endearing, filled with front-line workers, whether they were education workers, whether they were health care workers—people literally spilling their guts and expressing their experience of how important it is to have paid sick days. The government was invited, but they didn't show up.

I'd like to share a quote from one of the speakers there that really encapsulates what legislated paid sick days could have provided: "If you rely on every bit of your paycheque to cover your bills, how do you cover any gap if you lose any paydays? Well, the only way to do it is less food." Speaker, this is the reality faced by workers every single day in this province—food for their family or themselves, or recovery. This was a choice this government could have alleviated yesterday for workers all across the province, but they chose to be the government of no. I truly do not understand how they can title this bill Working for Workers when just yesterday they blocked that bill.

**1520**

Yet again I must say, over 25 times they've said no to paid sick days. It's a slap in the face, especially for the approximately 21 health care workers, the five migrant farm workers, the approximately 8,000 people—many, many of them being workers across sectors—who have

lost their lives to COVID in this province, who might have lived had they not had to go into work sick, who might have lived if they didn't have to travel on those packed public transit options that we saw throughout the pandemic at times.

Speaker, these were both bills that in the last week alone were put forth for workers in this province. Those were bills that would have worked for workers, legislation they were directly asking for from this government; legislation they needed, their children needed, their families needed and our communities in general needed to keep them safe; legislation that would have actually worked for workers, something this legislation I stand here debating just doesn't do enough of.

This is most apparent in schedule 6, for what it means for injured workers in this province, injured workers like Jana in my riding of St. Paul's. I've mentioned Jana before, but I mention her all the time because her case is still outstanding.

Jana was injured by no fault of her own at her workplace in 2014. She was hit on the head, giving her a concussion. She followed doctors' orders and rested for a couple of weeks, hoping that she would be healed and back to work and, most importantly, back to herself. Sadly, that has not been the case. Seven and a half years later Jana is still suffering tremendously. As if dealing with a lasting traumatic brain injury isn't enough, one that has completely uprooted her life from the outdoorsy, adventure-loving life she lived—I saw her with her dogs recently, and they're so full of energy; I know that this is the person Jana was and the person that she wants to come back to, and she hasn't been able to—she's been put through the wringer by WSIB since day one. Jana was denied benefits three times. This is despite documentation provided by multiple specialists and five neurologists, all confirming her injury.

Jana is not alone, either. In the same year she was denied three times, over 70% of other injured workers were too. It wasn't until 2019, through the WSIB tribunal appeals process, that her benefits were finally reinstated until the six-year lock mark the following year. This would require her to undergo another assessment through WSIB to determine if her benefits would lock in permanently or if she'd be fit to return to work.

Considering the lengths and trauma she was put through up until then, there was nothing more she wanted than to get this over with. This is despite there being ample evidence from specialists, therapists and doctors affirming she could not and would not be ready to return to work. Even CPP disability, which requires a disability of 90% or higher to be approved, approved Jana, but somehow it just wasn't enough for WSIB. Either way, she accepted the terms and tried to get an appointment. That was until the pandemic hit, making it harder than ever—more back and forth between WSIB, Jana, her own doctors, her therapist and my office.

In July 2020 WSIB confirmed they could make their decision through receiving documentation from her current treating professionals, of which there were many.

This decision was reversed in January 2021, at the very height of the pandemic, when cases were well above the

2,000-per-day mark. Still, in a turn of events from their previous decision, WSIB required she attend an in-person assessment to determine her claim. This was all while WSIB workers themselves were working from home, as the entire province was under a stay-at-home order. If it wasn't safe for them to leave their homes, why was Jana required to?

Finally, by June 2021 she completed her assessment at Altum Health, in a clinic paid for by WSIB that only treats injured workers. Surprise: Their own assessment came back with the exact same information her doctors, therapists and specialists all said. No new testing would give them more information than what Jana had already provided. Despite the year and a half of turbulence that was placed on Jana, absolutely nothing new was found. Their report also stated what we already knew: that Jana was incapable to return to work and wouldn't need to complete their return-to-work intensive special programs.

You would think that, after all was said and done, more than seven years later, this would be enough, that the piles and piles of confirming documents would allow them to make their decision, locking in Jana's benefits, however limited they were, to let her live in peace and finally heal. Well, not exactly.

By August 2021 they returned their decision, saying Jana was only 10% disabled and fit to return to work. Well, thanks to her lawyer and access to her case file through the freedom of information act, it was found out that on September 14, 2021, WSIB held meetings with executives, the director and Jana's case manager trying to get Altum Health to reverse their decision and state that she could go back to work. To this day, despite every red flag that was waved in the past seven and a half years, Jana is still waiting for that decision. She lives on edge in fear of the day she will get the call that what few benefits she receives, and few they are, may be cut off.

Jana is exhausted. Her case makes one thing clear: WSIB does not work for workers, and it needs to be overhauled. It was exemplary of the fact that WSIB is not there to protect workers, it's there to find loopholes to get people who are unfit to go back to work. The rate Jana received is 80% of what she was making in 2014, by the way, the year her injury took place. At that time, Jana was making minimum wage at the sporting goods store she worked at, a wage that was \$10.25 an hour—80% of that. Yikes. This is the rate WSIB uses and will continue to in locking in her benefits.

A reminder to all of us that we are now in the year of 2021 where the current minimum wage is \$14.35, an amount that's not even barely manageable today, let alone depending on benefits based on \$10.25 years back. I think of workers who were injured in the 1990s who made a minimum wage of \$6.25. What about them? Speaker, this is how the WSIB works. The WSIB "surplus" that exists, one that this bill would return to employers, is not a signal that the WSIB is taking too much from employers. It's a signal that the WSIB is not supporting injured workers. This Conservative government is giving back billions of dollars to employers instead of injured workers, and that

is a shame. It's a shame when workers have been fighting for over 20 years, several decades, for benefits.

From Willie Noiles, acting president of Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups:

"Between 2010 and 2017, WSIB benefits paid out to injured workers were cut by more than half. And" this Conservative "government's solution is to give employers more money back on top of the 52% cut in premiums in 2018, 2019 and 2020. How about using the surplus to ensure workers are taken care" of "when injured at work? Now, that's what we would call working for workers."

Speaker, it should be no surprise to the government across the bench that 50% of injured workers are also living below the poverty line. If there is a surplus in the system meant to lift these workers up, keep a roof over their heads, food on their table and workers—Ontarians—above the poverty line, which is supposed to be the sole purpose of the WSIB, it needs to go to the workers. This is not a surplus; it needs to go to the workers. It needs to go to the workers.

There's also nothing in this bill to protect temp workers. There's nothing in this bill that actually defines what temporary means, because simply it's just not fair to be labelled a temp worker while you're working alongside the "real worker" doing the same job; the same blood, sweat and tears; the same long hours, but you're not getting equal pay for equal work. This bill does not address that.

There's nothing in the bill that actually holds employers accountable if someone is injured. We look at Fiera Foods where the WSIB claims go against the temp hiring firm while leaving employers off the hook. That's just not good enough.

Where's the funding for the anti-racist directorate to support international students or newcomers experiencing discrimination in the workplace, being exploited—you know, those folks who are barely, in some cases not even, making minimum wage.

Where's the adoption of our outstanding colleague the member from Niagara Falls's PMB to end the practice of deeming where the WSIB deems you or, a.k.a., decides that you can work in a job that doesn't even exist in most cases and then reduces their compensation benefits even less.

Speaker, to conclude, let me speak a bit about how this bill could work for workers. Firstly, workers need to be paid adequately for their time with a minimum wage that surpasses the bare minimum of \$17 an hour. The \$15 that the Conservative government is promising, which is clearly a desperate tie onto the election coming up next year, frankly is no longer valid. It's just simply no longer valid. It does not reflect the rise of inflation rates across our province, especially here: rent costs, food costs, bread, butter, milk—the basics, as my mother would call them. It just doesn't reflect it. The rate of inflation is close to 5% in this province; \$15 an hour is just not enough at this point.

**1530**

Humans get sick. They need recovery time. They need rest. Humans get injured, sometimes permanently. It's not

their fault, and they shouldn't be legislated into poverty because of it. If we're talking about a she-covey, if we're talking about ensuring that no worker falls in between the cracks, I sincerely hope that this government will listen to the amendments of the Ontario NDP official opposition and, even more importantly, to the workers and the unions and the labour advocates who have demanded better in order to actually work for workers.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Questions and comments?

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** Thank you to the member from Toronto–St. Paul's for the presentation. Speaker, in the construct of the legislation, as you would expect, there was a vast consultation. What we heard there, from a number of sectors and people that we spoke to, is that they were complaining about the Liberal inaction for about 15 years when it came to supporting newcomers here in the province of Ontario. Particularly eliminating the Canadian work experience, as they told us at the time, was a common-sense move that should have been done years ago.

Could the member from Toronto–St. Paul's please tell the House why there seems to be a reluctance—I've been listening carefully, not alone to that member's presentation but others—to helping new Canadians work in careers they've trained all their lives for?

**Ms. Jill Andrew:** Thank you for that. I just wanted to mention that the Internationally Trained Physicians of Ontario head, Dr. Makini McGuire-Brown, has actually expressed disappointment with the announcement of this bill's schedule 2, because it explicitly excludes health care professionals. I just want to say clearly, I certainly am not against provisions that make wholehearted, meaningful investments in ensuring that internationally trained professionals have all of the resources and supports they need to thrive, especially when we know now that we need all hands on deck in our health care system.

But I urge the government to think wisely about this. Consider slashing Bill 124, for instance. That is how you support workers, many of whom are internationally trained, many of whom are BIPOC, many of whom are women.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Further questions?

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** To my colleague from St. Paul's—she did a wonderful 20-minute presentation—this bill has little that leads you to think it was crafted with specifically the worker in mind. The late increase to the minimum wage has left so many families with thousands less money than they would have had if they didn't cancel the increase originally. This has a ripple effect. Can you talk a little about what the damage is of not increasing the minimum rate of pay to a sector like child care? What is the risk of no wage increase to a family and what they've been going through the last few years?

**Ms. Jill Andrew:** Thank you very much to the member from St. Catharines for that question. You know, the reality is that we don't have affordable child care here in Ontario. I understand that there's a deal on the table, put

forth by the federal government, for \$10-a-day child care that for some reason this provincial government, this Conservative government, has refused to sign onto, and in fact has the feds waiting for their modelling, has the feds waiting for their proposal, for their information. I don't know why we would do that when folks are struggling to pay for affordable child care.

The minimum wage is just not doable. I can speak for folks in St. Paul's and say when we consider our rent, when we consider mortgage costs, when you consider food costs, that people need to be able to pay for their food and medicine, especially since many don't have paid sick days, it needs to be higher.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Further questions?

**Mr. Bill Walker:** It's a pleasure to stand and participate in this debate today. I want to applaud the Minister of Energy, the great member from Bay of Quinte, for all of the work that he is doing, particularly in our nuclear sector. We know with Bruce Power and Darlington doing life extensions, that is going to give us clean, affordable, reliable power for many years to come. Every time I get the chance, I'm going to talk about the isotopes, a benefit that hits every one of us, that truly benefits every single family in Ontario—across the world, frankly.

We're going to need those professionals. We're going to need them trained in all capacities to ensure that we have the ability to do those life extensions and keep nuclear a viable energy product. So I'd like to ask the member if there's an ability for her to agree that these trained professionals are absolutely critical, and that we're trying to get rid of, "You have to have Canadian experience to give that qualification that you gained in another country," and if she'll support us in this endeavour.

**Ms. Jill Andrew:** Thank you to the member. With regard to his question, again I'll reiterate some of what I said earlier. I didn't quite hear his entire comment. I am, of course, in support of any meaningful program and meaningful legislation that actually puts forth solutions for integrating internationally trained workers into our workforce across sectors. But it has to be meaningfully done. It needs to be done in consultation with said workers and with labour advocate groups that actually have a track record of fighting on behalf of workers and not billion-dollar corporations. I am not satisfied that this Working for Workers bill meets all of my checklist.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Further questions?

**Mr. Gurratan Singh:** We know that workers across Ontario really struggled throughout this pandemic, and specifically they struggled with the fact that they didn't have paid sick days. A year into this pandemic, there were no paid sick days for workers. In the end, workers were given an inadequate amount of three paid sick days that were temporary, that are actually slated to terminate at the end of this year.

I want to ask my colleague how much it's going to devastate her community, the fact that workers next year are not going to have paid sick days despite the fact we're

still in a pandemic, and what she would be doing if she had the ability to provide appropriate supports for workers.

**Ms. Jill Andrew:** Thank you so much to my colleague from Brampton East for that question. We made it very clear: Our workers in Ontario, all workers, need access to 10 permanent paid sick days. We need access to 14 pandemic sick days. This is crucial. It's really important to note that those three days, the three measly days that the government provided, expire at the end of December, at a time where flu season is in its height. We saw numbers today of new cases at over 700. This pandemic is still here.

I think that the government, the Conservative government, has a responsibility to do every single thing they can to keep workers safe, especially those essential workers who are, again, on those packed buses, who are working tough hours, who are going in with burnout, exhaustion, sick kids at home and school. They need supports.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Further question?

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** The members opposite have been calling for more to be done to protect workers from temporary help agencies that don't follow the rules. Our proposed changes would do exactly this and cut down on temporary agencies that exploit vulnerable workers. Can the member opposite please explain why they are saying no to protecting workers?

**Ms. Jill Andrew:** Thank you to the member from Scarborough—Rouge Park. I want to make it clear: The Ontario NDP are the only party in this Legislature that has fundamentally said yes to workers every single time. Our policies with regard to equal pay for equal work, our policies with regard to permanent paid sick days, our demand for a wage that's actually reflective of the inflation rates that are in Ontario: These are all for workers.

1540

Our demand to slash, burn and kill Bill 124, a bill that this government props up, that frankly is strangling our front-line health care workers, who are predominantly BIPOC and women—that's how you help workers: You kill Bill 124. You give people a minimum wage that they could actually live with. You pay people for the work that they do. You don't use "temporary" as a title to exploit workers. This is what the government is allowing with this bill, the Working for Workers Act.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Further debate?

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Madam Speaker, I would like just to begin by saying that this bill is a step in the right direction. I'm not going to deny it: The bill deserves some credit, for sure, for advancing protection for workers. Nobody will seriously argue that drivers should not be allowed access to washrooms. Banning non-compete clauses is another positive measure which has the potential to make Ontario's labour market more flexible and embracing of worker-driven innovation.

However, this bill falls short on reforming the licensing of internationally educated professionals, and I'll explain why. My riding is home to a significant population of workers with credentials obtained abroad who are being

prevented from working in their fields. With 316,000 vacant jobs in Ontario, we need to give potential workers a chance to join the workforce, especially in critical sectors.

Licensing requirements can be overly restrictive, and we should open the possibility of relaxing somewhat the licensing requirements—without putting the general public at risk, of course. To date, the government has not introduced any measures to allow further certification of internationally educated health care workers.

This is despite the fact that nurses with foreign credentials were actually allowed to practise in Ontario because of the pandemic on a temporary basis, and they did perform their jobs up to expectations and did it well. Therefore, accepting foreign credentials in health care can assist with much-needed workforce. After all, I think everybody will agree that the human body is constituted the same across the world. Immigrants who I have consulted with say that they found it insulting that they can help during the crisis, but then they're not considered good enough afterwards.

Health care is currently the field in Ontario with the most severe labour shortage, with 38,000 vacant jobs. The fact that this labour bill does not address the health care professional shortage is a missed opportunity, in my opinion.

One effective way to assist with the recognition of foreign credentials is through bridging programs. We've heard a little bit about that, and there has been success in that regard, so we need more of those. I'll cite the example of Ryerson University, which has a program which connects foreign-trained social workers with internships that allow them to receive their Canadian equivalency. This 13-month part-time program allows immigrants to receive pay while working to receive equivalency. This avoids the common occurrence of immigrants not being able to receive Canadian certification because they need to work and provide for their families, and 89% of graduates from this program are actually hired.

We also need to allow more assessment of people's knowledge and skills to take place. Currently in Ontario, we either recognize somebody's qualifications or we make them totally restart their education. There needs to be a path in between these courses of action. Updating people on Canadian regulation might be necessary, but not making them start from square one. We need to ensure that information is better communicated to immigrants, as well, especially on programs that are not government-run. Global Experience Ontario is an outdated and difficult-to-find website.

Stakeholders have told me that there is a lack of cooperation between levels of government that makes the process of receiving certification in Ontario needlessly difficult. I urge the government to work more constructively and closely with the federal government to ensure that immigrants can work in the fields where we need their talents. What happens often is that the federal government provides the point of entry into a province but without guiding the immigrants through the system, with the result

that skilled immigrants end up working in low-wage jobs just to ensure a living.

I have submitted a private member's bill that proposes a committee of experts to identify the obstacles and provide practical solutions to address the situation that internationally educated professionals find themselves in.

During a recent round table with stakeholders to hear concerns on professional licensing for immigrants, I heard many of the propositions that I have shared today. They told me about people in my community who can't work because their credentials aren't being recognized: an engineer with 20 years' experience who can't work in Ontario; a trained doctor from Lebanon who wasn't allowed to work here and left to be a surgeon in San Francisco; a woman with a civil law degree who was forced to redo all her studies; a man who completed a master's in engineering at Ottawa University and was informed that he would have to redo his undergrad before working as an engineer. These stories speak of an unjust system that disadvantages immigrants and doesn't help our economy. The government's measures in the Working for Workers Act don't do enough to help these people.

Je veux aussi prendre l'occasion de parler plus spécifiquement de la grande pénurie d'enseignants francophones qui affecte toute notre province. Cette pénurie a un impact profond sur la capacité de la province à offrir aux francophones l'éducation de qualité que chacun mérite. Le système d'éducation en langue française en Ontario est essentiel à la prospérité future de notre province, et contribue profondément à la vitalité et à la survie de la communauté francophone.

Malheureusement, dans ce secteur également, il existe trop d'enseignants formés à l'étranger qui veulent s'établir en Ontario pour y travailler mais qui ne peuvent pas trouver à se placer parce que les obstacles à la reconnaissance de leur formation sont trop nombreux et la procédure est d'une lenteur vraiment décourageante. Mes commentaires sont basés sur des cas réels d'enseignantes qui ont choisi d'aller travailler du côté du Québec ou de retourner dans leur pays.

Il y a un travail important à faire auprès des ordres professionnels afin d'obtenir une meilleure collaboration. S'il existe un problème de protectionnisme de la part des organismes de réglementation, nous devons nous y attarder. Nous devons également permettre davantage d'évaluations des connaissances et des compétences des personnes. Actuellement en Ontario, soit nous reconnaissons les qualifications de quelqu'un, soit nous lui faisons recommencer totalement ses études. Il doit y avoir une alternative entre ces deux plans d'action.

Un moyen efficace de remédier au manque de reconnaissance des diplômes étrangers consiste à mettre en place des programmes de transition. Plus de programmes de transition, particulièrement dans les domaines où le besoin est criant, permettrait de réduire les délais de certification et accélérerait l'accès des travailleurs à des emplois pour lesquels ils ont un intérêt et pour lesquels ils sont qualifiés.

Je terminerai en soulignant qu'une meilleure collaboration entre les différents paliers du gouvernement

pour la coordination de l'intégration des nouveaux arrivants est hautement souhaitable. Si nous arrivons à attirer des travailleurs, il faut nous assurer que nous leur donnons toute l'information et tous les moyens de s'intégrer au marché du travail rapidement et efficacement, car trop souvent nous constatons qu'une fois arrivées au Canada, les familles sont laissées à elles-mêmes pour s'orienter dans une culture et une économie dont elles ne saisissent pas tous les rouages.

I hope that we can all agree that more needs to be done to allow immigrants to achieve their full potential in our economy.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Questions and comments?

**M<sup>me</sup> Natalia Kusendova:** Merci à la députée pour son discours. Elle a parlé de la francophonie et des immigrants francophones. Chez moi, dans ma circonscription de Mississauga-Centre, on a beaucoup de nouveaux arrivants francophones, et je suis fière que notre gouvernement a signé un accord avec le consulat général de France pour voir plus d'enseignants francophones arriver en Ontario, car on sait qu'on a une grande pénurie dans le domaine des enseignants. Je suis aussi fière que le projet de loi 27 inclue les enseignants dans sa proposition.

Alors est-ce que la députée peut nous dire comment sa communauté à Ottawa va bénéficier d'avoir plus d'enseignants francophones arrivant en Ontario?

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Merci pour la question également. Vous avez raison qu'il y a un pas dans la bonne direction qui est fait puis que le gouvernement fait des efforts pour attirer des enseignants francophones. Par contre, il y a encore beaucoup d'obstacles. Le nombre d'enseignants dont on a besoin—on a besoin de mesures beaucoup plus draconiennes pour s'assurer de combler tous ces postes-là. On parle d'entre 400 et 500 postes par année qui auraient besoin d'être comblés pour adresser la croissance des étudiants qui s'inscrivent dans nos écoles francophones.

**1550**

Alors, c'est bien, l'entente avec la France, si on fait venir quatre enseignants. C'est un pas un peu gêné, mais il faut continuer dans ce sens-là, parce que la vitalité de la francophonie dépend des efforts qu'on va investir pour s'assurer qu'on emploie des enseignants francophones pour assurer une éducation, pour former plus tard des gens qui vont pouvoir travailler dans le domaine de la santé, par exemple.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Questions?

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** We've heard this afternoon from both sides of the House and from the speaker that was just up this afternoon. I'm just wondering, within this Working for Workers Act, I see that when the Liberals were in power, they froze minimum wage for years, right up until they needed an election promise, and I'm seeing that from the government side as well. We're heading into an election in June. I'm just wondering what this speaker—what their party would change. What change would you make within the Working for Workers

Act to make sure that working folks had a minimum wage that could pay the bills?

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** I think that there is a very important duty that we have as people in the Legislature. I think that in making policies, whether it's for a wage increase or other measures, such as maybe considering universal basic income, I think that we have a duty to look at what's been happening over the last few years, and more specifically, over the last couple of years with the pandemic.

I think there are a lot of lessons to be learned to adequately address the needs of people who are vulnerable. We've seen people who are on ODSP and OW not being able to look after themselves in a way that is sustainable. The CERB provided \$2,000 per month for people to live, but then people on ODSP were required to live on a much lesser amount of money. We need to look at what's happening on the ground and make appropriate adjustments to our policies.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Further questions?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Thank you for the remarks from the member opposite. I listened intently. I think to your comments on health care shortages and what can be done, and I think to expanding nursing seats, something that hadn't been done for decades; the challenge fund for PSWs, bringing in 16,000 net new PSWs; giving colleges simple tools like degree-granting authority for a bachelor of science in nursing; launching micro-credentials so you can earn as you learn and making them OSAP-eligible; and removing the Canadian workers' experience. These are all things just done in the last few years under this government. Why wasn't it done under the previous Liberal government over a decade?

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** All remarks are to and through the Chair, please. Just a reminder.

I return to the member for Ottawa–Vanier.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Thank you for the question. Obviously, when we're in government, we can always do better. It's good to look at the past and to recognize that maybe not enough was done. As a government, we are saying that you're not doing enough, because you're doing what you can with what you have at the moment. We're going to look back in a few years and say, "Why didn't you do this?" and "Why didn't you do that?" That's an easy poke.

What I'm saying and what I'm going to repeat is that we have to look at the situation today. We have to learn from what we're seeing and what we're realizing on the ground, and we have to do better. If we want to attract people like nurses and PSWs, we need to improve their working conditions, not give them temporary wage increases, because that's not going to do anything to convince people to come in the workforce and stay there knowing that their wage is going to decrease after a while.

So I would encourage the government to look at the extent that they can do to help.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** The next question.

**Ms. Jill Andrew:** I do recognize that the Liberal member from Ottawa–Vanier was not in government, but I do want to say that we've been calling for mandatory licensing of employment recruitment agencies, for fines, as well as for the creation of a registry since at least 2017, when the then deputy leader, Jagmeet Singh, tabled motions calling on the Liberal government to regulate the sector to protect temp workers, quite frankly, and the Liberals blocked that.

So I'm just wondering if the member from Ottawa–Vanier can answer, why is it that the Liberals always seem to have the right language, the pandering to equity and the marginalized groups, but when it comes to actually making the legislation, like protecting the temporary workers, like putting forth the registry since 2017, like making mandatory licensing of employment recruitment agencies, you didn't?

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Thank you for the question. You did recognize that I wasn't there when these policies were being made. Of course, if I would have been there, everything would have been different, because I would have told them what to do, right?

Anyway, again, we can look at the past to learn from our mistakes or to learn how we could have done better. But we have, again, to look at the situation now and ensure that we bring the protection measures that are important. And I think that in this bill, actually, there are good measures. Disconnecting from work, for example, is a good one. I really wish that it could apply to everyone. Unfortunately, it doesn't. I don't think I can separate myself from my phone at night; I wish I could. And it's not possible for everyone. But I think it's a good measure for employees that may be abused by their employer—taking advantage of those technical measures, those tools.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Further questions?

**Mr. Dave Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the member opposite for some of her comments, because she recognized that she wasn't in government and there were some other challenges. But what we did hear is that we're not doing enough to recognize or break down barriers for foreign credentials, so that is what the member said. But they did have 15 years. I recognize it wasn't her. But they did have 15 years to change it. So, really, it sounds to me like they simply didn't care. Could the member please explain why nothing was done during that 15 years to break down those barriers?

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** I feel like I'm going to have to repeat myself again. I don't think you can say that the Liberals don't care or didn't care. I think that they have a good record on caring for people, and I think that they are advancing, actually, really good policy ideas for the future, and you should tune into that as well.

Again, you've been doing what you can with what you have at your availability right now. You're not doing enough for those foreign workers, because in my riding of Ottawa–Vanier, many people, all the time, come to me and they tell me, "Look, I'm a doctor. Why can't I work?" I take a taxi and I've got an engineer driving me around. We

need to do better. We need to remove those obstacles, and I think we need to work with the professional orders, because the licensing requirements are not fair, are not allowing these immigrants to take part in our economy.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** And just before we continue, a reminder to all members, I identify as “Speaker.” That would be sufficient. “Mr. Speaker” is not who I’m going to be today or ever.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** I apologize, Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Okay. Further debate?

**Hon. David Piccini:** It’s wonderful to rise today. I always appreciate the opportunity to speak and to contribute to the debate. I listened intently to my colleagues speaking to this today, and I think we all can agree that this pandemic has certainly given us an opportunity to reflect and look back. I think one of the silver linings is acknowledging the incredible work of front-line workers in the province of Ontario, and all of us have had the opportunity to do that, be it the pots and pans, be it the Legion and some of the work they did in Brighton in my community to acknowledge front-line workers, be it the volunteers who stood up. I was just recently in Trent Hills with Chief Blake, acknowledging the volunteers, Rotarians and countless other service clubs that stood up to support the vaccine effort, our front-line heroes who supported that.

**1600**

We’re incredibly grateful, and I think it’s incumbent on all public policy-makers as the years go by in this place to continue to make efforts to improve the lot of workers in the province of Ontario.

I’m really proud to rise today to speak to third reading of Bill 27, the Working for Workers Act, and a special thank you to everyone on the team and the effort that went into this bill. I know our Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development has been working incredibly hard to build a better future for our great province and ensure that no workers get left behind. I’d especially like to thank his parliamentary assistant as well for the incredible work he’s been doing and the entire team at the ministry for the work they’ve been doing.

We know the world is shifting quickly. We know that technology is a disruptive force. It can also be a complementary force in the workforce and support us in our day-to-day activities. The world is indeed shifting quickly. We’ve seen that in this pandemic, and we need to keep up with that in the laws that we’re introducing. Workers are no longer getting their fair share of the economic pie, and our mission is to restore that, to give workers a hand up for better jobs, bigger paycheques and the protections they deserve.

I’d love to elaborate a little more on paycheques because often we hear in the discourse of public policy a lot of things that would increase the net debt to this province, and I’m proud to be part of a government that makes strategic investments where we have to—and boy, have we done that through the pandemic in health care—but a government and leading public policy-makers that

talk about paycheques and giving people a leg-up, giving the people the dignity of a job.

When I think to the conversations I have in my constituency office, it’s actually not overwhelmed with, “What you can do for me?” Ironically, through this pandemic, a lot of it—I’ve been really touched by people saying, “What can we do for our fellow neighbours?” and a lot lately about just getting government out of the way so that Ontarians can achieve their full potential.

I really think, as the grandson of an immigrant who came over to Ontario from Friuli in the northern part of Italy, fascist Italy under Mussolini at the time, the eighth child, who didn’t have the opportunity to continue working on the farm—I mean, most of the jobs were taken by then, by the time you have your eighth. So he came over to Canada with many of his brothers and sisters for a better future, for a better opportunity. He worked at Stelco in the steel factory, a proud worker who very much built this province. My father had his first summer jobs there and went on to be university-educated, becoming an architect.

Now his great grandson is quite literally sitting in this place and now has the opportunity to sit in cabinet as well. So it’s a truly incredible opportunity Canada affords people from all walks of life, from all corners of the globe, and I’m especially proud of the opportunity that Ontario affords workers.

That’s why I was really, really excited to see—and I think it’s really important—the Canada work experience removal which we see here. We often hear the adage of “My cab driver is a doctor,” or people in the health care professions who worked abroad elsewhere but are underemployed here. I think back—I rarely get to draw from what I did previously for the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, and a big shout-out to the team there and the incredible work they’re doing on accreditation and on some of the work we did in low- and middle-income countries and jurisdictions around the world, giving their health care professionals the opportunity to write the exams here in Ontario and certifying high standards of equivalency. I think if we can start doing that on standards and doing a better job to acknowledge the skills and the education one has received elsewhere, it will better ensure that immigrants in this province, new Canadians, new Ontarians, can achieve their full potential, can practise the profession that they’ve always wanted and dreamed in their life to practise. To do so in their new country—wouldn’t that be remarkable? Removing barriers and making that more easy is a massive step.

As I said, as the grandson of someone who came for a new beginning here in the province of Ontario, incredible thanks to the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development for doing this and to the team that worked together, the regulators, the countless number of regulators consulted: Professional Engineers Ontario, the College of Nurses of Ontario, the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario—who I worked closely with in my previous job. I think the ministry has done an incredible job on that.

When I talk a bit about the future of work and where it’s going, we know that that’s here, and we’re committed

to moving with the ebbs and flows of that as a government. That's why this legislation, based on important recommendations from the Ontario Workforce Recovery Advisory Committee, is so important: consulting with workers, consulting with unions, consulting with employers, consulting with regulators.

The changes proposed include helping workers leave their work behind at the end of the day. I know that's not a luxury any of us have in the roles that we're in. I know many long days working and returning calls. I know that certainly the Premier leads by example in doing that well into the wee hours of the morning. But I think we all understand that in places of work, and given the digital nature of where we're going, it is important to start having some carve-outs, start having a bit of your personal time. It actually makes one more productive in the workplace, decompressing. It's good for mental health etc.

I think acknowledging this step and starting to understand enabling, doing important things to enable the digitization of workflows and of the workplace is important, and this government has been doing that. But also, concurrently, looking at having a bit of disconnect time is important.

While I'm on that, I would say that this government—often we hear debate in this place, and the talk is about, “Well, this bill should have this, that and the other,” and then when you do have a big bill, it's, “This is an omnibus bill.” So you can't win in government. You try to be surgical with some bills or larger in scope and nature with others. But I would encourage everybody debating in this place and anyone watching or contemplating this piece of legislation to look at it in the context of other things the government is doing.

I think to the largest commitment to support broadband in this nation's history. It's not a federal government that has done that; it's Premier Ford and this government, with a \$4-billion commitment. What does that mean? That means that the folks in Grafton, in Shelter Valley are closer to high-speed Internet and that reliability and that connection. In fact, Algonquin Fiber is coming in right now and they're starting that work.

It means that the digital team—Tony, Dan, Glenn, the entire team at Northumberland county—who are working on digitizing, who are doing some incredible work on broadband—I've had some really inspiring conversations with them about how they're looking at connectivity in the county of Northumberland. We're a step closer. We're supporting projects. We're working with them—a lot of exciting stuff to come.

Clarington, the work that they've done right up to the north shores of Rice Lake: an expanded Internet, working in partnership with Hiawatha First Nation—again, something this government has done.

It's important to support workers, but as I contextualize the support for those workers, it's the dignity of a job; it's about supporting economic development. So we're helping people disconnect from the north shores of Rice Lake, for example, in Hiawatha; we're also working in partnership to help economic development with partnerships between Otonabee-South Monaghan, Hiawatha First

Nation. We're supporting that as a government, and also investing in broadband and connectivity, connecting every household—again, critically important. Those are commitments this government has made.

I think also about banning non-compete agreements, which limit opportunities for workers and career growth. One of the things I heard when I was parliamentary assistant in colleges and universities, one of the things I heard globally when I worked for the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada and one of the things I continue to hear in my role as Minister of the Environment is talent. It's about talent. Be it on adaptation and resiliency, fighting climate change, be it on recruiting and retaining talent, Ontario boasts incredible talent. It's what's between the ears here that we see—you might say not all the time with me, but at least with other Ontarians, we see the talent that exists in this province, the immense talents harnessed by colleges, universities, private career colleges; harnessed in training centres; harnessed on the job site with OYAP programs; harnessed in apprenticeship training. We boast incredible talent in this province, and it shouldn't be restricted with non-compete clauses, so I think that's the right move.

**1610**

These proposed actions will, if passed, position Ontario as the jurisdiction that has the most competitive framework for workers and businesses to both benefit in a new world of work. We're building this province, building a workforce, working to create the conditions for a workforce that is competitive, building a province that understands that you can't talk, as the member opposite said, purely about 10 years ago, you've got to look to the future. That's why we're making those digital investments for the future. That's why we're investing in public transit like we've never seen before, with the Ontario Line, with so many others.

The member from Ottawa-Vanier said before about transit, and would certainly know a thing or two about transit in Ottawa and how important it is, reliable transit. It's so critical. I think to the reliable transit Metrolinx provides the constituents I represent in Durham region and Clarington, and really broadly beyond in Northumberland-Peterborough South. One in every four trains, thanks to investments that Premier Ford has made and this government—it's critical.

Because we're not just competing. It really frustrated me hearing from members of this place about competing and naming other provinces a fraction of the size of Ontario—such a Canadian thing. We compete against New York. We compete against Hong Kong, Shanghai, Singapore. That's who Ontario competes against. We compete globally, and we can compete with the best of them on planet Earth, because we have the talent. It's about harnessing that in this province and for us to be competitive in doing that.

And harnessing workers, this ministry—to harness that, you can't just have a knowledge economy that exclusively looks to universities, but embraces colleges, embraces those who don't go to university or college, who enter the

trades and do incredible work to build this province. It takes skilled workers to build the hospitals of tomorrow. It takes highly skilled workers to build the transit that we need to compete as an incredible province. I think to Toronto, the largest city. I'm proudly from rural Ontario; I don't want to live in Toronto. But I acknowledge that when Toronto succeeds and when people can get around the GTHA, it benefits my community. Farmers coming in to the food terminal, folks connecting on the corridor benefits my riding of Northumberland–Peterborough South. And we're making these investments. We're competitive.

I talked about the virtual world and seeing businesses grow. A huge shout-out to an inspiring young man in the riding of Northumberland–Peterborough South, and that's Zach Copeland at Prep Food Co. This is an incredibly inspiring guy. When I want a good Cuban sandwich or a poke bowl or something delicious, I've got to follow him on Instagram, because he is so busy right now attracting talent and retaining employees. This is what we're hearing in Northumberland–Peterborough South: Folks can't find the workers they need. Last night, talking to builders and contractors at The Mill at their wing night, again, that's a common theme I heard about attracting talent.

Back to Zach—an incredible, talented guy who's going online, who has embraced and pivoted. Not every business can say this, but in Northumberland, taking this to make an order on the fly—it was Zach who opened my eyes to that, honestly. I'm a young member, but the pace of change is changing, that it's no longer grandparents looking at their grandkids in awe. I look at a young guy in his twenties in awe of how he's digitizing and how he's embracing that. So, Zach, a shout-out to you and the incredible work that you're doing.

I think about moving on, about where technology is going and how we stay competitive. The proposed legislative change on disconnecting would require businesses with 25 employees or more to post a written disconnect-from-work policy. Employers would also be required to provide a copy of the written policy to each of its employees within 30 days of preparing or changing the policy.

Again, people in this province want to work. People in this province want to grow their business. If you're a small business owner, you want to succeed, and I think workers and employers alike have a shared interest in our province prospering, but striking a balance there, and this legislation does that: putting workers first, giving employers the flexibility to tailor their policies with the nature of their business and work.

I think to the 401 corridor that I have the honour of representing, and I think to the truckers, the men and women who get up every day in the province of Ontario. Without them, we wouldn't be able to talk about eating Ontario, Canada-grown, Canada-made. BC blueberries in Ontario: We wouldn't have that opportunity if not for truckers.

Moreover, getting our product to market internationally, getting apples—I think to Quaker Oats. If anyone has ever been camping, do you know where many of

those dried apples come from? Algoma Orchards, right in Clarington, in the riding that I have the honour of representing. For that to get to market, we rely on the trucking sector.

We're doing all sorts of cool things in the trucking sector, modernizing it. I think to our ministry and the work we're doing to decarbonize the future in the transportation sector. But in the here and now, today, supporting truckers and workers, they have had no greater friend than Premier Ford and this government.

I think it's appalling, not treating and acknowledging their essential nature. As is often the case, it sometimes takes a global pandemic to see Ontarians recognizing and acknowledging something that I'm sure many in this place already know: the imperative role truckers play to our economy in the province of Ontario. Giving them access to little things like washroom access for truckers, for delivery drivers etc.—these are the unsung heroes who I'm incredibly grateful for in the riding I represent and as an Ontarian.

I think again to the workers and to the conversations we're having about supporting workers, and comments I made in the health care profession. We know that we've got to learn from the pandemic that we're in. We've got to train a better-trained workforce. I think to all of the measures that this government has done holistically. This incredibly empowering piece of legislation—expanding nursing seats is something that could have been done decades past, but wasn't.

The challenge fund for PSWs: Again, it's not just about throwing money mindlessly. Imagine a challenge fund where you have a bit of friendly competition to harness the next generation of PSWs—again, something that could have been done in decades gone past and wasn't.

I think to rural Ontario, acknowledging colleges and the incredible role they play in harnessing the next generation. Giving colleges simple things like the ability to grant degrees—a bachelor of science in nursing—could have been done, but wasn't. This government is getting it done.

Micro-credentials, earning as you learn: It could have been done, but this government is getting it done.

Empowering workers in a digital economy to disconnect, not waiting 10 years from now, when it's already here, but doing it now concurrently while we expand broadband is something previous governments of all stripes could have done, but something Premier Ford and this government are getting done.

It's critical that we empower our next generation, support workers, give them the dignity of a job, work in parallel in supporting employers, connecting and digitizing all corners of this province—not just the GTHA, but for workers in Shelter Valley; in Norwood; on the north shores of Rice Lake; in Hiawatha. We are connecting you, not to compete in Canada, but to compete globally, and I'm proud to be a part of a government doing that.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Questions?

**Mr. Dave Smith:** I know the member talked about it in his speech, but I want to come back to it, because I have a

resident in my riding who was the head of pediatric oncology in another country. During COVID, he came to see me because he wasn't even allowed to be a PSW. Can I finally reach out to him and say help is on the way?

**Hon. David Piccini:** That's an excellent question. How badly does Peterborough and our community need better-trained health care professionals? We do.

1620

In 2016, only one quarter of internationally trained immigrants in regulated professions were working in jobs that matched their level of qualification. This government understands that.

Regardless of where you come from on this planet, we value you. We will value the training that you've had, and we're going to work with you to ensure that you've got a job in the province of Ontario. We'll honour you and work with you. You're welcome in this incredible province—you're welcome in Peterborough–Kawartha, you're welcome in Northumberland–Peterborough South—and it's incredible to see. Not only that, but you're going to work in a hospital that has increased funding, thanks to this government; you might work in a long-term-care brand new build, thanks to this government. So it's an exciting future ahead.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Questions?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Speaker, the Minister of the Environment spoke a lot about the future of work and decarbonizing in his discussion of Bill 27. Protecting good jobs such as those at CAMI GM in Ingersoll also ought to be a priority. Electrical vehicle rebates would ensure those jobs are stable, long-lasting and help build families.

Premier Ford cancelled EV subsidies and wastefully ripped out bought-and-paid-for charging stations. There are 10 electric vehicles under \$16,000, yet Premier Ford thinks that it's something for millionaires.

I want to ask the minister: Will this minister stand up for workers, protect good jobs at CAMI GM in Ingersoll, and help families and tradespeople with EV rebates?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Speaker, I appreciate that question, but what the Premier and what this government very much was against was a blanket policy that predominantly and statistically—just look at it—benefited the most affluent, predominantly in the GTA. If that member thinks that is the way to harness EVs in the province of Ontario, they're sorely wrong.

What we have seen since we've come to government is \$6 billion invested, \$7 billion now, into the EV sector, giving men and women the dignity of a job. We're seeing manufacturing jobs not fleeing this province—like under the propped-up Liberal government, by the NDP—but actually entering this province, men and women getting up with the dignity of a job.

You want to talk about how we can support workers? Let's create clean, green jobs—not just today, but for the jobs of tomorrow. That's exactly what Premier Ford is doing, and the stats of the largest year-over-year growth in electric vehicles happening under this Premier proves just that.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Further questions?

**Mr. Jeremy Roberts:** Thank you to the Minister of the Environment for his remarks today. I know he has been fighting for workers in his region throughout his entire three years here, and so I'm proud to be able to be in this chamber with him.

Of course, the member knows that I represent a riding in Ottawa. Ottawa has a very vibrant tech hub in the west end of the city—a little bit in my riding, and quite a lot in the riding of the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. A lot of folks in the tech community talk about non-compete agreements. I know there have been some changes made in this legislation that are going to help some of those tech workers, to help make sure our wages are competitive. So I'm wondering if the minister could speak a little bit about the importance of those changes to helping these workers.

**Hon. David Piccini:** I'm very flattered by the comments, but really, having spent a couple of days door-knocking with this member, there's no harder worker than the member from Ottawa West–Nepean. In fact, the broader National Capital Region benefits in having him in this place.

What I would say about the non-compete clause: Removing the non-compete clause enables that talent retention to stay right here, and enabling mobility—both lateral and upward mobility—in a profession is critical.

Let's talk about retaining talent in this province of Ontario. We've seen a ferocious example from the Premier—made in Ontario—and investing and harnessing our ability so that we're not looking to other jurisdictions. In this ministry, how often have we seen tech solutions from Ontario being implemented elsewhere in the world before it's implemented in Ontario? No longer. Thanks in part to removing non-compete clauses, we're going to do that.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Next question.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** I listened very intently to the Minister of the Environment. He's a very good speaker.

I also listened to one of the questions from the member from Peterborough regarding this bill allowing people with foreign credentials—very important.

We were very encouraged in northern Ontario when this bill was first announced. There's nowhere where medical professionals are in shorter supply than in northern Ontario. I've got Cochrane, which has one family doctor for 5,000 people, and they're not unique. We've got groups that are looking—and when this first came out, we were incredibly encouraged, but now it seems that medical credentials aren't included. Despite the glowing reviews, they're not included in this bill. I can't believe that the government did it on purpose. So what roadblocks did the government find or were they challenged by not having—because we need people with medical credentials. We need doctors in northern Ontario. We need them now.

**Hon. David Piccini:** No doubt, the member opposite highlights a very important piece. This is a massive step

forward for workers in the province of Ontario. I think, relative to health care, one of the unique elements is—with the greatest of respect to everyone here, bar perhaps Dr. Fullerton, we're not best positioned to make that decision. That's for the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, the CSPO; that's for regulated health care professionals, again, who were consulted on this. So I think important signals there—lots of work still to do. We know that many of these bodies are doing incredible work already.

Without question, important steps were taken by this government through the pandemic. We're going to keep building on that momentum—the momentum of expanding funding for hospitals, the first time we're putting a hospital in Brampton, funding for—

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Thank you, Minister. Next question.

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova:** Many mayors welcome the proposed changes in Bill 27, including my own mayor, the mayor of Mississauga, Bonnie Crombie, who said, “Thank you to Minister McNaughton and the Ontario government for tabling this legislation that removes barriers for newcomers seeking employment, including the requirement for Canadian working experience. As a city built and strengthened by newcomers, Mississauga naturally welcomes this legislation.” It is true—in Mississauga, the ongoing joke is to ask your cab driver what profession he did in his or her previous life.

Today in Ontario we have over 300,000 unfilled jobs. Why is it, more than ever, today, Minister, important to recognize foreign credentials in the province of Ontario?

**Hon. David Piccini:** I thank the member from Mississauga Centre for this important question. It's so important for getting involved in harnessing the next generation of talent—and she herself is that talent, as a hero on the front lines through the pandemic, doing double duty and working incredibly hard. I think it really is incredibly important, understanding that 300,000 jobs are going unfilled across the province of Ontario. Harnessing workers in a number of regulated professions and supporting them, removing the Canada work experience, is critical. I think it builds on additional work this government is doing, like the \$68 million to help internationally trained immigrants access programs designed to bridge their experience with the needs of employers in your community. You think to what that's going to impact: 23 trades, 14 professions.

This is massive for the province of Ontario, to ensure that new Canadians entering this province have the dignity of a job in a field that they want to work in and are trained in.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Just a polite reminder to all members that they must reference any sitting members by their title or their riding, regardless of what the quotes say. You cannot say indirectly what you cannot say directly in this House.

I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 101(c), changes have been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public

business such that Mr. Bourgouin assumes ballot item number 23 and Ms. Lindo assumes ballot item number 26.

Further debate?

**Ms. Doly Begum:** Before I begin, I want to thank my two colleagues who are the critics on this file as well with me, MPP Peggy Sattler from London West and MPP Wayne Gates from Niagara Falls, who worked tirelessly on this bill.

1630

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** I'm sorry to interrupt the member, but you cannot name members. We just reminded folks to please reference all members by their riding or their title.

I return to the member.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** Thank you, Speaker. The next person, I can name: I want to thank Mayeesha from our office, who has been carrying the load with me on this bill, on the different stages, from all the consultations and conversations we've been having with our stakeholders. I want to thank her for the work that she has been doing.

Most importantly, I also want to thank our community members, the organizers, the organizations, the many advocates for workers' rights who have been tireless, who have been reaching out to our office, sharing their input, providing feedback to us. I just want to name a few of these individuals we have been able to hear from: Dr. Ayesha Mohammad, Dr. Makini McGuire-Brown, Dr. Shafi Bhuiyan, Dr. Agafya Krivova, Dr. Ahmed Al Khatib, Dr. Luca Salvador, Ben Corpuz, Dr. Abdul Awal, Dr. Mohammed Ali, Dr. Asaduzzaman, engineer Nowsher Ali, engineer Saifur Rahman, agriculture scientist Azizur Rahman, Dr. Shurovi Sayeed, Dr. Monjur Khuda.

Actually, there have been a lot of internationally trained professionals who have years and years of skills and expertise and are highly educated, who have gone through this process of credential recognition in Canada or who are still struggling with it, and who have given their input as we analyze this bill and try to make it better.

I also want to thank Deena Ladd from the Workers Action Centre, who has been working for workers' rights for many, many years.

And I want to thank everyone who signed up for committee hearings. I believe there were about 77 submissions or requests for hearings, but only 27 were allowed to present in committee hearings. It was unfortunate, because we had a lot of individuals, a lot of organizations that wanted to present. We had excellent presentations from the ones who were able to present. Some of these organizations included the Ontario Federation of Labour, Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council, IAVGO legal clinic, Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, UFCW Canada, OSPE, the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers—another organization that I remember from quite a few years ago, that have been fighting for the recognition of foreign credentials for years now—and so many others that have been strong advocates for workers' rights across this province and this country for years and decades.

Speaker, over the past week, I have sat in committee with my colleagues from across the aisle discussing Bill 27 and the impact it will have on workers across the province.

Earlier, my colleague from London West did a fantastic job going through all the schedules, so in the limited time I have, I will focus on particular schedules that many of my constituents reached out about.

Let's start with schedule 3, recognizing internationally trained professionals. It sounds like, from the government side, this is the golden egg that will solve all the problems for immigrants. As the critic for citizenship, foreign credentials and immigration services, first I want to thank the government and commend them for finally shining some light on the challenges faced by internationally trained professionals in this province. I want to thank them for listening to us, listening to many of my constituents, who have been begging this House since I've been elected to recognize this issue and to address it. For years people have raised it, and they finally were glad to see this happen. However, the impact of schedule 3 falls short.

Schedule 3 of this bill amends the FARPACTA, Fair Access to Regulated Professions and Compulsory Trades Act—and whenever I read this one or the name of this bill, the Working for Workers Act, I feel like we need to do a whole session on changing names of these bills, because they don't seem to do what the bills actually are titled. Talk about fair access here—boy. The core of this schedule is the removal of the requirement of Canadian experience from regulated professions, excluding health care workers. Well, from the get-go, it excludes health care workers. This schedule only impacts regulated workers who are in regulated professions and fails to address the multiple other barriers, including discriminatory hiring practices, which is one of the biggest barriers to getting employment across this province; the bias within our systems, in our regulatory systems; the huge amount of cost—and I've highlighted this during my second reading debate.

Our immigration process, the system, actually prioritizes and recognizes the advanced degrees and experiences, but leaves their talents and potential as soon as they come to this country. Highly educated and experienced immigrants can still be discriminated against in their workplaces and the hiring process. This government does not lay out any strategy to address that. This government has not even agreed to create the Anti-Racism Directorate the way it should be done, or invested in it, Speaker. There are many people who have given us life experiences about the way we could have actually improved this. The Anti-Racism Directorate would have addressed the forms of systemic discrimination that disproportionately impact immigrants.

Exhausted from this process, Sam reached out to our office. Sam's credentials and professional designations are endless, yet Sam received a job rejection clearly stating that they will not hire someone without Canadian experience. I'll quote what's written in their rejection letter: "Unfortunately we are looking for more Canadian experience."

Here is what Sam shared with us—and this is for hiring, Speaker; this is not a regulatory body. This is what the real problems are. I want to share Sam's frustration, because I think it really highlights what people are actually going through. He writes, "I am rather disappointed in your feedback having set a second interview date with me today and rejected my application a few hours to the interview based on your presumed Canadian experience."

He goes on to write, "Rejecting a candidate based on Canadian experience is discrimination based on race and nationality which is contrary to Ontario Human Right Act and Canadian Human Rights Code."

He also adds, "Furthermore, I am a certified HR professional in Ontario with CHRP and Canada with CPHR. These two certifications are the major HR certifications required to prove my competence in HR." Sam has expressed to us the negative impact this has had on his life and his mental health as well, Speaker.

I also want to share another example from an internationally trained professional, a dentist. He writes, "I am a foreign-trained dentist with master's degree in oral and maxillofacial surgery. I am struggling since three years here because of barriers to recognition of my skills and education. I have already completed first two exams for my licence but my third exam got delayed by one and half year because of COVID. I am working as a security guard with minimum wages."

Speaker, we could have done better for all of these people, for Sam and for—I don't want to share the name, because I don't have permission to do so, but the experience is important to share.

Immigrants in Canada earn less, on average, than those born in Canada. Immigrants earn about 10% less than those born in Canada, and 30 years ago, actually, I want to mention, that gap was about 4%. So it has actually gotten worse, despite the fact that the immigration process, which is stricter now, includes the points system, a significant portion of which is the higher education and the higher skills which allow for these immigrants to come to the country with their credentials.

Highly educated and capable individuals are under-employed and deskilled—not to mention the opportunity cost for our province. Research has also shown the negative impact this has on our economy, Speaker, because there's a huge opportunity cost that's lost and we're not giving them the potential. And the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane just talked about the amount of doctors that they need in their riding, in their constituency—the dire need for this, especially as we get through COVID right now.

Speaker, this bill addresses a portion of the solution, when they look at the Canadian experience. And I know the way that it's being talked about by the government members does not actually reflect what's really in the bill, and that's very problematic because the real solutions that internationally trained professionals need, a lot of that is not addressed here.

I want to be very clear. When I talk about health care workers, for example, I'm not asking for exemptions; I'm

just asking for them to have an opportunity so that they can go throughout bridging programs, so that they can actually find a path that's practice ready to be able to actually practise in this province.

Speaker, we could have done better creating those pathways, making sure that we're addressing the shortages. We could also have done better in understanding the problem by consulting with many of these regulatory bodies, many of which were not consulted with, and especially when it comes to health care professionals. After a huge pandemic—and we're still in this pandemic—we could have done better by those workers.

**1640**

Now I want to look into schedule 4. Schedule 4 allows the minister responsible to collect personal information about migrant workers. Migrant workers in Ontario and in Canada overall have few to no rights in this country and are mistreated in their line of work. They even lose their lives, and we have seen this during this pandemic. During COVID, migrant workers were suffering from increased risk of COVID with no support from our government. They are disregarded as a federal matter by the provincial government. It's like we play hot potato with their lives. Yet now the provincial government seeks to collect their personal health data without disclosing what will be done with that data, not to mention the fact that they are still not given any rights to actually be protected.

Schedule 6: One of the most disheartening and harmful parts of this bill is schedule 6, and a lot of my colleagues talked about this already. The changes that workers and worker groups across this province have spoken out against—if you listened to the committee hearings, Speaker, you would have seen the amount of people who talked about it who were horrified at seeing what's written in schedule 6.

This schedule will allocate WSIB surpluses—the so-called surpluses—at the end of the year back to the employers, and it removes the obligation of the board to maintain the funds that workers in the province pay into as their insurance against future injury. It takes that money and gives it back to the employers. Not only is this incredibly unfair and harmful, but it also incentivizes employers to not sign off on their employees' WSIB claims. That is so problematic because we've seen what the records are for WSIB claims and just the devastating stories of so many workers who deserve to be paid out, who deserve to get compensation and are still fighting that battle or are still going to workplaces that are unsafe.

It undermines and hurts injured workers across this province. Carol, a constituent of mine, was disheartened after hearing this government and its members address this provision. As an injured worker, she was deeply hurt to see how this government was disregarding her and thousands of others. She pointed out that one of the government MPPs made light of injured workers during the committee—because she was actually watching committee hearings. She put it simply, and I want to quote her:

“As an injured worker who has absolutely no income because of deeming, I want to inform you that all the good

that is present in schedules 1 to 5, it is overshadowing the real issue with the WSIB surplus. There is a surplus because it is taken from the injured worker; it is our money, not the employers'.”

She goes on to write, “I returned to work under modified and then forced by WSIB back to the position that injured me. I went to this position four times and was injured four times and finally refused to do the job that keeps injuring me.

“At this point I was deemed. This has left me in debt to my employer 10,000-plus dollars. I currently have no income and the regulations of WSIB are cumbersome and lengthy. I have in turn been dismissed from work and my EI has expired.

“This so-called surplus is no such thing; \$10,000-plus of it belongs to me and clearing the debt caused by WSIB to my employer.

“I question how many other injured workers owe money that WSIB claims is a surplus.

“If the money is to go back to the employer then the whole process of compensation is lost.

“There is a use for the so-called surplus. It could be used to simplify the claims process, shorten the lengthy waits for decisions, restore injured workers benefits, and it could be used for occupational health research that is peer reviewed.”

Speaker, I had to share her words because I think she clearly outlines a flaw within this bill as well as the solution that could have been proposed within this legislation.

I know my colleagues are going to get up during the Q&A period and ask me, “Why not talk about the positive parts of the bill?” Well, first, the entire bill should have been positive. But let's talk a little bit about the positive parts of this bill. I see that I have just a few minutes left, so I want to point out that there are some parts of it—and I pointed out the one section of schedule 3, which does a limited amount of good to some people. This bill also has a section, schedule 5, which allows for delivery workers, like app workers, couriers and truck drivers access to washrooms. Well, that's great. It's just shameful—during the pandemic, for the last two years, we've heard about how difficult it's been for people—that it took them that long. But you know what? We're getting there.

Yet, even with that section, Speaker, it falls short. The fact that it's excluding Uber drivers, Lyft, transit and taxi drivers—I've heard from so many taxi drivers. When we were in committee hearings and clause-by-clause, we went through this and talked about amendments for each of these issues that I'm highlighting, each of the issues that my other colleagues have highlighted. We have proposed amendments to all of the sections that we could actually touch, that we were allowed to propose amendments to. And we did. All of them were rejected—all of them.

If we want to work together and actually fix and propose something and pass something that is helpful and that supports people across this province, why not listen to the amendments? Why not listen to the committee hearings? Because there were people who talked about—

the OFL came and were just really pointing out what's wrong with schedule 6, for example. The migrant workers group came and talked about what it would mean to give them real rights. TRIEC came and talked about how we should have included health care workers. All of these sections—we could have done so much better for workers across the province, whether they're migrant workers, whether they're internationally trained or whether they're workers who were born in this province, and yet this bill falls short of all of that.

Yes, there are some parts that are praiseworthy, but let's not jump up and down because you're finally giving access to truck drivers. Really? This omnibus bill, which you could have actually supported workers and supported people with—this is what it's going to be about?

This morning I held a press conference with Dr. Makini McGuire-Brown, Dr. Shafi Bhuiyan and Dr. Luca Salvador, three advocates who have been fighting so hard for health care workers to finally be recognized. Not just recognized; I don't mean they come here—you know, immigrants who have these skills come here and actually just go and start practising. But I mean, when they come here, they have a bridging program. They're able to find a path. That's what Dr. Makini talked about: "Here is what we can actually do." You didn't even consult with the regulatory bodies to actually address this.

*Interjection.*

**Ms. Doly Begum:** No. I have heard from many of the regulatory bodies. I have talked to many of them. You didn't even consult with them. At many of the committee hearings, Speaker, when I asked them in committee—that's on record—when I asked these people who were presenting, I asked, "Were you consulted? You have been advocating for decades now. Were you consulted?" The fact that the Ontario Federation of Labour, which represents thousands and thousands of workers, was not consulted is a huge problem. And we're talking about working for workers? That's shameful. That is shameful.

I know the members want to heckle me, correct me and talk about how they have done their due diligence. No, you haven't. You have not. When I read this bill, that is shown in this bill. And that's extremely problematic, because bills are not incremental. I don't know the next time it will be amended. When I looked at FARPACTA, for example, I don't know—the last time it was amended was probably 2006, maybe. Are we going to wait for another decade or so to actually talk about health care workers? Is this how we're really treating Ontarians and workers across this province?

Speaker, I ask this government to listen to the people of this province and do better by all of them.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Questions?

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** I know the member opposite is passionate about foreign credentials. I can tell her that we have many members in this House on our side who have those credentials. We hear it many, many times.

1650

The member talked about that we did not talk to the regulators, so I just want to talk about the people we spoke

to, so that she's aware of this: Professional Engineers Ontario, the College of Nurses of Ontario, the College of Physiotherapists of Ontario, the Ontario College of Teachers, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario, the Ontario College of Pharmacists, the College of Midwives of Ontario, the college of traditional Chinese—the list goes on and on and on.

I just want to say this, Madam Speaker: Yes, absolutely, we did consult with regulators. We did consult with bodies. And it is required, also; it's not something where we're proud that we did something. Everybody does it. All ministers do it all the time. So my question is—

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Thank you. That's time.

Response? The member from Scarborough Southwest.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** Speaker, I didn't hear any immigrant trained professionals who were consulted. If you're going to talk about somebody you're going to help through a bill, did you consult with them? No. The three people I mentioned who were in the press conference this morning, who lead organizations that are specifically about internationally trained professionals: Did you consult with them? No, you did not.

I could go on with the list, but instead I want to point out—I want to quote from the member opposite. I want to quote from the Hansard, something that he mentioned a few days ago: "As I talked about, foreign credentials: Once they have the licensing in place—and they can actually expedite their licensing as soon as five years. They don't even have to work on the minimum wage."

But five years is okay? That's an expedited form? This is what you're going to give internationally trained professionals, is that they're going to be expedited in five years?

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Next question.

**Mr. Guratan Singh:** I want to thank my colleague for her presentation. It was very detailed and it was very, very informative. This issue around consultation is clearly something that you're passionate about, this issue around the fact that there wasn't enough consultation that was done. Can you elaborate on the individuals you spoke with, what they said and how they described the fact that they weren't contacted or consulted with?

**Ms. Doly Begum:** Thank you for that question. I know the member from Brampton also has done a lot of work with a lot of people who are internationally trained. Many of them across Brampton have been working in minimum-wage jobs—as security guards, as I mentioned one example in my speech earlier. I know government-side members have pointed out, as well, the fact that many of these people who are internationally trained, who have years and years of experience, are driving taxicabs, and the struggle that they're going through.

I'll just finish what I was saying: When you talk about expedited certification, five years is not expedited. You're talking about somebody working on minimum wage. Think about their mental health. Think about trying to

survive in this province. Think about putting food on the table. Think about education. Think about what they need to do in order to make sure they're providing for their families. All of that was not considered in this bill, Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Next question?

**Mr. Billy Pang:** I want to add onto the list of what we have consulted on, especially with the member of the opposition talking about immigrants. There is the College of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists of Ontario, the College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario, the College of Medical Radiation and Imaging Technologists of Ontario—we have a long list; we can carry on.

We are a government with open ears, so at this point in time I want to ask the member—yes, there may be some not in the committee that we have met, but we are still open, so I encourage—can the member support this bill?

**Ms. Doly Begum:** Again, I'll just reiterate: When I talk about health care workers, have you consulted with internationally trained professionals who are in health care? Have you talked to people who are in the regulatory body of the health care system?

We have just gone through two years of this pandemic, Speaker, and there's a shortage of nurses right now in this province. The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane talked about the fact that per—was it 5,000 people?—you have one family doctor. That is not acceptable.

And we have people who are ready. Dr. Ahmed Al Khatib, who I talked about, is one of those doctors who works in a community centre in one of those northern regions, and he's getting paid a very, very small amount for the skills that he has, but he's continuing to do so because he's able to support—

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Response.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** —a community that needs doctors, but he's still not recognized, Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Question?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I'd like to thank the member from Scarborough Southwest for her advocacy for internationally trained health professionals. It's a shame that this barrier still persists under Bill 27.

I myself have also worked with many within my riding, folks who were sold the Canadian dream. Headhunters promised them the land of milk and honey, and this dream has turned into a nightmare. I think in particular of somebody who was the head of dentistry at a hospital in Dubai. She was so skilled, so highly trained that she was able to administer anesthesia to a three-and-half-year-old but yet still is unable to achieve that Canadian dream of dentistry here in Ontario.

My question to the member is, how did the government respond to amendments about respect and fairness and a bridging program for foreign-trained professionals?

**Ms. Doly Begum:** Well, they voted against all of them—not one. It's unbelievable because a lot of these

amendments were put in place after talking to many of the people that they're claiming to have talked to, many of these workers. A lot of these amendments would have actually helped to fix what's wrong with the schedules.

If you really want to work together and actually fix a lot of these things, the fact that you're excluding a whole range of workers, transit workers who are not going to get access to washrooms—unbelievable.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Next question?

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova:** I must admit that I find some of the comments made by the member a little bit insensitive, and I'll give her a very personal example. As an immigrant myself, my family has been deeply impacted by the ability or inability to find work. My own mom, who is a trained teacher from Poland, today works as a housekeeper at Brampton Civic Hospital. When I was in high school, I used to be ashamed to admit to that, that my mom is a housekeeper even though she is a trained teacher and she could be working as a teacher here in Ontario.

We know we have a shortage of teachers in Ontario. Had this legislation been in place 22 years ago when we immigrated to Canada, my mom today would be working as a teacher. Instead, she's working as a housekeeper in Brampton Civic, which I'm very proud of because there is no shame in working hard and there is no shame in working our tail off.

My question to the member is, why is the opposition not supporting training to help people get into better jobs?

*Interjections.*

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Order.

Response?

**Ms. Doly Begum:** I want to thank the member and her mother for their contribution. It is amazing.

*Interjection.*

**Ms. Doly Begum:** It is; it really is. When we talk about a hospital, for example, the janitorial staff are some of the most important staff members who keep the entire place clean and make sure that we're healthy. It's so important that we recognize them, which is why I talked about WSIB, for example. Why are you incentivizing employers from taking away from employees who are hurt? I gave examples of it.

When we talk about immigrants, it's not about the fact that one job is more than the other, Speaker. Let me be extremely clear: It's the fact that someone who has 10, 15, 20 years of experience and comes here with the hope and dream—and they're given that hope and dream by our federal government. But the fact is, when they come here, they're told no. They're told that the door is shut because you do not have the right to work in the same field that you have practised in, and it's deemed less than what they're actually able to provide. That's not fair. They shouldn't be working in those minimum jobs because they deserve better, Speaker. It's not about—

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Thank you. Further debate?

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova:** It is a privilege to rise today to speak to this pivotal piece of legislation—

*Interjections.*

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Stop the clock. I'm sorry to interrupt the member, who is the only member who has the floor and the opportunity to speak. So the other ministers who are heckling right now, I'm going to ask you to respect the opportunity for your colleague to give her remarks unheckled.

Can we restart the clock, please, and give her a fair shake at this? Okay. I return to the member from Mississauga Centre for her remarks.

1700

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova:** Thank you very much. It is a privilege to rise today and speak to this pivotal piece of legislation that will be at the centre of great change in the province of Ontario.

Before I begin, I want to first congratulate my colleagues, who, through their tireless work and dedication, have crafted Bill 27, the Working for Workers Act, 2021, with the intention of supporting Ontario's workers and businesses, both now and in the times after this pandemic. To our Premier, to our Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development, to the parliamentary assistant to the minister and to everyone else involved in the policy-making process: Your hard work is an example to us all.

Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic brought upon Ontario one of the sternest challenges that we have collectively faced. Our supply chains, our work environments, our ability to buy goods and services: These were all impacted by this ever-changing virus. But in full resilience and determination was Ontario's workforce, who persevered during these uncertain times. They kept our shelves full, our pantries stocked and our deadlines met.

And just as each and every one of Ontario's workers supported this province in one of the greatest challenges it has ever faced, our government has a plan to support and protect these workers and their families as we chart a new course in the post-pandemic Ontario. The Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development said it best when he said, "We're not responding to the future; we're charting our path forward."

This piece of legislation will be unprecedented in the way that it prioritizes our workers and businesses as our industries and our businesses continue to evolve in the world today. It was during the pandemic that trends relating to the changes in work and in working environment accelerated, meaning that types of jobs and the ways that we work are changing at an unprecedented rate. Remote and hybrid work, becoming necessary during the pandemic, may for many of us remain as an alternative to traditional in-person work environments. Greater automation in manufacturing, distribution and retail sectors, expanded to aid in social distancing and avoid interruptions in critical industries, may now be here to stay in a way that we may not have seen before.

The intersection of technology and the service industry was pivotal during this pandemic, with digital platform

workers delivering the food we eat, the supplies that we need and driving us to the places where we need to go. I must admit, even in my own household, I don't actually go to the grocery store anymore. I do all of my ordering online. We thank those platform workers who deliver our food and our essentials when we need them. It remains to be seen which of these trends are permanent and which will change as we continue to transition into a post-pandemic economy.

Peu importe la façon dont ces tendances se poursuivront, et peu importe comment nos industries et nos entreprises changeront à l'avenir, une chose est sûre : ce gouvernement jettera son dévolu sur l'horizon, montrant la voie non seulement au Canada, mais partout dans le monde, en agissant pour protéger nos travailleurs et notre économie.

Avec notre vision, nous le ferons à chaque étape du processus.

Nous veillerons à ce que l'Ontario demeure une destination de choix pour les talents internationaux, tout en offrant à nos entreprises un environnement qui favorise la croissance et l'innovation.

Nous veillerons à ce que la santé et la sécurité des travailleurs et travailleuses de l'Ontario restent protégées maintenant et à l'avenir.

Nous veillerons à ce que les travailleurs et travailleuses de l'Ontario soient traités avec équité et respect en milieu de travail, afin qu'ils puissent réaliser leur plein potentiel dans la profession qu'ils choisissent.

Nous veillerons à ce que les travailleurs et travailleuses de l'Ontario puissent prospérer face à l'avenir du travail, et, ce faisant, nous maintiendrons que l'économie de notre province reste forte et compétitive à l'échelle mondiale.

Je vais donc passer un peu de temps à discuter de ce qui est inclus dans ce projet de loi et de la manière dont ces engagements seront pris en compte dans chacun d'eux. Je veux commencer par la disposition incluse dans la législation concernant le nouveau droit de se déconnecter.

Madame la Présidente, pendant la pandémie, les familles ontariennes ont fait preuve de résilience en s'adaptant aux nouveaux environnements de travail. Nos travailleurs savaient que, malgré les nouveaux défis auxquels ils et elles étaient confrontés pendant la pandémie, les rôles et les responsabilités de leur travail devaient encore être remplis. Nos travailleurs et travailleuses ont relevé ce défi et, grâce à leur courage et à leur détermination, ont veillé à ce que le travail se poursuive. Cette pandémie nous a montré à quel point le travail des travailleurs de l'Ontario est essentiel chaque jour.

Pour de nombreuses familles de l'Ontario, leurs maisons se sont transformées en bureaux. Madame la Présidente, même dans ma maison, j'ai transformé une chambre en mon bureau de travail. Et je suis très fier d'avoir trois drapeaux—le drapeau canadien, le drapeau ontarien et aussi le drapeau franco-ontarien—dans mon bureau à domicile.

Bien que la commodité d'une situation de travail à domicile soit évidente et que les possibilités qu'elle

présente pour les travailleurs de l'Ontario en termes de flexibilité soient évidentes, ces lignes floues entre le travail et la maison ont constitué un changement sans précédent dans la nature du travail.

Ce gouvernement veut s'assurer que les travailleurs de l'Ontario peuvent profiter des avantages du travail à distance, tout en veillant à ce que leur temps de travail et leur temps en famille ne se confondent pas.

C'est pourquoi nous exigerons des employeurs de 25 employés ou plus qu'ils aient une politique écrite concernant que les employés se déconnectent de leur travail à la fin de la journée de travail afin d'aider les employés à passer plus de temps avec leur famille. Ce faisant, nous veillerons à ce qu'il soit plus facile pour les Ontariens et les Ontariennes de se détendre et de passer du temps de qualité avec leurs proches. Lorsque la santé mentale des employés est prioritaire, la productivité s'épanouit.

As Ontario's economy recovers from the devastating impact that COVID-19 has had on it, we need a workforce that is innovative, that is committed and that is ready to get to work. By supporting our workers with a clearly defined work-life balance, we will foster economic growth and also ensure that we retain our talent and continue to make our province a global destination for those seeking opportunity, and a good place to do business, to live and to raise a family.

Another important way this legislation will help in this respect is by making it easier for internationally trained immigrants to start careers in their professions. These professions include engineers, lawyers, architects, plumbers, electricians, teachers and many more. The Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development said it best when he said that Ontario is facing a generational labour shortage. As things stand now, there are hundreds of thousands of positions going unfilled, yet, we have some of the best human resources not in the country, but in the entire world. Many newcomers to Ontario have difficulties finding jobs in the professions that they know and love—including in my very own family—because of senseless bureaucracy and red tape. If we are to position Ontario for a strong economic recovery as the pandemic comes to a close, these two issues cannot be allowed to continue.

With this legislation, newcomers will be more able to contribute to our economy in their professions. They have the training, they have the experience, they have the qualifications and, I would add, they have the passion and determination to give back to Canada. It's time that we unleashed their economic potential by giving them the same opportunities to contribute to our world-class economy.

I know that the minister has had many round tables on this issue and heard from many new arrivals, industry leaders, settlement groups and faith communities to understand what the barriers facing Ontarians are in these situations. Both the minister and the parliamentary assistant have displayed a strong leadership and commitment to this issue, and I know that the changes proposed here in

the legislation will improve fair access to regulated professions and trades that are in need of talented workers.

As an MPP in the city of Mississauga, these changes will be sure to offer significant improvements to residents. Mississauga is a multicultural, global city that continues to grow through attracting international talent from around the world. I'm proud to say that we speak over 100 languages in Mississauga, and I'm proud to say that Mississauga is like the whole world in one city, and it truly is true. Even this weekend, I'm attending about 10 events from all different ethnic communities, and I'm so blessed and privileged to have that opportunity.

**1710**

Excluding these newcomers from the jobs that they are qualified to do and excluding them from industries in need is a fact that will end with the actions of this government. This government remains committed to supporting both workers and businesses with measures like this, and with these changes we are further strengthening the capabilities of Ontario's economy as we transition out of the pandemic.

Monsieur le Président, depuis que j'ai été élue comme députée de Mississauga-Centre, je me suis engagée à sensibiliser le public à la traite des personnes, qui est une préoccupation croissante non seulement en Ontario, mais partout dans le monde.

La traite des êtres humains représente aujourd'hui l'un des crimes les plus odieux au monde et continue de tourmenter les communautés vulnérables. C'est un crime qui s'attaque à l'insécurité, à la vulnérabilité et aux disparités économiques.

Monsieur le Président, ce gouvernement a continué d'accorder la priorité à la lutte contre la traite des personnes de toutes les manières possibles, et nous serons toujours là pour combattre sans relâche ceux qui cherchent à tirer profit des personnes vulnérables. Point final.

Mais le crime qu'est la traite des êtres humains est en réalité très nuancé, et il est important de se rappeler ce que recouvre ce terme. Quand quelqu'un pense à la traite des humains, il se peut qu'il ne pense pas à quel point cela peut être formel. La traite des êtres humains peut impliquer des entreprises et des organisations. Elle peut être institutionnalisée et elle peut être largement omniprésente d'une manière qui n'est pas considérée à première vue. L'exploitation du travail est une grande partie de ce qui constitue la traite des personnes, et je suis ravie de dire que ce projet de loi visera à lutter contre cela en ce qu'il vise à empêcher que les travailleurs nationaux et étrangers soient exploités.

Des inspections effectuées par des agents du ministère ont montré qu'il existe de nombreuses agences de placement temporaire en Ontario qui paient illégalement des personnes en dessous du salaire minimum et nient d'autres droits fondamentaux en matière d'emploi. Les agences de placement temporaire emploient des personnes pour les affecter à des travaux temporaires pour les clients de l'agence.

Avec cette loi, nous assurerons leur conformité aux lois provinciales en exigeant des entreprises qu'elles

détiennent un permis pour exercer leurs activités en Ontario.

Under this proposed legislation, temporary help agencies and recruiters would be vetted before being issued a licence to operate. Applicants would need to provide an irrevocable letter of credit that could be used to repay owed wages to workers.

When the agencies operate in accordance with the Employment Standards Act and all other laws, they are a valuable part of our province's economy. According to the WSIB, there were about 128,000 full-time employees employed by temporary help agencies in 2019, representing 2.6% of employment in Ontario. But when some firms pay below minimum wage and deny basic employment rights, it is exploitation. Full stop.

Taking advantage of vulnerable workers is something this government will not allow. With this practice, these agencies gain an unfair competitive advantage over law-abiding agencies through using exploitative practices as a way to undercut lawful rates. These practices hurt Ontario workers of all backgrounds and cannot and will not be tolerated.

With this legislation, penalties could be issued against unlicensed agencies and recruiters, as well as the companies who use them, with proactive inspection measures to ensure compliance with applicable requirements.

Last year, our government focused inspections on temporary help agency use in farms, retirement homes, food processing and warehouse facilities. As of October 1, 2021, just over \$3.3 million was found owing to employees and approximately half has been recovered. Non-compliance during the 2020-21 campaign was found in areas such as minimum wage, record keeping, misclassification, hours of work, public holiday pay, overtime pay and vacation pay. Even worse is that there have been instances of these agencies trapping workers in this cycle of exploitation.

In February 2019, a raid in Barrie and Wasaga Beach, involving the Canadian Border Services Agency, Barrie Police and Ontario Provincial Police, rescued more than 60 migrant workers from a labour trafficking ring. Third-party recruiters were involved and were charging workers illegal fees and exercising control over their movements. This is a textbook instance of human trafficking in our province, and as Ontarians, we have zero tolerance for this taking place in our communities.

This government will continue to be committed to protecting this province's workers from exploitation, and we will continue to be committed to eradicating human trafficking in Ontario. To continue being a place of economic opportunity and innovation, we will do what is necessary to ensure Ontario's workers are protected by the Employment Standards Act, and we will punish agencies who think that these laws do not apply to them.

Speaker, there is, of course, much more to be said on this legislation, as it includes many other provisions set forth to protect the workers of Ontario, to work for the workers of Ontario. I know that my colleagues will speak to these provisions well and show to this House and to the

people of Ontario the strength of this legislation in putting our workers first.

I want to end on reiterating how crucial this legislation is in the face of the changing nature of work in the 21st century. While the nature of what a job looks like might have changed for some, our commitment to your health and safety on the job has not.

As we gear towards a post-pandemic recovery, unleashing the potential of Ontario workers will be critical for long-term economic success. With this legislation, we are building on our commitment to our workers and ensuring the best possible workplace experience that we have had since the beginning of our mandate in 2018.

Our government knows the value of a strong economy and the good-paying jobs that support it. Our government knows the value of Ontario's businesses who provide Ontarians with these well-paying jobs. And our government knows that when workers feel safe and protected and appreciated, they are in the best possible position to put in a good day's work and contribute the most that they can to their company and to our province.

La loi sur le travail pour les travailleurs est fondée sur ces reconnaissances, et ce sera la nouvelle norme pour le reste du Canada alors que d'autres juridictions réagiront aux changements sans précédent du marché du travail et de l'économie. Je sais ce que cette loi signifiera pour mes concitoyens, et je sais que la ville que nous appelons tous « chez nous » bénéficiera directement des dispositions du projet de loi 27.

Je suis heureuse d'appuyer ce projet de loi et je suis heureuse de faire partie d'un gouvernement qui continue d'être un chef de file à l'échelle mondiale dans la gestion de la pandémie et des changements qu'elle a apportés à nos vies. Les Ontariens et les Ontariennes, ensemble, sortiront des épreuves de la pandémie et montreront au reste du monde à quoi ressemble une forte reprise économique. Ensemble, nous établirons une norme pour les opportunités d'emploi et dans les affaires que le reste du monde remarquera.

C'est par nos efforts collectifs, en incarnant l'esprit de l'Ontario, que nous avons traversé la tempête qu'est la COVID-19, et ce seront ces mêmes choses qui nous mèneront vers l'avenir de l'Ontario.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Questions?

**Ms. Doly Begum:** I want to thank the member for her passionate speech. We heard in committee, and I know the member listened as well, from quite a few different individuals, including Fred Hahn from CUPE, Patty Coates from the OFL, UFCW, and Willy Noiles. One of the things that Willy said to us was, "Between 2010 and 2017, WSIB benefits paid out to injured workers were cut by more than half. And the Ford government's solution is to give employers more money back on top of the 52% cut in premiums in 2018, 2019 and 2020. How about using the surplus to ensure workers are taken care of when injured at work? Now, that's what we would call working for workers."

1720

Speaker, my question is, would the member listen to Willy and many others and actually do the right thing and give the surplus to employees instead?

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova:** Thank you so much for the question.

Yes, I did listen intently, as I was chairing the clause-by-clause consideration and the public hearings of this bill.

Through you, Speaker: To get through this pandemic, we understand that workers need our support. That is why we introduced Bill 27, the Working for Workers Act, which will give workers a hand up to get better jobs and bigger paycheques. This includes those who have been injured on the job.

We continue to work with the WSIB to help workers and their families because we firmly believe that every worker deserves the dignity of a good job. For example, we're expanding our Second Career program to help more people with disabilities find work. This includes supporting them with up to \$28,000 for tuition, plus supports for living expenses, child care and other costs.

Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a government that's working for workers.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Next question.

**Hon. Lisa M. Thompson:** I'm pleased to rise in the House today because I feel that the member who was debating has a wealth of experience that sheds some light on why this legislation is so important. So I respectfully ask if she could share the experience of her family immigrating to Ontario and how this legislation could have made such an important difference when she first arrived in Ontario.

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova:** I certainly appreciate the opportunity to highlight what my family went through as we came to Canada. We were so thrilled to come to Canada, the land of opportunity, the dream of many people from back home. But when we first came, of course, there were a lot of challenges that we faced, including the fact that my mom couldn't get a job as a teacher and had to look for different jobs. I remember working with her, as a young girl, at banquet halls, cleaning people's houses, whatever it took to put food on the table. We also had challenges on my father's side. He is a physician, and he was unable to work as a physician. Unfortunately, due to stress and depression, he left and now works in France.

We recognize that there are many, many professions that need help in recognizing foreign credentials.

I'm so proud that this particular legislation does impact the teaching profession, which would have made a huge difference for my family had it happened 22 years ago.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Question?

**Ms. Doly Begum:** As I listen to the member, I know that she's passionate about immigrant workers.

During the pandemic, one of the places I continuously begged this House to help was Cosmetica. Many immigrant workers—many women, actually—who are trained professionals from other places end up working, through

agencies, in this place, a cosmetic factory. They were forced to work, and then they were fired. I begged the House for help. Many of these workers did not even get proper compensation—not to mention the fact that this government has voted against many of the other things that we requested, including paid sick days, most recently.

My question is, would the member support legislation like paid sick days? And where was the government when we were begging them to support Cosmetica workers, for example?

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova:** I want to address the first part of the question, which is on temporary agency registry. Our government is focused on the health and safety of every single worker, including our female workers, who have been impacted severely by this pandemic. It is unacceptable that some temporary agencies are paying people below the minimum wage and denying them other employment rights, while also gaining a competitive advantage over law-abiding agencies by undercutting rates. To protect these workers, the government is proposing this legislation that, if passed, would require temporary help agencies and recruiters to have a licence and pay a security deposit to operate in Ontario.

I am proud of this legislation because it will address some of the concerns brought forward by this member. We are working for workers, once again.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Next question.

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** Ontario is prioritizing workers' mental health and, thankfully, family time. Almost 29% of the people in Ontario, the highest percentage of any province in Canada, work half their week from home. Can the member please elaborate on our proposal for the right to disconnect, and why now is such an important time for our government to act?

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova:** Thank you so much for asking this question, because I admit I'm guilty as charged when it comes to disconnecting. Sometimes I actually have to stop myself before texting in my chat group for my team and my office because it's 2 in the morning and I'm just always wired and always working and always thinking about the next day. I'm very guilty of doing this all the time. Obviously, it is not appropriate to be texting our WhatsApp group at 2 in the morning. So I think it's really important, because the lines have been so blurred between our workspace and our home life that we do have policies in place for employers, including me and including all of us, who do employ people, to allow them to disconnect and allow them that peace of mind to be with their family, so that the next day they come back to work energized and ready to take the day on.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** The next question.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I'd like to thank the member from Mississauga Centre for her presentation. It's really powerful when you hear someone's family's story. I'm a trained educator myself, and I'm sure that even though your mother didn't end up in a classroom, she's still never

stopped leading and teaching, although her classroom was just a different-appearing one.

I did want to address that the member stated that this legislation would help people like her mother pursue employment in Ontario according to her training and skills and it would have made a huge difference for that member's family. But is it fair that doctors, dentists, nurses and health care professionals are excluded from this bill?

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova:** I just want to answer honestly. I think a lot of us would have wished to see medical professionals included in this bill, myself included, as a medical professional. But as we know, we have regulatory bodies that are self-governed. We are self-regulated professions, such as nurses, so we have to really ensure that this is done right. So that's why this actually falls under the Ministry of Health, which is actively looking at this issue. And we have consulted many health regulatory bodies in putting this bill forward. What they have told us is that this needs to be done right, because at the end of the day, we are talking about the health of Ontarians. What this pandemic has demonstrated is that there's nothing more important to Ontarians than their health. That's why we need to take our due diligence and

our time to ensure that this particular issue has the appropriate amount of study done before we can move forward with any changes.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):** Time for a very quick back-and-forth.

**M. Dave Smith:** Madame la Présidente, je pense que je vais essayer ma question en français pour la première fois.

Est-ce que nos partenaires soutiennent cette législation?

**M<sup>me</sup> Natalia Kusendova:** Merci beaucoup pour la question. Oui, on a beaucoup de partenaires qui soutiennent cette législation; on en a nommé quelques-uns.

Mais je pense que ce qui est important de dire c'est que notre gouvernement va travailler pour les travailleurs et travailleuses de l'Ontario. Et ce projet de loi, le projet de loi 27, est une des choses par laquelle nous démontrons comment nous allons améliorer la vie des travailleurs et travailleuses de l'Ontario.

Je suis très fière de tous les changements qui sont proposés dans cette législation, et j'espère que l'opposition va faire la chose correcte et va soutenir et voter oui pour cette législation.

*Report continues in volume B.*





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Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
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Gravelle, Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
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Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hassan, Faisal (NDP)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
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Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
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Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
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<b>McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)</b>	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
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Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
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Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
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Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Park, Lindsey (IND)	Durham	
Parsa, Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
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Roberts, Jeremy (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
<b>Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)</b>	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
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Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
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Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
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