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Jeudi
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 26 March 2026

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 26 mars 2026

The House met at 0900.

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

Prières / Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MILITARY HONOURS

DISTINCTIONS MILITAIRES

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Canada should establish an independent military honours review board to review veterans' cases where evidence suggests that the criteria for the Victoria Cross were met.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Minister Fedeli has moved government notice of motion number 15.

Back to the minister for details.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I want to begin by acknowledging that I will share my time with the Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism, the member for Oakville North-Burlington and the member for Mississauga East-Cooksville.

Speaker, each year on Remembrance Day, we rise in this House to reflect on the sacrifices made by those who have served our country. We pause, we remember and we honour those who put on the uniform and were prepared to give everything for Canada.

For many Canadians, our understanding of war is shaped by stories or documentaries or movies like *Saving Private Ryan*. That's as close as we ever get. They give us a glimpse into the horrors of war, but they are still only glimpses.

But for the men and women who served, war was not a story; it was a reality. One of those Canadians was Private Jess Larochelle. Born up in Restoule, Jess joined the Canadian Armed Forces straight out of high school, choosing a life of service at a young age. He served with Charles Company, 1st Battalion, the Royal Canadian Regiment, one of the most storied infantry units in our country. In 2006, he deployed to Afghanistan at a time when Canada was deeply engaged in some of the most dangerous combat operations of the mission. Canadian soldiers were operating in active combat zones, facing a determined and well-armed Taliban.

During his deployment, Private Larochelle volunteered to man an observation post. Exposed, isolated, oftentimes the first point of contact with the enemy, this was a brave

and dangerous position. Private Larochelle was assigned to watch for Taliban and provide early warning to his unit. One afternoon at approximately 3 p.m., his position came under heavy attack. Taliban forces launched an assault using rocket-propelled grenades and small arms fire. The observation post had taken a direct hit and Private Larochelle was knocked unconscious, waking up to learn that two of his company were dead and three more gravely wounded. Larochelle himself was seriously injured, with broken vertebrae in the neck and back, a detached retina in one of his eyes and a blown eardrum.

Despite being badly wounded, he launched a brave counterattack and disrupted the Taliban operation, saving the other wounded members of his company. Larochelle's actions that day were the true definition of heroic, showing the ultimate courage to put his life on the line to save others. When Larochelle returned to Canada, he was awarded the Star of Military Valour, the second-highest award for military valour in the Canadian system of honours, after the Victoria Cross.

But for many, including those who served alongside him, that recognition does not fully reflect what happened that day. Private Larochelle never fully recovered from his injuries. He lived with the physical and emotional toll of that battle for the rest of his short life, and he tragically passed away at just 40 years of age. His story is one of bravery but is also a reminder of the lasting cost of war—a cost that extends far beyond the battlefield.

Since that day, there has been a tireless advocacy to have Private Larochelle granted Canada's highest military honour, the Victoria Cross. That advocacy comes from friends here today: Captain Mike Harrison, who is here in the gallery. Captain.

Mike is joined by others: Warrant Officer David Losier—great friend—Kevin Reed, Captain David Mack, Captain Tim Fieck, and also Sergeant Josh Ward. These are friends, most who drove down from North Bay to attend the debate of this motion, which speaks to the significance of this cause. First of all, friends, thank you all for your service. Thank you very much.

This is service to our country. It's advocacy like Mike's, including his direct call to the Premier and their conversation, that brought us to this moment where not only Jess's story but the story of other veterans can be recognized with the appreciation they rightly deserve.

But with this moment comes another call. It's a call to action—by calling on the federal government to establish an independent military honours review board to review cases such as that of Jess Larochelle, where there is clear evidence that the criteria for Canada's highest military

honour, the Victoria Cross, has been met. While originally created in 1856 by Queen Victoria to recognize soldiers during the Crimean War, Canada created its own version of the Victoria Cross in 1993, but it has never been awarded—not because acts of extraordinary bravery have not occurred, but because they've not been recognized. We, collectively, believe that extraordinary acts of bravery and self-sacrifice must be acknowledged and honoured appropriately. In the case of Private Larochelle, there's no doubt—there's no doubt—that he met that standard. These gentlemen have made his case—for years now have made his case. Though he has been gone for nearly three years, his legacy endures in the courage he showed and the lives he saved.

0910

By establishing an independent military honours review board and ensuring that those who meet the threshold are recognized with the Victoria Cross, this House has an opportunity to do what is right: to honour not only Jess Larochelle but all those whose sacrifice has yet to be fully recognized by the country they served and by the country they loved.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the Minister for Citizenship and Multiculturalism.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Before addressing the motion before the House, it's both appropriate and necessary that we begin by acknowledging the bravery, courage and sacrifices of Canada's service members across every generation and every conflict.

Canada's history is inseparable from the stories of those who stepped forward when this country asked them to serve. From the trenches of the First World War to the beaches of Normandy, from Korea to decades of peace-keeping missions and, most recently, to the war in Afghanistan, Canadians have fought and sacrificed.

From 1939 to 1945, during the Second World War, over one million Canadians and Newfoundlanders served in uniform both here at home and around the world. And for over six years at war, more than 45,000 brave individuals in that Canadian uniform gave their lives for us while another 55,000 were wounded.

During the Korean War, from 1950 to 1953, after North Korean troops invaded South Korea, over 26,000 Canadians served on land, at sea and in the air during this conflict. Unfortunately, 516 Canadian lost their lives.

More than 4,000 Canadians served during the Gulf War of the early 1990s in the Persian Gulf region as part of the coalition of countries to remove the invading forces of Iraq from neighbouring Kuwait.

And we can't forget about Afghanistan. After the September 11 terrorist attacks, the US formed an international coalition to use force against the Taliban to remove their terrorist regime from power and destroy al-Qaeda camps so that country can never be a safe haven for terrorists. Not only was this the largest deployment of our Canadian troops since the Second World War and the longest conflict in our history at over 12 years, it also saw over 40,000 Canadians go to serve our country. This conflict

also had a price: A total of 158 Canadian Armed Forces personnel died during Canada's military mission in Afghanistan between 2002 and 2014; thousands more were physically and mentally injured.

This history shows what Canada is about. It shows what Canadians are capable of, and Canadians have repeatedly demonstrated, extraordinary courage in defence of democratic values, human dignity and international stability. They did not serve for recognition; they served because service was required. As a nation, we carry a responsibility not only to remember their sacrifice but to ensure that the systems we use to honour service are fair, credible and worthy of the trust placed in them.

That responsibility brings us to the motion before this House: that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Canada should establish an independent military honours review board to review veterans' cases where evidence suggests that the criteria for the Victoria Cross were met.

This is not a partisan motion. It's not a backward-looking exercise in blame. It's an act of institutional reflection rooted in respect. This motion is not about glorifying war. It's not about questioning service. It's about justice, integrity and national memory.

In democratic societies, military honours serve a profound purpose. They are not ornamental. They are moral signposts. They tell future generations what a country values in moments of its greatest tests. They anchor collective memory and individual human courage. They bridge the lived experience of war with the safety and freedom enjoyed in peace.

An honour system, however, must be more than symbolic; it must be credible. And credibility rests on three principles: First, clear and consistent standards that are understood and respected; second, independent and impartial decision-making insulated from political or institutional pressure; and third, the ability to review exceptional cases when credible, substantive evidence suggests reassessment is warranted.

This motion before this House concerns the third principle. It does not seek to change standards. It seeks to ensure the standards are capable of being applied fairly, even with the benefit of time. Review is not a sign of weakness. Review is how institutions sustain legitimacy.

The Victoria Cross is Canada's highest award for military valour. No recognition in our honour system carries greater moral weight nor speaks more powerfully to the values a nation chooses to uphold under the most extreme circumstances. No, the criteria for the Victoria Cross are explicit and deliberately exacting. It is awarded only for the most conspicuous bravery or for a daring or pre-eminent act of valour or self-sacrifice or for extreme devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy.

These are not broadly interpreted terms. They are carefully chosen words that reflect conduct far beyond what is normally expected—sorry, Madam Speaker. It has been an emotionally weighted issue. Anyway, I will collect myself and carry on with the support of my colleagues.

It is not awarded for competence nor for leadership alone, nor even for courage. It's awarded for acts that stand apart even amongst those who are themselves trained, willing and prepared to face danger, acts that, in the judgment of those charged with assessing them, rise to a level of bravery so profound that they permanently enter the nation's memory. For that reason, the Victoria Cross is not granted lightly, nor should it ever be.

In fact, since its inception, whether under the original imperial framework or since the establishment of the distinctly Canadian Victoria Cross, very few Canadians have received this honour, and none since 1993. This rarity is not an accident of history; it is essential to the award itself. The Victoria Cross must remain exceptional, or it ceases to signify what it is intended to represent.

Its scarcity ensures that when the medal is mentioned, Canadians understand that it reflects the most extraordinary acts of bravery imaginable, acts undertaken not for recognition but for the preservation of life, for duty to comrades and for the mission entrusted to them. Yet while the standard for the Victoria Cross has remained constant, the context in which acts of valour have occurred, are recorded, assessed and understood has changed dramatically.

Early conflicts often unfolded along defined battle lines with clearer chains of command and, in some cases, opportunities for documentation. Even then, we know that acts of extraordinary bravery were sometimes recognized only after the passage of time, once accounts could be corroborated and circumstances better understood.

Modern warfare, including Canada's mission in Afghanistan, present fundamentally different conditions. Combat is often dispersed, fast-moving and chaotic. Engagements may last minutes rather than hours. Decisions are made instantly, under conditions of extreme stress with limited visibility and limited opportunity for formal documentation.

Witnesses may be killed or injured. Communications may be disrupted. Records may be incomplete, classified or necessarily brief. In such an environment, it is not surprising that the full scope of an individual's actions may not be immediately or fully appreciated at the time. This does not reflect a failure of those making decisions under pressure. This is simply a reality of war.

What becomes essential, therefore, is not to weaken the standard of the Victoria Cross, but to ensure that our processes are capable of reflection when credible evidence emerges over time. A system worthy of the honour it administers must be strong enough to apply the same rigorous criteria, even when that examination occurs years after the events occur.

0920

The integrity of the Victoria Cross depends not only on how rarely it is awarded but on the confidence Canadians have that when acts truly meet the extraordinary threshold, they are given full, fair and independent consideration. That principle—respect for the highest standard, combined with respect for the truth—lies at the heart of the motion before this House.

This brings me to one of the cases in question, which the honourable minister talked about, that of Private Jess Larochelle, a member of the 1st Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment battle group during Canada's mission in Afghanistan. On October 14, 2006, in the Pashmul region, Private Larochelle was manning an observation post when it was destroyed by an enemy rocket. The circumstances were stark and unforgiving. He was alone, severely injured, left in an exposed position and he was under sustained enemy fire. The initial attack killed two members of his unit and wounded three others. With the observation post destroyed, the flank of the company's defensive position was suddenly exposed at a moment of danger.

In that moment, retreat would have been understandable. Many would have considered it the only viable option. Instead, despite his injuries and isolation, Private Larochelle provided aggressive covering fire over that exposed flank. Though he was partially deaf and had limited eyesight, Larochelle mounted a swift and aggressive defence of the outpost, firing his machine gun, when he quickly ran out of ammunition. He then began firing M72 rocket launchers at the enemy, firing 15 66mm rockets at a force of about 20 to 40 Taliban insurgents heavily armed with rifles, light machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades. His actions enabled his company to reorganize, maintain defensive positions and repel a sustained assault by dozens of heavily armed insurgents.

According to those who served alongside him and understand the engagement, his actions saved the lives of members of that company. These claims are not conjecture. They are grounded in testimony, military reporting and sustained advocacy by fellow veterans and supporters. Private Larochelle himself has not sought recognition, speaking modestly about his role, emphasizing teamwork and collective sacrifice, an attitude familiar to anyone who has worked with veterans.

The call for review is not on his behalf alone and does not just come from members of his company. It has come from comrades, journalists, historians, petitioners and Canadians across the country who believe that such actions merit full and independent consideration.

I want to be clear about the motion before the House. The case of Private Larochelle does not dictate a conclusion—that's not the role of this House—nor would it be the role of an independent review board. This motion does not ask Parliament to award the Victoria Cross. It does not ask ministers to override military expertise. It does not ask anyone to lower standards. It asks a single, principled question: Does Canada possess an independent, arm's-length mechanism capable of reassessing exceptional cases where credible evidence suggests the criteria for the Victoria Cross have been met? At present, such a mechanism does not exist. That absence is not an indictment of our institutions but an opportunity to strengthen them.

This issue has not emerged in isolation. Canadians have engaged with it thoughtfully and persistently. Petitions have gathered thousands of signatures. Media reporting has examined the issue carefully. Veterans advocates have raised concerns respectfully. These are not demands

rooted in entitlement; they are appeals grounded in fairness and trust. They reflect a belief that Canada's institutions are capable of listening and learning.

Importantly, support for a review has not come only from outside observers. Former senior leaders of the Canadian Armed Forces, many of them here today but including retired General Rick Hillier, have publicly stated that reviewing Afghanistan-era honours, where evidence supports it, is reasonable and responsible. This perspective carries credibility. It reflects an understanding of the realities of modern combat, honours processes and the limits of documentation under fire. It demonstrates that institutional maturity lies not in refusing scrutiny but in welcoming principled review.

This matter has also been raised in other provinces. In Saskatchewan, the Legislative Assembly introduced a motion urging the federal government to ensure that potential cases of extraordinary valour, particularly from Afghanistan, receive appropriate consideration for the Victoria Cross. This motion did not seek to dictate outcomes. It sought fairness and reflects a growing understanding across jurisdictions that honouring veterans is a shared national responsibility.

Ontario is not shying away from treating our veterans and active service members with the respect they deserve. This government, with the support of the opposition parties, Madam Speaker—yourself being one of those voters—put forward the Honouring Veterans Act in 2024 to do a few things: one, to honour veterans with the first ever Ontario-specific veterans' award for community service after their service. It was this government and this House that put forward free GO service for veterans that enabled better integration into civilian life. Think of a vehicle technician: If you can do an oil change on a light-armoured vehicle, you can certainly do it on a Honda Accord—certainly on my Honda Accord sitting in Brampton, Ontario. We do this because we know that we can never thank our veterans enough for what they have done, but we can sure as heck try in this House, in this party, in this government, and I know all colleagues will continue to do that to the best of our ability.

The motion at hand—some will worry that a review opens the floodgates. It does not. Any review mechanism can and should be tightly scoped, limited to exceptional cases with substantial evidence. Some worry about politicization; in fact, an independent review board reduces political involvement by placing review in the hands of qualified, arm's-length experts.

I need to thank my colleague the member for Oakville North–Burlington for being a staunch advocate on this issue, banging down the door of our ministry saying, "We need to do something about this." You'll hear from her soon, I believe, Madam Speaker.

This motion does not ask us to create heroes; Canada's heroes already exist. It asks us to ensure that our institutions remain worthy of their service. If Private Jess Larochelle's actions meet the highest standard of valour, Canada should be prepared to say so. If they do not, Canada should be prepared to explain why, openly, in-

dependently and transparently. What we should not accept is silence where credible evidence calls for consideration, for memory, for fairness, for the integrity of our honour system, for the very country we are blessed to call home, Madam Speaker.

With that being said, I urge the House to support this motion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I believe I recognize the member for Oakville North–Burlington.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: I am so honoured to rise today in support of this motion, one that speaks not only to history but to justice, to recognition and to our enduring duty to those who have served this country with extraordinary courage.

At its heart, this motion asks something simple yet profound: that where credible evidence exists that a Canadian service member may have met the criteria for the Victoria Cross, we ensure their case is reviewed independently, fairly and thoroughly because recognition does matter. And for those who risk everything in service of our nation, it matters deeply.

The Victoria Cross is not just a medal; it is the highest expression of bravery in the face of the enemy, awarded for acts of valour so exceptional that they transcend duty itself. It represents moments when individuals, in the most difficult and dangerous circumstances imaginable, chose courage over fear, selflessness over safety and service over self.

Canada has been home to some of the most extraordinary individuals at times of conflict, but we also know, and history has shown us, that not every act of heroism has been formally recognized. In some cases, decisions were made in the fog of war. In others, documentation was incomplete. And in still others, biases or systemic barriers may have played a role.

This motion does not rewrite history, but it strengthens it. It ensures that when questions remain, we are willing to revisit them with integrity. It says to Canadian veterans, "We are still listening."

I'd like to take a moment to thank Blaine McLeod, MLA for Lumsden–Morse and the Deputy Speaker in Saskatchewan, for informing me about their government's "valour in the presence" committee, chaired by four-star General Rick Hillier, the former Chief of the Defence Staff of the Canadian Armed Forces. Its objective similarly "calls on the government of Canada to establish an independent military honours review board to review veterans' cases where evidence suggests Victoria Cross criteria were met." Their mission is to educate and share the heroic experiences of these brave individuals and recognize soldiers who have displayed exceptional courage and sacrifice.

0930

Now, in my own community of Oakville North–Burlington, I've had the privilege of meeting many veterans and active service members. They are our neighbours, volunteers, mentors and community leaders. They are the people we see at Remembrance Day ceremonies, standing

quietly, often without seeking recognition, often in the cold, rain or snow.

In communities like Oakville and Burlington, remembrance is not abstract, it is personal. We gather at our local cenotaphs, we hear the stories passed down through generations, we see families who carry the legacy of service with pride, and in those moments, we are reminded that behind every uniform is a person with a family, with a story and with sacrifices that often extend far beyond the battlefield.

In fact, when I have visited Oakville Royal Canadian Legion Branch 486 and Legion Branch 114, where I am a member, I've heard stories of service and sacrifice. I've left with a deep sense of gratitude and a renewed appreciation for the freedoms and community we often take for granted.

I'd also like to highlight for a moment my visit in 2024 to the Republic of Cyprus, to mark the 50th anniversary of the illegal invasion and occupation of Cyprus by Türkiye, where I had the privilege of honouring our Canadian peacekeepers, 25,000 of whom have served in Cyprus over the years.

Standing in the United Nations buffer zone is a monument dedicated to the 28 Canadians who lost serving their lives there. It was also another stark reminder of the vital role Canadians continue to play far beyond our borders to mediate peace in places of conflict. This is why getting recognition right matters: because when we honour one individual properly, we honour them all.

This motion is also about trust, Speaker: trust that our institutions are willing to revisit decisions when new evidence comes to light; trust that recognition is not frozen in time, but responsive to truth; and trust that no act of extraordinary courage will be forgotten simply because it was overlooked. An independent military honours review board would provide exactly that. It would bring expertise, impartiality and transparency to the process. It would ensure that cases are assessed based on merit and evidence, free from political influence and grounded in fairness. And, importantly, it would give families, many of whom have waited decades, the opportunity to have their loved ones' stories fully and properly considered.

We should also reflect on the broader message that it sends to those currently serving. To the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces today, this motion affirms that their country stands behind them not only in moments of service but in how their service is remembered. It reinforces that acts of bravery will not be lost to time, that Canada takes seriously its responsibility to honour those who have gone above and beyond, and that we are committed to ensuring that recognition is not just timely, but right.

This motion is also about national unity. Honouring Canadian veterans transcends partisanship. It transcends region. It transcends ideology. It is something that brings Canadians together.

In Oakville North–Burlington, as across this province and country, we see that unity every November 11. People of all backgrounds, all ages and all walks of life come

together to say two simple words: “Thank you.” This motion builds on that spirit. It turns gratitude into action.

Now, some may ask, “Why revisit the past?” Let me offer one compelling example. It's that of Sergeant Tommy Prince, one of Canada's most decorated Indigenous soldiers. Serving with extraordinary distinction during the Second World War and the Korean War, Sergeant Prince carried out acts of bravery that many historians and veterans believe met the threshold for the Victoria Cross. Despite his remarkable service, including operating behind enemy lines and maintaining critical communications under dangerous conditions, he was never awarded the decoration. His case continues to be raised as an example of how systemic barriers and the realities of the time may have prevented full recognition.

In my own community and by extension the region of Halton, there is a proud and long-standing military tradition, with many residents having served with distinction in conflicts such as the First World War, Second World War and the Korean War.

It underscores why a modern, independent review process is so important to ensure that courage of this magnitude is never overlooked, and that every Canadian who demonstrated the highest level of valour is given the consideration they deserve. Because recognition delayed is still recognition worth pursuing, and because the values that underpin the Victoria Cross—courage, sacrifice and honour—are timeless. If there are individuals whose actions met that standard, then we have a responsibility to ensure their stories are told accurately and completely.

Let me close with this, Speaker: In every community, including my own, there are families who carry stories of service, stories of bravery that may never have made headlines, but that live on in memory. This motion tells those families that their stories matter, that Canada is willing to listen and that when it comes to honouring extraordinary courage, we are committed to getting it right.

So let us move forward with this motion. Let us support the creation of an independent military honours review board and let us ensure that the legacy of those who served is recognized with the dignity, fairness and respect they deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member for Mississauga East–Cooksville.

MPP Silvia Gualtieri: Today, I'm here to speak about courage—not the kind of courage that lives comfortably in stories or statues, but the courage that is demonstrated in the dust and chaos of war. The kind that comes from young men and women who stand in the breach where everything is on the line. The kind of courage that in our nation's long history of military service has shaped Canada's reputation for duty, sacrifice and valour.

One such Canadian was Private Jess Laroche. He was born in 1983. Like many who wear our nation's uniform, he was quiet, humble and deeply committed to his brothers and sisters in arms. He joined the first battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment and deployed to Afghanistan in 2006 during one of the most dangerous and

violent phases of the conflict in Kandahar province. He was just 23 years old.

What happened on October 14 in that year has since become one of the most extraordinary stories of modern Canadian military bravery. That afternoon, Private Larochelle was operating an isolated observation post on the flank of his company. His comrades nearby were tending to a light armoured vehicle that had been struck by an improvised explosive device. Without warning, Taliban fighters attacked with rifles, machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades, and Private Larochelle's position took a direct hit.

The blast killed Sergeant Darcy Tedford and Private Blake Williamson and gravely wounded three others. Private Larochelle himself suffered a blown eardrum, a detached retina and a cracked vertebrae in his neck and back. He was alone, he was severely wounded, and the enemy was closing in.

Yet he did not withdraw. He did not seek cover; instead, he fought. Despite his injuries, Private Larochelle got his damaged machine gun working long enough to hold off the assault until he ran out of ammunition. Then, in an act so rare it borders on the unbelievable, he turned to the M72 rocket launchers stored in the post. One after another—15 in total—he launched rockets at an attacking force of 20 to 40 insurgents, buying time for his company to mount a defence and preventing the Taliban from reaching their main objective.

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His actions saved lives. Without Private Larochelle, the attack would have reached the company line, and Canada may have lost far more soldiers that day.

For this extraordinary act of self-sacrifice, Private Larochelle was awarded the Star of Military Valour in 2007, Canada's second-highest decoration for bravery in the presence of the enemy. The very same day he received this honour, he was medically discharged from the Canadian Armed Forces. His wounds—physical, emotional and psychological—never fully healed. Private Larochelle passed away in 2023 at just 40 years of age.

Since 2021, more than 14,000 Canadians—veterans, families, historians, former generals and everyday citizens—have been calling for Private Larochelle's actions to be considered for the Canadian Victoria Cross. Their case is compelling. Madam Speaker, the time has come for Ontario and Canada to consider Afghanistan-era cases, especially Private Larochelle's, for Victoria Cross eligibility.

That's why, to continue Ontario's work to honour veterans, our province will join in signing the letter urging the federal government to establish an independent military honours review board. It's time to take this critical step. We have waited far too long.

Canada created its Victoria Cross in 1993. Unlike Australia, New Zealand or the United Kingdom, Canada has never awarded this modern version—not once. Other nations recognized extraordinary valour in Afghanistan with their highest honours; Canada has not. Today we find ourselves asking whether our process, not our soldiers, fell short.

Private Larochelle's citation for the Star of Military Valour reads like those awarded the Victoria Cross in earlier wars. Retired General Rick Hillier has said plainly that Private Larochelle's actions would have merited the Victoria Cross in previous eras. Veterans who were on the ground that day have insisted the same, yet the process remains closed.

There is no mechanism in Canada—none—to review past military honours even when new evidence, testimonies or historical analyses emerge. This is unlike our allies, who maintain independent review processes capable of reassessing whether soldiers receive recognition they deserve. So today, we must confront an uncomfortable truth: When systems cannot self-correct, brave men and women may be remembered as less than what they truly were.

Private Larochelle was not the only Canadian whose actions in Afghanistan raised questions about whether our honour system has kept pace with the realities of modern warfare. Many soldiers fought under extreme conditions, fighting in complex, unconventional combat, with small units, isolated positions and immense personal risk. Afghanistan produced moments of heroism every bit as profound as Vimy Ridge, Normandy and Korea. Our soldiers are willing to give everything, and our honour system must be capable of giving them their due.

This is why today I stand to call clearly and unequivocally for the government of Canada to establish an independent military honours review board. This is not about politics. It's not about rewriting history. It's about ensuring that history is written truthfully, fully and honourably.

If we fail to act, we risk telling future generations that extraordinary courage is something we admire only in hindsight—never in policy, never in recognition and never in the medals we award to those who risk their lives for their country. But if we act, if we create a fair, transparent and independent review mechanism, we send a different message: that in Canada, bravery does not get lost in bureaucracy, that sacrifice does not go unrecognized, that heroism, no matter when or where it occurs, will always be honoured.

Private Jess Larochelle's story is not simply one of valour; it is one of responsibility—ours, not his. His valour has already been proven. What remains is for Canada to determine whether we have honoured it accurately.

So, in Private Larochelle's name and in the name of every Canadian soldier whose courage may deserve a second, fair-minded, look, I call on the federal government to establish an independent military honours review board and to begin its work by reviewing the Afghanistan era. Because Canada must never hesitate to honour its heroes.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I want to welcome our extraordinary people here today, our service members. I want to thank you for all you have done. It is always a pleasure to say thank you. Those are two small words; however, they mean an extraordinary amount of heartfelt feelings. Thank you.

Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member from Nickel Belt and the member from Ottawa West–Nepean.

It is always a pleasure and a distinct honour to rise in this House to speak on behalf of veterans and active members of the Canadian Forces across Ontario and across Canada. As shadow minister for veterans, Legions and military affairs, I am proud to speak to this motion today.

Today we are talking about veterans, we are talking about service, we are talking about sacrifice and we are talking about recognition. At the end of that conversation is the Victoria Cross. The Victoria Cross is not just another medal; it is the highest military honour in our country. It represents acts of bravery in the presence of an enemy that goes beyond the call of duty, often at the risk of one's own life. It is reserved for the extraordinary, for those who, in a moment of unimaginable danger, choose courage over fear. In doing so it is representing the very best over Canada.

Established in 1856, the Victoria Cross was awarded to British and Commonwealth forces, including Canadians. In total, 81 Canadians received the Victoria Cross under that system, recognized for their heroism from the Crimean War through the Second World War.

In 1993, Canada created its own honours system. It included our own Victoria Cross. Yet, Speaker, in over three decades, it has never been awarded—not once. The last Canadian to receive it, Sergeant Ernest “Smokey” Smith, was recognized for his bravery in Italy during the Second World War. He passed away in 2005. Since then, the medal has remained quite silent—not because bravery has disappeared, not because sacrifice has diminished, but because we have not found a way to recognize modern acts of valour at that level.

Speaker, when we talk about veterans, we are not just talking about history; we are talking about ordinary people: people within our communities, people within our Legion halls, people who served quietly and came home carrying experiences most of us will never fully understand.

This issue is quite deeply personal to me. Both my grandfathers served in the Second World War. They came back, like so many other veterans of that generation, quiet. They did not speak often about what they saw. They did not look for recognition. They carried their stories, their bravery and their sacrifice with quiet integrity. That is something we see again and again with all of our veterans: a deep sense of duty, quiet pride and, often, a reluctance to ask for recognition.

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That is why it is our responsibility to ensure that this recognition is there: Because bravery does not always announce itself. Sometimes, it's only visible if we are willing to look for it. The creation of an independent military honours review board gives us that opportunity, an opportunity to reassess how we evaluate acts of bravery, an opportunity to look at modern conflicts, especially Afghanistan, where Canadian Armed Forces members demonstrated extraordinary courage under fire—again, a personal moment for me: My son has done three tours of

duty. And it gives us an opportunity to ensure those who meet the highest standard are not overlooked.

We know there are stories—stories of Canadians who risked everything for their fellow soldiers, stories that live on in regimental history, stories shared quietly between veterans, and stories carried by families, often for generations—and yet none of these acts have been recognized with the Victoria Cross. This is not about diminishing other honours; it is about ensuring that the highest level of recognition in our country remains meaningful and accessible when it's deserved.

Across Ontario and across Canada, Royal Canadian Legions are at the heart of this very conversation. They are more than buildings; they are places of memory, places of support and places where veterans gather, where stories are preserved and where younger generations learn what service truly, truly means. In those Legion halls, there is a clear understanding of courage. Courage did not end in 1945; it continued in Korea, in peacekeeping missions around the world, Afghanistan and other wars. Veterans know this; they have lived it.

Speaker, if the Victoria Cross remains unawarded indefinitely, we risk allowing it to fade—to fade away not in name, but in meaning. We risk turning it into something that only belongs to the past. But it was never meant to be that; it was meant to be a living honour, one that recognizes the bravest among us all, no matter when they served. The nature of warfare has changed, but courage has not.

In Afghanistan, Canadian soldiers faced complex and dangerous conditions every day. They dealt with insurgent threats, improvised explosive devices and constant uncertainty. They made split-second decisions to protect their fellow soldiers—their brothers and sisters—to protect civilians, to complete their mission. Their actions, by any measure, stand alongside those previous generations, and yet none have received a Victoria Cross. That is why reviewing our current process is so important: It introduces transparency, it introduces fairness and it ensures that recognition is based on merit, not limited by an outdated process or by hesitation.

I spend a great deal of time speaking with veterans in my community, and there is a common thread in those conversations: a deep sense of duty, of quiet pride. I'm reminded of the moment in 2005 when Sergeant “Smokey” Smith laid in state in the House of Commons. Hundreds of Canadians lined up to pay their respects. That moment told us something very important: Canadians want to honour their veterans not just in words, but in action.

Yet many veterans today feel very overlooked. Some have spoken openly about this. They feel that their sacrifices have not been fully recognized, not because they are seeking accolades but because recognition reflects respect. Tens of thousands of Canadians have supported calls to revisit how we award our highest honour. Advocacy has come from veterans, from families, from military leaders. And still, too often, the answer has been no. We are told that no one has met the standards. We must ask ourselves: What do the standards require? Because

when we look at the actions of Canadian service members in modern conflicts, the bravery is undeniable.

Speaker, Canada has always taken pride in honouring our veterans. We mark Remembrance Day—I brought that forward—to remember modern-day veterans, to remember all. We wear a poppy. We teach our children about Vimy Ridge, about world wars, about sacrifices made in conflicts around the world. But honouring veterans is not only about looking back; it's about recognizing those who serve today and have served in the past. The Victoria Cross must not be frozen in time. It must evolve alongside the country it represents: our Canada.

If there are individuals who meet the criteria—and I believe there are—then we must have the responsibility to recognize them, otherwise we risk sending a message that no act today could ever measure up to those of the past, and that is not true. Speaker, behind every act of extraordinary bravery is quite a story: a family waiting at home, children hoping their parents return safely and sometimes a loss that can never truly be measured.

For some, the Victoria Cross has been awarded posthumously. It has become not just a symbol of courage, but the ultimate sacrifice. The reality has not changed. Families across this country still carry that weight.

Ensuring we have a fair and independent process to access acts of valour honours not only the individual, but everyone connected to the story. This conversation is about trust—trust that when Canadians put the uniform on, their country will stand behind them; trust that their actions will be recognized appropriately; and trust that our institutions are capable of evolving. An independent review board will help build that trust. It allows past and present cases to be examined thoroughly. It ensures that no act of extraordinary bravery is overlooked, simply because it was not fully understood at the time.

Speaker, there is something deeply Canadian about this moment. We are not lowering the bar. We are reaffirming that that standard remains as high as ever. But we are also ensuring that our processes are capable of recognizing those who meet it. Because if we never award the Victoria Cross, we must ask ourselves: Is it because bravery no longer exists, or is it because we have failed to recognize it? I believe it is the latter, and that is why this motion deserves our support.

A similar motion has already passed unanimously in Saskatchewan, so let us join them. Let us stand with veterans across Canada. Let us support a process that is fair, independent and reflective of our values we hold dear. Most importantly, let us ensure that those who have demonstrated extraordinary courage in service to Canada are recognized, because that is what our veterans deserve.

Speaker, I spoke for several minutes with my son yesterday, and he said it's about time. Let us recognize the men and women who have braved and let us recognize the pasts that never made it home to Canadian soil.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I will be sharing my time with the member from Ottawa West–Nepean and the member from Waterloo.

I would like to start by thanking the veterans who came here today for your courage, for your service. Thank you for being here.

Moi, je suis la fille d'un ancien combattant. Mon père, Camille Gélinas, a servi dans l'aviation canadienne. Il a été premièrement basé à Zweibrücken en Allemagne, pour après aller dans le nord de l'Afrique, et a servi pendant la guerre de Corée.

C'est un sujet dont on s'est parlé souvent, moi et mon père. La Croix de Victoria a commencé le 5 février 1856 pour récompenser la bravoure durant la guerre de Crimée. Elle symbolise un dévouement ultime au devoir, et elle est la médaille la plus prestigieuse. Elle a été décernée à des membres des forces armées du Commonwealth, incluant 81 Canadiens jusqu'en 1945.

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En 1993, une version canadienne spécifique a été approuvée, avec l'inscription latine « Pro Valore », mais aucune d'entre elles n'a encore été décernée. Un fait intéressant, monsieur le Président, c'est que la médaille est fabriquée à partir du bronze de canons russes qui ont été capturés pendant la guerre de Corée. Elles s'ajoutent aux décorations existantes, dépassant en préséance toutes autres médailles.

Que personne n'ait reçu la Croix de Victoria de 1945 à 1993, et que personne n'ait reçu la nouvelle médaille qui a été créée en 1993, la Croix de Victoria canadienne, c'est difficile à croire. Il faut changer les choses.

En ce moment, la demande au gouvernement est simple. Une demande quasi-identique a été faite par le gouvernement de la Saskatchewan. On demande au gouvernement du Canada de créer un comité indépendant d'examen des distinctions militaires chargé d'examiner les cas des anciens combattants pour lesquels des éléments de preuve suggèrent que les critères d'attribution de la Croix de Victoria canadienne étaient établis.

C'est quelque chose de neutre. C'est quelque chose qui nous permettrait de dire merci, d'honorer les gens que l'on sait devraient l'avoir. Il y a de la bravoure dans les Forces armées, dans tout le système militaire. On doit créer un processus qui nous permet de les honorer au plus haut niveau, et ça, c'est ce qu'on demande. Le service extraordinaire des Canadiens et Canadiennes doit être reconnu.

Comme je vous ai dit, c'est une conversation que j'ai eue avec mon père souvent. Mon père est resté ami avec d'autres vétérans et c'est une conversation que, je te dirais, tu peux aller dans n'importe quelle Légion et c'est une conversation que tu vas entendre.

Les gens veulent que ça change. Les gens savent qu'il y a des Canadiens et Canadiennes qui devraient recevoir cette médaille. Mettons en place un système pour que ça devienne possible. C'est tout ce qu'on demande. Reconnaître la bravoure, c'est quelque chose de très canadien. C'est quelque chose qui doit être fait.

Je vais être fier de voter en faveur de cette motion et je partage mon temps avec mes collègues.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member from Ottawa West–Nepean.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: It's an honour for me to rise to speak on behalf of the residents of Ottawa West–Nepean in support of this motion, which is calling on the government of Canada to establish an independent review board to assess the service of former members of the Canadian Forces to determine whether or not any of them have met the criteria for our country's highest award of recognition for service, the Victoria Cross.

As I begin my remarks, I want to—as my colleagues have already done—recognize the veterans and service members who are in our gallery, and to add my voice to those who have said thank you for your service and sacrifices on behalf of our country.

I would also just like to recognize, Speaker, we've heard some stories shared already this morning. I know our colleague the MPP for Kanata–Carleton will be speaking later, and she has also served on behalf of our country.

And we've heard some stories already this morning from family members, from the MPP for St. Catharines, who has been both the child of service members and the mother of people who served on behalf of our country, and the MPP for Nickel Belt, whose father served. And I'm sure there are more members of this House who have made the sacrifices that family members make: being afraid and worried for their children or their parents or their grandparents.

As the MPP for Ottawa West–Nepean, I have, as I'm sure all of our colleagues here have, attended numerous Remembrance Day ceremonies—both public ceremonies and ones that the Legion has organized in long-term-care facilities. So I've had the opportunity to speak with many people—with veterans who share their experience and their pride in having served with distinction, their close bonds with their comrades, and their fond memories of the people they served with, but also the mark that their experience of service has left on them. You may come home alive, but it doesn't mean that you're coming home unchanged from your experience.

I've also spoken with many family members who, again, speak with great pride of the service of their loved one, but they've also spoken about the sacrifices—the fear and the worry, the constant change of deployments and disruption in their lives, and also the loneliness of being without their loved one while they're serving somewhere else.

So I think it's important that we recognize that it is not just the person who serves in the Canadian Forces who is making a sacrifice. It's also the impact of having your loved one come home changed by their experience that I think we need to acknowledge as well.

When you have all of these conversations, it's impossible to not understand the immensity of the commitment and the sacrifice that people are making when they make that decision to serve, and the sense of duty and pride and honour and love for our country and for the people who remain here that they feel when they make that commitment. When you truly understand the depth of that commitment and sacrifice, I think it creates in all of us a

desire that we recognize it to the greatest extent that we possibly can—even just saying thank you.

This past year, a veteran who is a friend and has been a campaign volunteer for me filled in for me at one of the Remembrance Day ceremonies in Ottawa West–Nepean because I can't be at all of them at one time. He said, in his many years of service, it was the first time that someone recognized his service, in asking him to play this public role. It was deeply meaningful to me to see how much such a simple gesture meant to my friend.

I think it's very important that we think about how we can honour these people who have served our country,

In the case of the Victoria Cross, which recognizes the greatest level of bravery, we should certainly be asking ourselves, are there people who are meeting that standard of bravery and what can we do to ensure that they are appropriately honoured? When nobody in our country has been awarded the Victoria Cross since World War II, we know, then, that we are failing to recognize people who have engaged in acts of very deep bravery. So I hope that with a motion like this, which the Saskatchewan Parliament has already passed unanimously—and if Ontario adds our voice, we will create that pressure for the federal government to create this independent review board to determine who meets that threshold and ensure that we are appropriately honouring those who have sacrificed.

I want to add that at this most recent Remembrance Day, when I had the opportunity to share a few words at the Blood Red memorial in Britannia Park, I included in my remarks the fact that part of the way we say thank you to our veterans is to ensure that there are programs and services and supports that are in place when they return home from their service, and that we are there for them the way that they were there for us. After the service ended, I had a few veterans come up to me with tears in their eyes, to say thank you for those remarks, but to tell me that they do not feel adequately supported, that they feel like our country and our province has been letting them down, that they do not have access to the health care and to the home supports and to other programming that they need. In particular, the topic of health care came up again and again—their access to a primary care physician who can make a diagnosis, who can make a referral to other programs. I spoke to a woman whose brother was a veteran, and she told me about the great lengths she went to to try to find a primary care physician for him who could connect him to all of these services.

So I would encourage all of us—I believe we can count on the unanimous support of this chamber, that we can all agree we need to support our veterans. I hope that we will all support this motion, and I hope that we will continue to look at what we can do as a province to ensure that we are doing everything we can to honour, respect and support our veterans.

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The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member for Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It truly is an honour and a privilege to join the debate this morning on the member from Brampton North's motion to review the military

honours review board. It's a very important moment for us as a province to have this debate.

Every time I stand in this House, I think of my grandfather who fought in World War II, Ernest Morgan; and my dad, who was part of the armed forces. I was born on an army base in West Germany, Iserlohn. Every time we have the opportunity to honour, to thank and to improve the lives of veterans and those who are serving, we should do so.

My colleague who's the critic for this portfolio, the member from St. Catharines, gave a very good outline of the Victoria Cross and the importance of the Victoria Cross. She referenced the fact that it is not a common honour. It is the most prestigious military honour in our country, and, in fact, it is the highest-ranking honour in the Canadian Honours System, ranking higher than any other national award. The fact that it has not been awarded in many years should give us all pause, especially in the environment that we currently exist in, where you have a very volatile geopolitical environment with the President of the United States truly causing chaos in the world, both economically and from a violence perspective.

As you know, I represent the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians. The Commonwealth, in my view—those 56 countries that first came together to align their initiatives, their economies and their goals as nations for their populations—has never been more important, in my mind.

I would like, though, to take this opportunity to give the government another chance, perhaps, to honour veterans. We are one of the only legislatures in the country that does not fly the “Lest We Forget” flag. I raised this issue yesterday through a petition. I'm currently working with retired Chief Petty Officer Donald Eenkooren, from the Wilmot and Kitchener-Conestoga area, who is really determined and personally reaching out to every province to find out what their policy is around flying the “Lest We Forget” flag.

But for those of you who don't know, every year on Remembrance Day, obviously, all of us go to our Legions—I'm a member at Branch 530 in Waterloo—and we honour our military's selfless service to the nation. This should happen every single day, in my view. Veterans' Week is when Ontarians come together to remember past and present veterans who proudly served this great country, including many who paid the ultimate sacrifice.

The “Lest We Forget” flag is a symbol used to honour veterans, active members of the Canadian Armed Forces, as well as first responders and their families, recognizing their sacrifices, dedication and service to our communities and country throughout history. Veterans' service should be recognized and honoured at Queen's Park.

I think today's motion sets the groundwork for us to also be a Legislative Assembly in Canada that raises the “Lest We Forget” flag. More of Canada's veterans live in Ontario than in any other province in the country. We are one of the largest provinces and we have the largest number of veterans.

I respectfully ask that the government take this into consideration going forward. There is no reason why we shouldn't be raising the “Lest We Forget” flag, honouring veterans at Queen's Park in a very formal way to ensure that they see themselves reflected in this place, along with the health and mental health supports that, of course, we should be supplying to everyone who puts their lives on the line for this great country.

Thank you very much to the member.

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

Debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ONTARIO TRILLIUM FOUNDATION GRANTS

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Earlier this month, I was proud to join the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Gaming at the Small Arms Inspection Building in Lakeview to announce that our government is investing over \$47 million this year through the Ontario Trillium Foundation's Grow Grant program to help 153 non-profit organizations, First Nations and municipalities to deliver programs that promote healthy lifestyles and support arts, culture and heritage.

This includes \$403,000 to CreativeHub 1352 to expand their arts and culture programs in Mississauga–Lakeshore. The Small Arms Inspection Building has been a hub for collaboration, innovation and expression, and this investment will ensure it continues to grow as a space where ideas, talent and community come together.

Alzheimer Society Peel, based in Port Credit, will receive \$312,000 to expand their programs that support seniors living with dementia and their caregivers. This funding will help provide essential services, education and compassionate care to ensure that families affected by dementia are not alone and have access to supports they need, close to home.

As we look forward to the budget later this afternoon, I also want to thank these organizations, and so many others from across Mississauga–Lakeshore, for their important contributions at our pre-budget consultation in Mississauga earlier this year.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I rise today to speak directly to young people in this province, because we know it has never been harder to be a young person than it is today. Higher education already feels out of reach for you. It's impossible to find a decent-paying job; that's because youth unemployment is at an all-time high. You struggle to find a decent, affordable place to rent. Grocery prices, as we know, are through the roof. You are right to be shocked and angered that the Premier chose to make things even more difficult for you by decimating OSAP.

I've heard from you, I've heard from parents and I've even heard from your grandparents that this government's

decision to cut OSAP is devastating. I've heard from students at McMaster and Mohawk and even high school students who must make the impossible choice between graduating with a huge debt or, unfortunately, not going to school at all. I've also heard young people say that protecting OSAP is about ensuring that every student has the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background or financial situation. But this government's cruel message to you is: You are on your own.

This afternoon, the government will table their budget, and because they're already half a trillion dollars in debt—make no mistake, this government is spending big on luxury spas, fantasy highway tunnels, so we can only hope this afternoon that they will do the right thing and cancel these cuts to OSAP. You must understand that when you invest in young people, you are investing in the future of Ontario.

IRANIAN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION OF ONTARIO

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Today I rise to recognize the outstanding work of the Iranian Women's Organization of Ontario. For over three decades, this organization has helped women and families build new lives right here in Ontario, offering settlement services, employment support and, most importantly, a strong sense of community.

Today, as Persian communities mark Nowruz, the Persian new year, at a time of hope and renewal, many are doing so with heavy hearts. Families here and abroad are facing the pain of conflict, separation and uncertainty while holding onto hopes for peace.

Here at home, the Iranian Women's Organization of Ontario, IWO, continues to be a source of strength, providing not only services but compassion, connection and empowerment. However, this work would not be possible without their dedicated staff and volunteers.

I want to especially recognize the leadership of IWO President Dr. Fariba Bashiri, the entire IWO team and welcome Mahsa and Shuko, who are with us today in the gallery. To all of you, we say, Dasté shomā dard nakoné. Thank you for your tireless work.

Speaker, we stand in solidarity with Iranian Canadians in their resilience and in their hopes for a free and democratic Iran. I ask all members to join me in thanking the Iranian Women's Organization of Ontario. Sepâs-gožâram. Thank you.

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STANLEY'S OLDE MAPLE LANE FARM

MPP George Darouze: I rise today to recognize an extraordinary milestone for a cherished local business in my riding of Carleton, Stanley's Olde Maple Lane Farm, which is celebrating its 200th anniversary this year. For two centuries, Stanley's maple farm has been a symbol of hard work, family tradition and rural pride.

What began as a small maple operation in the early 1800s has grown into a loved destination where families from across Ontario come together to experience the sweetness of our province's maple heritage. Generations

of the Stanley family, including Earl, Ron, Kathy and their kids, have carried forward the craft of maple syrup production, welcoming new and returning visitors each season.

It was a pleasure to personally attend this 200th anniversary ceremony tree tapping on February 28 alongside political leaders across Ottawa and eastern Ontario.

Anniversaries like this remind us that family farms are the backbone of our rural communities. They strengthen our local economies and pass on traditions from one generation to the next.

On behalf of the Legislature, I would like to congratulate the Stanley family and everyone at Stanley's maple farm on 200 remarkable years and wish them continued success for many generations to come.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Peggy Sattler: London West constituents are deeply concerned about this government's plan to rewrite freedom-of-information laws. While Londoners struggle with rising unemployment, grocery bills that get bigger every month and a health care system in crisis, it seems that this government's biggest priority is changing the rules to hide the truth.

Let's be clear, Speaker: The government's FOI changes have nothing to do with protecting people's personal information. There are already legislative protections for that. This is about hiding government business by blocking access to records held by the Premier, cabinet ministers and political staff. It is about keeping the Premier's personal cellphone records secret, even after he was ordered by the courts to release them.

Without freedom of information, Ontarians and the RCMP would never have known about the greenbelt scandal. The proposed FOI changes will weaken this kind of transparency and accountability for generations to come while giving the government more unchecked power.

Speaker, FOI laws exist so citizens can understand how government decisions are made, who influenced the decisions and whether the public interest is being served. An honest government does not hide from the people. It does not disparage the Information and Privacy Commissioner when serious concerns are raised. Ontarians deserve a government that plays by the rules, not one that rewrites them to avoid scrutiny.

NU-TECH PRECISION METALS

MPP Billy Denault: Last week, I had the pleasure of touring Nu-Tech Precision Metals, a trusted manufacturer of seamless titanium pipe and tube in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, located in my hometown of Arnprior.

Nu-Tech plays a critical role in Ontario's nuclear supply chain and supports industries across the province. During my visit, I learned more about their work designing and manufacturing one of the most essential components of the Candu reactor, the pressure tube.

It was also great to connect with the people behind that success, employees like Ryan and Trevor, the local man-

agement team, and even my former boss—actually, my first boss from Arnprior McDonald's, Lana.

While there, we were proud to celebrate Brian on his upcoming retirement and recognize his many years of dedicated service to the company. I wish him all the best in his next chapter.

Speaker, the nuclear sector is a major economic driver in the Ottawa Valley, from Canadian Nuclear Laboratories in Chalk River, where the Candu reactor was born, to BWXT, to Nu-Tech and to the many local suppliers, vendors and innovators that support this industry every day. What stands out the most isn't just the technology; it's the people—skilled workers, engineers, tradespeople and families who have built their lives around this industry and continue to pass that knowledge on to the next generation.

In the Ottawa Valley, we don't just support the nuclear industry; we help power it. I'm proud to stand in this House and recognize the people and communities in Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke who continue to make that possible every single day.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Over 21,000 children living with disabilities are not in school today because the supports they need are not there, and this leaves parents no choice but to stay home.

Trustees are the door parents knock on when they need advocacy, but trustees are being replaced by unaccountable, politically appointed supervisors, with nothing to recommend them except their loyalty to the minister's narrow, authoritarian ideology. This minister is so afraid of accountability, he has actually forbidden the live-streaming of special education advisory meetings.

Make no mistake: The very existence of special education is being threatened. How could it not be when schools are dealing with enormous class sizes, the direct effect of \$6.3 billion in cuts to public education?

As this minister hastens us towards educational totalitarianism, where his thoughts are the only thoughts allowed and no one else dare raise a critical concern, we must remember that the game of this government has always been to kill the public in order to enrich the private.

The well-being of children with disabilities is not even a blip on this agenda. If the minister were capable of admitting cause and effect, he would get out of the way, restore funding to public education, respect the work of trustees and allow educators to educate.

MANUFACTURING SECTOR IN NEWMARKET–AURORA

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: The manufacturing sector in Newmarket–Aurora had a great start to the year with a more than \$17.4-million investment by four of our local businesses. I had the great privilege of announcing over \$3.6 million in support for these projects from the Ontario government.

In Aurora, Echo Guardian was the recipient of the Advanced Manufacturing and Innovation Competitiveness

Stream, allowing them to scale production that produces high-quality, sustainable packaging being made right here in Ontario for the global market.

In Newmarket, Esco Engineering and Bramden Precision were the recipients of the Ontario Together Trade Fund, allowing these businesses to adapt and stay competitive by reshoring critical tooling capacity and building a more resilient supply chain here at home, all the while creating jobs and allowing employees to build critical trade skill sets that they will have for life.

Eurospec Manufacturing, recipient of the Ontario Automotive Modernization Program—their investment will automate production monitoring while boosting the company's capacity.

In total, these investments will create 56 good-paying jobs and help protect 347 existing positions.

CHARLES H. BEST DIABETES CENTRE

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm honoured this morning to recognize our government's investment of \$3 million into the Charles H. Best Diabetes Centre in Whitby. The upgraded centre will include more clinical space, private consulting rooms and child-friendly areas that support integrated patient care and enable the centre to nearly double its capacity from 2,000 to 3,800 patients annually. By expanding access to high-quality diabetes services, our government is helping prevent serious health complications and reducing pressure on the broader health care system.

Speaker, I want to extend my thanks to Minister Jones and Minister Bethlenfalvy for their ongoing commitment to the Charles H. Best Diabetes Centre and its innovative work. Their support has ensured that residents in Whitby and across Durham region will now receive dependable lifelong care when and where they need it.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Will Bouma: I would like to welcome page John Thayil from Brantford–Brant to the House as page captain today and especially his family, parents Jo and Jinu Thayil. Welcome to your House.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I would like to recognize people who are here from the Federation of Ontario Law Associations and the County of Carleton Law Association. I will name Robin Brown, Mimi Marrello, Michelle LaPierre and Kimberly Hyslop. Also from my riding: from the Sandy Hill Community Health Centre, Julie Tessier. Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Today, I'm pleased to welcome Nancy Hutchinson from St. John Ambulance, an Ontario Corps partner. Welcome to Queen's Park.

1030

Hon. George Pirie: Good morning. I'd like to welcome Dave Plourde, president of FONOM; Rick Dumas, president of NOMA; and Kraymr Grenke from Timmins, who's the chair of the Timmins Police Service Board and chair of Northern College. Welcome.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'd also like to extend a warm welcome to the Federation of Ontario Law Associations. There are representatives coming from 46 different county and district law areas. They're here at Queen's Park for their lobby day. I want to thank Ian Hu, who's their director of law policy and advocacy, and I look forward to my meeting with Curtis Pineiro, Chantal McCollum and Astha Dhanda—I apologize for mispronouncing your name.

Also, to remind everybody that FOLA is having a reception at lunch time—I hope we can all join them.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I'd like to welcome all of my colleagues and my learned co-counsel from the Federation of Ontario Law Associations.

MPP Monica Ciriello: I would like to welcome as well the Federation of Ontario Law Associations, including Allen Wynperle, Robin Brown, Jennifer Rooke, and from Hamilton specifically, Melissa Craig and Matthew Johnstone. Welcome to your House.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I'd like to welcome to the House today my friend Jeni Lambert-Bowyer from Haldimand–Norfolk. Jeni is the mastermind behind the amazing Facebook page Kindness Counts in Norfolk county. Welcome to the House, Jeni.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Today's page captain is Ronald, and I enjoyed having lunch with him yesterday—a spectacular, sparkling student from Oshawa.

But I'm here to introduce the parents of page Ronald from Oshawa: his father, Ron Lucero, and mother, Fanny Suarez Mendez. You must be so proud, and welcome to your House.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I'd like to introduce, in the gallery today, Captain Mike Harrison, Warrant Officer David Losier, Captain David Mack, Captain Tim Fieck, Sergeant Josh Ward and Kevin Reed.

Hon. David Piccini: I want to welcome students from Trinity College School in my riding who are here. Welcome to Queen's Park. I'm honoured to have all of you here today.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I would like to welcome Daniel Schmidt from Riverdale Collegiate. Welcome to your House today.

OPPOSITION DAY MOTIONS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): As members will be aware, there are two opposition day notices appearing on today's orders and notices paper for debate next week. Since only one opposition day debate may take place per meeting week, I am required to select which notice will be debated, pursuant to standing order 45(d).

Both notices were filed at essentially the same time, so I have based my decision on the relative opportunities for each party to file notices.

Out of the five opposition days that may be held this meeting period, the official opposition is entitled to three and the third party to two. Since the official opposition has the greater entitlement, and given that all opportunities remain for both parties to give notice, I have selected the motion standing in the name of the leader of the official

opposition for debate next week. The third party's notice of motion, filed by the member for Nepean, will therefore be removed from the order paper, but may be filed again at a later date.

I thank the House for its attention.

QUESTION PERIOD

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Jeff Burch: Good morning. My question is to the Premier.

The Financial Accountability Office projected this province will lose 9,000 front-line health care positions by next year. We are losing nurses faster than we are training or hiring them. Front-line workers at Niagara hospitals have been sounding the alarm for months. They know that in Niagara and across this province, short staffing, burnout and unsafe workloads are putting patient care at risk. We continue to see reductions in staffing due to hospital deficits created by this government.

Through you, Speaker, why is this government forcing hospitals to fire front-line workers?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Of course, we have increased hospital funding by over 50% in the province of Ontario since Premier Ford and our government came into office. That is a commitment to our hospital partners. It is also an assurance that we will work directly with them to a path to balance in the next three years.

You know, the member opposite talks about reductions. The truth is that we have seen a 15% increase in the number of nurses hired in our publicly funded system across Ontario—that, coupled with 100,000 nurses that have been registered since 2018; 30,000 nursing students, who are currently in our colleges and universities, who want to be part of our publicly funded system; and, again, a 15% increase in the number of nurses who are practising in Ontario today.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Ontario's health care system is under enormous strain. We know that: patients waiting hours in emergency rooms, surgeries delayed and nurses working back-to-back double shifts just to keep up.

Meanwhile, this government is firing nurses: 700 nurses and front-line health care jobs have been cut across Ontario since January 2025. St. Joe's health care in Hamilton is cutting 62 jobs. And because of your drastic provincial cuts, they were forced to cancel a planned expansion of a neonatal intensive care unit—newborns, Minister.

Families are being denied the critical care that they need. Why is this Premier cutting the nurses that our health care system desperately needs?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Do you remember that line, Speaker? “Don't let the facts get in the way of a good

argument.” I just said we’ve had a 15% increase in the number of nurses who are working in the province of Ontario.

We are making investments, whether it is in our long-term-care homes, whether it is in home and community care, whether it is in palliative care, our hospital system; and, of course, our multi-disciplinary primary care team, where we have seen a \$3.4-billion investment to make sure that family physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, dietitians, mental health workers work together in a multi-disciplinary team to make sure that we provide those services.

Are we asking our hospital partners to make sure that they ensure the money that we are funding—again, a 50% increase since Premier Ford came into office. Are we making sure that that is front-line care? One hundred per cent. We are committed to do that work with our hospital partners.

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

MPP Catherine McKenney: It was recently reported that Bruyère Health in Ottawa is eliminating 55 front-line positions, including 46 personal support workers and nine nurses. The Canadian Union of Public Employees says these layoffs are the result of major funding cuts by the provincial government. At a time when hospitals are already understaffed and patients are facing longer wait times and overcrowding, this government is allowing front-line care to be reduced across Ontario.

Speaker, my question is to the Premier. When will you stop making things worse for patients by allowing hundreds of front-line health care positions to be eliminated?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Only the NDP could do a math where a 50% increase to our hospital partners equates to a cut.

We have ensured that hospitals are prepared a path to balance—yes, a three-year path to balance—where we are asking them to look at those investments and ensure that they are actually going to front-line, patient-facing care.

Are they eliminating some vacant positions? Absolutely. Are they ensuring that the money that we are flowing to them is going to front-line, patient-facing bedside care? Yes, we are. Why? Because not only are we a partner to our hospitals and ensuring that they have the funds they need, but we are also asking them to make sure that that money is spent very specifically on front-line patient care.

1040

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Mr. Chris Glover: Shakira is a student with a disability, and she wants to attend college, but this government’s ODSP rates are so low—\$600 a month for housing—that they left 35,000 Ontarians with disabilities homeless. Now this government is cutting OSAP.

She wants to fulfill her potential and contribute to Ontario, but she sees people with disabilities becoming homeless, and some are even taking medical assistance in dying. So her question is, why is this government cutting OSAP and leaving ODSP rates so low that people with

disabilities cannot attend college, but instead are becoming homeless and some are even taking MAID?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: For the 50th time this week: We are not cutting OSAP. I don’t know how I can make that any clearer. OSAP funds will continue to be available.

Yes, we have changed the grant-to-loan ratio to ensure it is sustainable, because the Auditor General made it very, very clear in 2017 that a desperate Liberal government was trying to hang on to power and they changed the grant-to-loan ratio. It was clearly articulated by the Auditor General. Me and the Premier have been very clear since day one: This is to ensure the sustainability of the OSAP program.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: What used to be 85% grants is going to be 25% grants. It means that a lot of low- and middle-income students are going to be priced out of the opportunity to attend college or university.

T is a first-year York University student, and she’s one of four children of a sole-support mother. She and every other undergraduate student who relies on OSAP is facing an average \$3,400 additional debt because of the OSAP changes that this government is making. She’s wondering why this government is making our college and university system an opportunity only for the wealthy and they’re pricing out low- and middle-income students.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: The opposition needs to stop fear-mongering parents and students and they need to clarify that there is a significant amount of supports available to our students, whether it’s bursaries or grants through the universities that amount to \$1.8 billion every single year or our colleges that have their own bursaries and grants as well in the hundreds of millions of dollars. We have a Student Access Guarantee, which is a tuition set-aside. We’re going to enhance that Student Access Guarantee to ensure that our low- and medium-income students will always have the supports available to them.

I wish the member opposite would actually clarify that when students are coming to him concerned, because they’re only given half of the facts.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: You know what I’ll clarify? I have been to walkouts, high school students walking out of class in Oshawa and in Keswick and other cities across this province because they know that what this government is doing is going to hurt their opportunities for the future. They know that you are downloading tens of thousands of dollars of debt onto low- and middle-income students and they are disgusted with your actions, and your pompous replies are not helping.

Kaia is a single parent with two children who is completing her degree. At her daughter’s school, four teachers have been cut in one year. Educators are overwhelmed, classrooms are underfunded and recently, at every level,

education—elementary, secondary, college, university—is being cut.

She's asking: Why is this government so out of touch with the reality of what's happening in the schools, and why are you undermining our education systems in Ontario?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I was jumping out of my chair there when he called me pompous. I think that member needs to look in the mirror. I'll take that as a grain of salt. That part is unbelievably out of touch with the needs of the people of Ontario.

Speaker, when we cut and froze tuition in 2018—is we are saving the average of \$1,800 per university student since then and \$450 per college student. But I wish, I hope, that that member, when he's meeting with the students, will clarify his own leader's comments that we would like to get to a place where other provinces are at. We did get to a place where other provinces are at. We're exactly in the middle of the pack when it comes to the grant-to-loan ratios. Your own leader stated that in the media. Hopefully you've clarified that, but you know what? I won't give them that much credit, Speaker. They don't clarify anything with the students. They are fearmongering and rage-baiting students right now.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Premier. Madam Speaker, it's been eight years—eight long, hard years—and boys are falling behind in school, young men are struggling with mental health, and too many are unable to find a meaningful path to work. That didn't happen overnight; it happened under this Conservative government's watch.

Now, the federal Liberal government has announced a national strategy for young boys and men. Later today, this government will show Ontarians its priorities. Madam Speaker, will the Conservative government finally step up with real investment to address these challenges for young men, or will they keep making life harder and harder for this generation of young men?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Peterborough-Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: As the member opposite knows, we can't divulge what's in the budget before the budget is released. However, I have some things I can tell the member opposite. In the budget, there will be some graphics, there will be some charts, some words and a lot of numbers. And I suggest he take the time this afternoon and read the budget through because he'll be very impressed with the continued work that we're doing in Ontario to ensure that people have a better life here.

The investments that we've made in employment opportunities: More than one million people are employed today than what was employed in 2018. There's been an increase in our GDP from \$717 billion to just over \$1.1 trillion. And we've done that without raising a single tax because we recognize that investing in our economy is good for all of Ontario.

I'll have more to say in the supplementary to his questions.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: Well, Madam Speaker, nothing designed for the issues relating to boys and young men.

Boys are struggling in school. Young men are questioning whether college or university is even within their reach. And this Conservative government has made it worse by gutting OSAP and increasing the financial barriers to college and university, piling on more and more debt.

After eight years, when young men are already struggling and falling behind, why is this Premier making it harder for them to pursue a diploma, get a degree and start a job that will build a prosperous career?

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

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, we've seen businesses create one million new jobs since we took office. In the face of President Trump's tariffs, we're doing everything to protect and build on that progress.

We're securing job-creating investments in sectors that are poised for growth, like AI and life sciences. We're investing millions in the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program, which now supports more than 28,000 students. And we're putting more money in skills, STEM opportunities, helping young people across Ontario build the skills that they need to secure those good-paying jobs that we are bringing here for years to come.

Speaker, unlike the NDP and the Liberals, we're focused on practical pathways that help young people find real jobs and build a career.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: Madam Speaker, I would encourage the minister and their entire government to go home and talk to boy moms about the struggles boys and young men are facing in their Ontario. Young men are finding it harder and harder to get ahead, harder to pursue post-secondary education, harder to find opportunity, harder to build a future.

And just when it couldn't get any harder, Madam Speaker, this Conservative government is pushing gambling ads directly at them all day long: on the bus, watching sports, beamed directly to their phone 24 hours a day. It's wall-to-wall ads, easy access, designed to hook, designed to be addictive. That's not support. That's not opportunity. It's just another way to lose.

So after eight long years, why has this Conservative government made it easier for young men to place a bet than it is for them to build a future?

1050

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, as we have been traveling the globe, bringing new businesses here—businesses like Marvell from the States, who invested \$238 million; Ferrero, who have invested \$445 million; Element5 from Austria, which has invested \$107 million. The list is long and healthy.

We've created opportunities for these graduates. Not only do we currently graduate 86,000 STEM grads—that's the speech that we give when we're around the world, bringing these companies here—but we're adding 20,500 more spaces for STEM grads.

Our companies around the world that are listening to us understand, because we have that talent here in Ontario. That's the jewel. That's what they love about Ontario. And that's why, in record numbers, they're continuing to come here, company after company after company, adding a million new jobs in Ontario.

EDUCATION ISSUES

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Minister of Education.

Those of us who were at the teachers' breakfast yesterday are still talking about the minister's speech. We were all shocked. The remarks that he made to the people who represent 160,000 teachers—the people who help and support our kids learn every day in this province. The one thing that really stood out is the minister said 95% of teachers are good and the rest are bad. That shocks me.

So I guess the question I have for the minister is: Just exactly where did he pull that number out of, and if he can't tell us that here, will he apologize to teachers?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Actually, Madam Speaker, I was listening to this narrative yesterday about how tough this speech was and how it would really be hurtful to me and my government. So I thought to myself, "Let me go to the website of the Leader of the Opposition, because his whole party was there and they were videotaping the speech, so certainly they were using copies of the videotaped speech to take me down." But I couldn't find it. He didn't post the speech.

So then I thought, "Okay, let me go to ETFO, who said it was a very tough speech. Let me go to the ETFO website." Could I find my speech? No. So then I went to the OSSTF. Could I find my speech there, videotaped? They were all videotaping. Did I find it? No.

I challenge the member opposite—yesterday, I gave him the opportunity to read my letter in the House. He refused to do it. I have brought 15 copies so that the members opposite can actually post it on their websites. I challenge the member opposite: Post my speech on your website. Post my letter on your website and let teachers and parents decide.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Leader of the third party.

Mr. John Fraser: I think the minister has a highly inflated sense of self-importance. I wasn't videotaping his speech and we weren't.

Speaker, after eight years, this government is tired and out of touch and they've made a mess in our schools. Class sizes are too big. Special education has been starved and there's a mental health crisis my colleague just described that's not being addressed. Now the Minister of Education is saying he wants to fire thousands and thousands of teachers, and we don't have enough already.

That's not the point, though. The minister is trying to distract from the things that are wrong in our schools after eight years of a tired, out-of-touch, out-of-gas, out-of-ideas government. And he's treating education, our kids' schools, like his personal political playground.

So, Minister, I know what you said. You need to apologize. Will you do it?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I don't know who this was that was videotaping it, but I thought it was you.

But I will say this, Madam Speaker: If the speech was that bad, if it would harm me and my government, you would think the member opposite would want to post it. Post it. I asked the member opposite—I challenge him. I challenge the 15 members of his caucus. I challenge the 100 teachers who were there yesterday—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: —I challenge ETFO. I challenge OECTA. If you thought the speech was so bad—all of you were videotaping it—put the speech online and let teachers make that decision. Let parents make that decision. Let students make that decision.

But I tell you what: He's a paper tiger. He has no guts and he'll never, ever do it.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Yesterday, teachers' unions were at Queen's Park, and the Minister of Education knows, because he did show up at the breakfast, after all. He didn't meet with them, however, because if he did, he would've heard about their concerns and about their perspective on the effect his policies are having on classrooms and on educators across the province.

I take it personally that the minister didn't even mention the IFO in his initial response, and I want to point out that francophone education has unique realities that require particular attention. And yet, since his appointment, the minister has not yet met with the Association des enseignantes et enseignants franco-ontariens, and that's despite repeated requests. They are wanting to meet.

So I ask the minister: Will you extend them the basic courtesy of a meeting, and take the time to hear directly from francophone educators about the challenges they face and the support that they are expecting from you?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Of course; they meet with me and my officials on a biweekly basis.

But here's what I said, colleagues. Let me quote from my speech. This was actually from a reporter who was there and videotaped it, as well: "I will not apologize for trying to create a system that is squarely focused on student achievement ... by providing teachers the resources they need to succeed," Calandra said at a breakfast...

"I ask you to come with me, join with me in building the system. Don't be a stumbling block on the path. We will get this done..."

"He added that while 95% of—"

Interjections.

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

Order. Order. I don't think anybody wants to be warned today. I'm assuming that that is the direction we are heading, but I don't—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I will warn people, so if you want to be here later this afternoon, behave.

I apologize. Back to the Minister of Education.

Hon. Paul Calandra: “He added that while 95% of teachers are ‘hard-working people,’ 5% or less are ‘focused on something other than our students.’”

Madam Speaker, I ask the member opposite: Which part of that does he not agree with? And post it online. If you have so much courage of your convictions, I dare you: Put the letter online—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Ms. Jennifer K. French: This Premier's attack on OSAP has awakened a giant. In 12 years, I have never before seen high school students organize themselves into province-wide, cross-community walkouts. Students know that education is a right, and what this Premier and minister are doing is so wrong.

I listened to high school kids who have picked post-secondary programs for their future that now they don't think they can pursue. I've met with student leadership at Oshawa's post-secondary institutions trying to deal with panicked students whose goals are unravelling in real time, because they can't afford to continue their studies. I've heard from hundreds of parents and students through my OSAP impact survey, and hosted a town hall where the people were overcome with emotion as they shared how impossible it is to build a future in Ford's Ontario.

The minister responsible for this mess stood here this week and said he went to college because “Going to university would have put debt on my career.” So, Minister, if student debt wasn't good for you, then why is debt what you want for today's young people?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: You know, I don't expect the opposition to ever listen to anything I'm saying, but when I was graduating high school, I took a careful look at my goals and how I could best plan my higher education to achieve those goals.

I knew I wanted to own a small business, as I mentioned earlier this week, in my community, so I weighed my options. I got into all the universities I wanted, I got into the colleges I wanted, but I understood that if I wanted to be a small business owner, college was the best path for me, so I made the sacrifice and stayed at home with my parents, because I understood that was more financially sustainable for me to be able to open a small business.

Our students need to do the same. They need to look at their future and make a fiscally responsible decision that will enable them to achieve their goals. Post-secondary education is an investment that students make into themselves and their future, and our government is proud to support that investment.

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

1100

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Back to the Premier: Windsor's youth unemployment has reached alarming levels, among the highest in Ontario, leaving many young people struggling to find stable work and build a future in our community. Yet this Conservative government is making cuts to OSAP at a time when students are already facing rising costs and limited opportunities.

Students and parents have been very clear: OSAP cuts will force many into a lifetime of debt. Students from lower- and middle-income families will face even more barriers to receiving post-secondary education, further reducing their prospects of securing employment. Windsor students and families are already struggling simply to get by. My question is, will the Premier explain to my constituents why he is so hell-bent on making their lives even harder?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: There are no cuts to OSAP, Speaker. I don't know how I can say that any other way. The funds will be there for OSAP. Yes, we did change the grant-to-loan ratio because the previous grant-to-loan ratio was unsustainable. I've said it 10 times in the House this week. The Auditor General clearly articulated that grant-to-loan ratio was not sustainable both for Ontario and the taxpayers we serve. Ultimately—

Interjections.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: —the full facts, Speaker. OSAP will continue to be there. We are 25% grants, right in line with both governments in Manitoba and BC—both NDP governments. Did you tell that to the students you spoke to? I know she didn't, Speaker. Unfortunately, they're just giving them half the information and they're trying to get them even more upset, because you know what? They're not doing well in the polls. I don't know if they've checked. Their leader's not even here.

But ultimately—I withdraw—the funds are available for our students and we're ensuring that OSAP will continue to be sustainable moving forward for the next—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Leader of the third party.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Life is hard right now for everyone and it's always been hard for the people who care for the people that we care for most. I'm talking about people who work in residential care, in retirement homes and group homes across this province.

There's a group of these workers who don't have the coverage of WSIB simply because of who their employer is. I know, Minister, that you and I have spoken on this several times before and I appreciated your time and attention to it. But here's the reality: I've introduced the bill six times over a period of time, so I've talked to a number of ministers. I have a debate slot in three weeks, and I'm prepared to debate the bill again for a third time, so I'd like to know whether the government will support the bill or whether you're going to cover these workers.

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

Hon. David Piccini: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. He's right, we have spoken about this. Recently, I had the opportunity to sit down with these workers, with SEIU at a round table just two weeks ago. I want especially to acknowledge Sandee Green, who spoke about her challenges and about lived experience. I appreciate that.

The member and I spoke and I said, "We've got to get it right and we've got to sit down." It's about more, as I've always said, than lip service; it's about action, about sitting down and having those conversations, and we did that.

Again, the track record of this government, through over seven Working for Workers pieces of legislation, is to reflect those stories in meaningful legislation. So to the member opposite: Yes, we intend to take action. Stay tuned.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I want to thank the minister for that answer. That's very, very encouraging. We both know Sandee Green. I've heard her story. She's been an advocate for this. I really appreciate that answer, because these folks, a lot of them work two and three jobs. We hope everybody comes home safe from work, but if you're not covered by WSIB, you're only covered at one of those jobs.

I think they should be encouraged by that answer, and I'm hopeful that we see it come forward soon, before my ballot date. That would be great.

Hon. David Piccini: Again, having the opportunity to sit down, I appreciate the advocacy of that member. But it predates even more than eight years. For over 20 years, these workers, like Sandee Green, have said that they've fallen outside of that coverage. You know what really struck me—and I know that member has heard the same stories: the Wild West that they work in. They need that coverage. They need that support.

Previous iterations had moved some employers into a different schedule, that were already covered.

So I think these are conversations we can sit down on, to make sure we get it right for those workers—every worker, regardless of what you do, but especially home care workers. We've all likely had someone in our family or a friend who has been touched by their hands and the incredible work that they do.

To those workers: We see you, we hear you, and you can count on your government to continue to take action in the very near future on it.

Again, I appreciate that question. Residential care workers do deserve better and they're going to get it from Premier Ford and this government.

HOUSING

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

While many Ontarians spent the winter break with their families, the need to build more homes did not slow down.

For years, excessive municipal red tape and past Liberal government mismanagement created barriers that drove

up costs, delayed projects and made it harder for families to find a place to call home. Our government is changing that.

Through Bill 17, we are modernizing outdated processes and removing the barriers that have stood in the way of building more homes faster.

Speaker, can the minister share how our government continued advancing this work over the winter months to ensure these reforms are delivering results for Ontarians?

Hon. Rob Flack: Thank you for the question.

I think everybody knows that affordability is key when it comes to all types of housing. And as I've said many times, it takes too long and it costs too much to get housing built in this province.

Over the winter, we've been looking at implementing portions of Bill 17 and Bill 60, and one of the things we came across, as we've talked about, is the duplication of studies and engineering stamps in municipalities. We're changing that. And why are we changing it? Because it takes too long to get permits for houses to get built.

Here's what we've done: We've said if you're a qualified engineer—one stamp; it counts, end of subject. No duplication; no time-wasters; no pride of authorship. It's about affordability.

And do you want to know what else, Speaker? We removed the full portion of the HST on all new home builds.

At the end of the day, we're creating affordability. It takes so long and it costs too much to get a home built. We're changing that.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Markham–Thornhill.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to the minister for that great answer and the update. It is encouraging to hear that these changes are already reducing delays and improving certainty for builders and buyers.

However, we know more work is needed to fully modernize the system and make it as efficient and cost-effective as possible.

That's why our government is taking decisive action to cut red tape and help more families achieve home ownership.

Speaker, can the minister outline how our government will build on these reforms to further streamline approvals and save families time and money when purchasing a home?

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

Ms. Laura Smith: The member is right. We're going to have a busy legislative session, where we'll continue to advance our agenda to protect Ontario. And our government is not stopping. We're going to continue to build on the strong foundation laid through the previous legislation, including the Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act and the Fighting Delays, Building Faster Act. We are remaining focused on this.

We had a great announcement yesterday—and through the budget—with a full HST rebate for all homebuyers, which is fantastic.

We are going to continue to identify additional opportunities to standardize requirements and ensure that ap-

provals move efficiently across all stages of the process, including planning and design, and by working with the engineers. It's very important to work with our friends who know the system the best.

Every step we take is aimed at affordability, reducing delays, and getting more homes built faster so we can protect the dream of home ownership in Ontario.

1110

JUSTICE SYSTEM

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: To the Premier: This government is failing to deliver a justice system that works for Ontarians. A recent Superior Court ruling proved this by highlighting this government's failure to uphold basic human rights in our province. The court found that the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal is systematically misapplying the law by failing to properly evaluate allegations of disability discrimination. Since 2021, 97% of those cases, or thousands of Ontarians, have been wrongly denied their right to a fair hearing.

Will this Premier make reparations for the damage done to Ontarians denied justice by his mismanagement of the tribunal system?

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

MPP Monica Ciriello: I thank the member of the opposition for the question and for giving us the opportunity to talk about the work that our ministry has done for Tribunals Ontario in ensuring that we are delivering consistent justice for Ontarians across this province.

We continue to ensure that it operates independently, that people receive timely and fair hearings to resolve all disputes regardless of creed. In March 2023, we continued to invest more than \$12 million in Tribunals Ontario to hire additional support staff and improve service delivery, and it's a commitment we will continue to do and deliver for all of those in Ontario.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Back to the Premier: It is absolutely embarrassing to have those recycled talking points come back to a question that was as serious as that.

This government only knows how to reduce court backlogs by unfairly dismissing cases. They are hell-bent on destroying what's left of our underfunded justice system.

While under federal police investigation, our buck-a-beer Premier is calling on the feds to let Premiers like him actually hand-pick Ontario judges. The justice system is collapsing, and instead of fixing it, this Premier shows us how out of touch he is. He's proposing to give away judicial appointments just like he gave away our greenbelt.

Speaker, will this Premier listen to the legal experts that are here in the chamber today and do what is right, or will he continue to mismanage and compromise our justice system?

MPP Monica Ciriello: I appreciate the opportunity to be able to speak on this again and again, the great work

that our government has continued to do in the justice sphere.

We have undertaken extreme measures to streamline and modernize our appointment processes to ensure access to justice. In fact, we've already made important changes to the Courts of Justice Act to streamline and modernize a quicker process. You know what that means? It means moving to a pool-based recommendation process that brings in more qualified candidates that Ontarians want to see and helps appoint judges faster. This is exactly what the people of Ontario voted for.

By 2027-28, our government will have invested more than half a billion dollars to help the courts address backlogs and manage a growing number of complex cases. This is what we will continue to deliver for the people of Ontario.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Ted Hsu: The Kingston Hospital serves the ridings of Bay of Quinte, Hastings–Lennox and Addington, Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston, Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes and Kingston and the Islands. Four weeks ago was the highest ever in-patient admissions: 630 patients, 60 more than the 570 beds. This as the hospital also cares for over 800 patients who stay out in the community. It's bursting at the seams. In the hallways you walk around labelled beds—formally labelled so the computer system can track hallway patients.

As our population rises, this government should have seen this crisis coming since they promised to end hallway medicine eight years ago.

Ontario's oldest public hospital, a national historic site with most of its buildings intact, is a unique and urgent case. Will this government prioritize a real need and fund a replacement?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Of course, as part of our 50% increase in hospital-based funding, Kingston Health Sciences actually received \$150 million since Premier Ford and our government came into power.

We're also, of course, providing operational funding for a new MRI facility machine. And what that means is that we've actually decreased the wait times for MRIs across Ontario, but of course, in the Kingston region.

The member opposite will also remember, I hope, that the Kingston area was actually one of the first communities that had an expanded interprofessional primary care multidisciplinary team. What does that mean? That means that 3,575 patients in the Kingston community are now attached to a primary care multidisciplinary team—a team that can have a family physician, a nurse practitioner, an RN, a mental health worker. Those are the investments our government is making and will continue to make across Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Ted Hsu: This is not some pet project for downtown Toronto; this is a real infrastructure need, real capital need. This should be a government priority.

Three weeks ago, the hospital tied the dire conditions and record patient volume directly to the urgent need for a new facility. Everyone knows that it is not possible anymore to rebuild and restore this 188-year-old hospital, Ontario's oldest. Everybody knows that's hindering care for their loved ones. A site has been chosen for the new hospital, and they've designed a phased plan that won't break the budget or overwhelm management while steadily improving the care for patients.

Today is budget day, so I'll ask the finance minister: Do you think it costs less to build a new hospital now or years from now?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, I think it's important to remind everyone in this House: \$60 billion in hospital capital infrastructure; 50 different projects across Ontario where we are investing in new hospitals, in renovated hospitals, in expanded hospitals. We know that in order to keep Ontario's world-class health care system operational, we will make those investments, and we are, with a \$60-billion investment.

As we move forward in working with all of our hospital partners, we are absolutely making sure that the capital asks that they are interested in proceeding with we will assess, we will review. But I think it's really important to understand that we already have 50 of them in the pipeline, worth the equivalent of \$60 billion.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Hon. Laurie Scott: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness.

Farmers are the backbone of our province. They drive our economy, support our communities and provide families across Ontario with nutritious food. I see that every day in Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, and I thank them for that.

But with the ongoing tariff and trade uncertainty, farmers are concerned about their livelihoods and the future of their operations. They want stability, clear guidance and strong leadership. They want our government to continue standing with them, taking decisive action to protect their businesses, open new markets and ensure that Ontario's agricultural sector can thrive for years to come.

Through you, Madam Speaker, to the Minister: What is our government doing to support farmers and strengthen our agri-food sector?

Hon. Trevor Jones: I want to thank the honourable member for that question.

Speaker, let me make one thing clear: Our government will never back down supporting our farmers and protecting our food supply. Over the past year, I've had the honour of speaking to farmers on their farms, at their kitchen tables, in barns, in fields and at production facilities to understand what they need to navigate this time of uncertainty, and we're taking action. We listened, and we're taking action.

Speaker, we've increased the Risk Management Program \$100 million to \$250 million to support our farmers. We're helping producers expand new markets

beyond the US to stay competitive on the global stage. And Speaker, last year we were elected with an historic third mandate to protect Ontario, and we'll continue to do that by empowering farmers and supporting our food producers.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

Hon. Laurie Scott: Thanks to the minister for that strong response and update and for visiting farmers in Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. It's encouraging to see that we are not just reacting to these uncertain times but also providing the industry with the tools and support needed to pursue new opportunities.

Speaker, farmers and agri-food businesses across Ontario are looking for stability as they navigate the impacts of tariffs. Expanding into new markets will help reduce reliance on the US. Ontario producers know there is a global demand for their products, and they are ready to deliver them.

1120

Through you, Madam Speaker, can the minister outline what steps our government is taking to support farmers and agri-food businesses in expanding into new markets?

Hon. Trevor Jones: Thank you again to my colleague.

Madam Speaker, over the winter, I had the privilege of attending the world's largest food trade show in Dubai, attracting 100,000 visitors, buyers and sellers and 6,500 exhibitors, many from Canada and Ontario. Ontario is the best partner for food business, and we have what the world wants. Since 2018, our global exports have increased 65% to \$26.8 billion. We're also seeing momentum in the EU and UK, 10% and 12%, respectively.

Speaker, I worked in those booths alongside Ontario beef producers, by grain producers, by our excellent food exporters. One thing the world wants, and I learned that from over 100,000 people through that booth: They saw the trillium, they saw the maple leaf, and they saw trust, they saw value and they saw quality.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is for the Minister of Education.

School bus drivers in West Nipissing who drive for Alouette school bus lines, proud members of USW 2020, have been on the picket lines for over a month. Their demand: They would like their wages increased from \$18 and change to \$24, which is actually the recommended level by the Ministry of Education.

My question is to the minister: Why do they have to be on the picket lines to get the ministry's recommendation?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you again to the member for the question.

The member knows, of course, that the crown is not a party to this negotiation. It is a negotiation between the service itself and its employees, as represented by the United Steelworkers, as he mentioned, so we are not at the table with them. We do provide a significant amount of resources for local consortiums.

But I will say this to the member: I am somewhat concerned at how long this has taken. I have expressed that frustration.

At the same time, I'm also concerned at the fact that across the province of Ontario, there are not a lot of people offering this service anymore. We have seen a dramatic reduction in the amount of companies offering bus services across the province of Ontario. It is something that I'm going to look at. It's, of course, a system that was put in place by the previous Liberal government, another mess that was created by them that we're going to look at and try to untangle and fix for the people of the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank the minister for that answer, and I would also like to inform the House that the same company actually has got ads in the paper for school bus drivers in the adjoining school bus district for \$25 an hour. I'd also like to inform the House that the Near North school board, who these drivers drive kids for, has been taken over by the Minister of Education. He himself is the supervisor of the school board, so he's kind of part of the consortium.

So my question, again: I really appreciate his answer, but why are these people still on the picket line to attain the recommended rate by the Ministry of Education?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, I am the supervisor of that board. I am very concerned that it's taken this long, frankly, but the member knows that the Ministry of Education nor the school board are at the table negotiating. It is a strike from a private company with its employees. We do not provide that direction, the member would know.

At the same time, while I have the floor, two quick things, Madam Speaker: A very good friend of mine, Colin McSweeney, has been under the weather. I want to just highlight the fact that he's coming home soon, and I'm glad that he's feeling a lot better.

And to the member opposite: We've had, as he will know, a couple of challenging situations in his riding with heavy snow load on a couple of schools. I was informed that there was a partial collapse of a roof in one of the schools, but just to let him know, everybody was safe. There were no injuries. The kids are being relocated to other schools as quickly as possible, and I thank the honourable member for his help in making sure that everybody was settled and class can start up very soon.

ADDICTION SERVICES

M^{me} Lucille Collard: My question is for the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Two weeks ago, the Sandy Hill Community Health Centre in my riding was notified that it must close its supervised consumption sites, along with all the other ones in the province. Meanwhile, there are no HART hubs in proximity, and the closest one is already at capacity.

So I want to ask the associate minister: What is the government's concrete transition plan for the people currently relying on these life-saving services, and will

you allow providers in the Ottawa east end to implement and receive funding for alternative models that meet the needs of our community? Because right now, we're underserved, and with the closure of the site, people are just going to die.

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam: We are building a system of care that is providing recovery-based supports for those who are struggling with addictions, Madam Speaker. Unlike the Liberals and NDP, we don't believe in providing tools for the most vulnerable in our population to use illicit drugs.

Don't take it from me; take it from the Ontario Association Chiefs of Police:

"Police services and community partners have raised ongoing concerns regarding the impacts surrounding some sites, including public disorder, open drug use, needle debris and public health hazards, trafficking and exploitation, and increased demands on emergency and policing resources...."

"With strong oversight and coordinated partnerships, Ontario can advance recovery-focused solutions that support vulnerable individuals while maintaining safe, healthy and resilient communities across the province."

That's why we're expanding HART hubs across the province with \$550 million to the province.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Closing supervised consumption sites without a viable and accessible alternative does not eliminate the need. What it does is shift the burden onto our communities.

What the minister has described is true: It's going to increase. There will be more public drug use. There will be increased pressure on first responders and longer wait times in already strained emergency rooms. At the Sandy Hill site alone, there were over 250 overdoses that were reversed in the past six months. What's going to happen now?

So I ask the minister: What specific, evidence-based plan does this government have to replace the life-saving work currently being done by the Sandy Hill Community Health Centre and prevent these deaths from occurring in our communities?

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam: The old model, the drug injection sites—they act as a revolving door. Instead of treatment and recovery, people cycle through the system repeatedly. The new model, building on a recovery-treatment model, will break the cycle of addiction, Madam Speaker.

That's why this government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, will increase the HART hub funding to four times more than the SCS sites, Madam Speaker. Take it from the Auditor General, who said the drug injection sites only serve 1,600 people every year, but the HART hubs—all the 28 that are operational right now—are estimated to serve 45,000 people every year. The HART hub is all about—from a simple cup of coffee, a hot shower, a warm meal, all the way to meaningful social and mental health support services, where and when they need it.

POLICE SERVICES

MPP Bill Rosenberg: My question is to the Solicitor General. Ontarians rely on their local police officers to protect them and their neighbourhoods. Families in my riding of Algoma–Manitoulin, like many in our province, are concerned about reports of crime and violence. They want to feel secure in their communities and know that police have the resources and support they need to do their jobs effectively.

Speaker, we know a strong, well-staffed police force is essential to preventing crime and responding quickly when incidents occur. Through you, Madam Speaker, can the minister tell us, the House, what steps our government is taking to encourage police recruitment and ensure communities across Ontario are safe?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Since Premier Ford's government came to office in June 2018, there has not been one day, one moment, where protecting Ontario was not our single highest priority.

1130

To the member's comment: What can a government do to encourage people to come forward and become police officers? I'm happy to report that, last week, when the Associate Solicitor General and the member from Kitchener South–Hespeler were with me at the Ontario Police College, we saw our latest class of 525 incredible individuals come forward. I reminded this class that it was our government, led by the Premier, that said, "We will contribute. We will pay your basic constable tuition." That's an investment by the province of \$36 million last year to watch 2,150 people come forward and go to the member's riding with the OPP, go to municipal police services, go to First Nations police services and keep Ontario safe.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Algoma–Manitoulin.

MPP Bill Rosenberg: Thank you to the Solicitor General for the important update.

Everyone has a right to feel safe in their own home and their community, but people are concerned about stories of violence and crime fuelled by illicit drugs. These situations make people feel concerned about safety in their own neighbourhoods.

Our dedicated police officers are working tirelessly to keep drugs off the street, prevent crime and protect families. By supporting and strengthening our police services, we can ensure that our communities are safer and residents feel secure.

Could the Solicitor General share how our government's investments in policing are translating into real, on-the-ground results?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'm happy to remind the House that, thanks to the incredible leadership by our commissioner of the OPP, Thomas Carrique, his command team and everyone that's part of the OPP, last year alone, in just the last few months, we were able to have a number of announcements to take over \$6 million of heroin off our

streets and to take over \$6 million of street value of fentanyl off our streets.

And thanks to the leadership of the Premier, we came forward with Operation Deterrence 1.0, which provided an incredible amount of money to help strengthen our police services around the borders of Ontario. We are going to be doing it again soon with Operation Deterrence 2.0, so stay tuned. That will mean more vessels, more technology, more drones for our police services across Ontario to keep them safe.

MUNICIPAL FUNDING

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is for the Premier. Waterloo region's water crisis is a warning—a warning that came with a complete pause on new housing permits. It should not have been a surprise, as the former chair of Ontario's Greenbelt Council David Crombie has argued, pointing to years of growth pressures outpacing infrastructure planning and funding.

AMO agrees. They have cited a \$52-billion infrastructure deficit for Ontario.

We know that you can't build needed housing without the appropriate infrastructure and investments.

Waterloo region depends 80% on groundwater. Provincial investment is needed. This is a very serious situation for our region.

To the Premier: Will your government wake up and adequately fund municipal infrastructure like water to ensure that the housing crisis in Ontario can improve?

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

Hon. Rob Flack: Thank you for that question. I understand the concerns, obviously, about Waterloo. That being said, I'm in constant communication, as is the Minister of Infrastructure, with Chair Redman. I would point out that we will have invested close to \$4 billion in infrastructure and water and housing-enabling water investments.

Most importantly, Speaker, this is why we're setting up publicly owned municipal service corporations: \$250 billion dollars is needed in this province over the next 10 to 15 years to replace aging infrastructure and new infrastructure. Waterloo is no exception.

We are going to be there to support Waterloo, as we always have been. We're listening and we're learning. They've got their challenges; we're going to get over them.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you for that response. However, there is a very serious disconnect that's happening here, and that is that the Ministry of Environment continues to approve huge, commercial water-taking permits on the aquifer.

Yesterday, thankfully, the region of Waterloo unanimously passed a motion to request the province to pause new and expanded water-taking permits in the Mannheim service area as they search for solutions to the water capacity issue. They're basically just asking for a little bit of time so they can figure this out and also not to continue

to deplete the aquifers where 80% of our water comes from.

The motion highlights the need to prevent the risk of interference to existing municipal and private water supplies and to safeguard groundwater resources for both the natural environment and potential future use. This is very serious.

Will the province stop approving water-taking permits while we get our house in order in the region of Waterloo?

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

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: I want to begin by saying that our government has been working tirelessly to ensure municipalities have the infrastructure they need to build more homes faster.

Over the last four or five months, Madam Speaker, I have had the opportunity to travel across the province, from small towns to growing cities, announcing new funding to help municipalities upgrade critical housing infrastructure like water, waste water, and roads. And as the Minister of Housing mentioned, our government is investing \$4 billion in the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program. And the good news is that the Premier announced an additional \$1.6 billion at the AMO conference last year, Madam Speaker.

We're not leaving any stone unturned when it comes to building housing and investing in infrastructure. We're investing over \$230 billion in infrastructure, building housing, building hospitals, critical infrastructure like transit and highways like Highway 413 and the GTA west corridor.

DEFERRED VOTES

PROTECTING RENTERS FROM UNFAIR ABOVE GUIDELINE RENT INCREASES ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 VISANT À PROTÉGER LES LOCATAIRES CONTRE LES AUGMENTATIONS INJUSTES DE LOYER SUPÉRIEURES AU TAUX LÉGAL

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

Bill 82, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 with respect to above guideline rent increases /
Projet de loi 82, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation à l'égard des augmentations de loyer supérieures au taux légal.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1137 to 1142.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): On March 25, 2026, MPP Smyth moved second reading of Bill 82, an Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 with respect to above guideline rent increases.

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

Ayes

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gates, Wayne	Sattler, Peggy
Blais, Stephen	Gélinas, France	Schreiner, Mike
Bourgouin, Guy	Gilmour, Alexa	Shamji, Adil
Bowman, Stephanie	Glover, Chris	Shaw, Sandy
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Gretzky, Lisa	Smyth, Stephanie
Burch, Jeff	Hsu, Ted	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Clancy, Aislinn	Kernaghan, Terence	Tsao, Jonathan
Collard, Lucille	McCrimmon, Karen	Vanhof, John
Fairclough, Lee	McKenney, Catherine	Vaugeois, Lise
Fife, Catherine	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Watt, Tyler
Fraser, John	Pasma, Chandra	West, Jamie
French, Jennifer K.	Rakocevic, Tom	Wong-Tam, Kristyn

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Allsopp, Tyler	Ford, Doug	Pinsonneault, Steve
Anand, Deepak	Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Pirie, George
Babikian, Aris	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Quinn, Nolan
Bailey, Robert	Gualtieri, Silvia	Racinsky, Joseph
Bouma, Will	Hamid, Zee	Rae, Matthew
Bresee, Ric	Hardeman, Ernie	Rosenberg, Bill
Calandra, Paul	Harris, Mike	Sabawy, Sheref
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Holland, Kevin	Sandhu, Amarjot
Cho, Stan	Jones, Sylvia	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Ciriello, Monica	Jones, Trevor	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Clark, Steve	Jordan, John	Scott, Chris
Coe, Lorne	Kanapathi, Logan	Scott, Laurie
Cooper, Michelle	Kerzner, Michael S.	Smith, Dave
Crawford, Stephen	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, David
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, Laura
Darouze, George	Lumsden, Neil	Tangri, Nina
Denault, Billy	McCarthy, Todd J.	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Dixon, Jess	McGregor, Graham	Thompson, Lisa M.
Dowie, Andrew	Mulroney, Caroline	Tibollo, Michael A.
Dunlop, Jill	Oosterhoff, Sam	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Fedeli, Victor	Pang, Billy	Vickers, Paul
Firin, Mohamed	Parsa, Michael	Williams, Charmaine A.
Flack, Rob	Piccini, David	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 36; the nays are 68.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negatived.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Steve Clark: Under standing order 59, this afternoon, as members know, it's the government's intention to present the budget.

On Monday, March 30, at 9 a.m., we'll have the Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy kick off second reading debate of the budget bill, followed by, in the afternoon, again, second reading debate on the budget bill.

On Tuesday, March 31, in the morning, debate on the budget bill—thank you for your ruling about the opposition day. We'll have opposition day number 1 in the after-

noon, followed by debate on government notice of motion number 14, which is the budget motion, followed by private members' debate on private member's motion number 45.

On Wednesday, April 1, in the morning, we'll have second reading debate on the budget. In the afternoon, we'll have debate on government notice of motion 14, the budget motion, followed by second reading of a private member's bill, Bill 84.

On Thursday, April 2, in the morning, second reading debate on the budget bill. To date, in the afternoon, we have debate on private member's motion number 53.

I have a further point of order: Speaker, if you seek it, you'll find unanimous consent to proceed immediately to the afternoon routine.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The government House leader is asking for unanimous consent to go immediately into afternoon routine. Agreed? Agreed.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I beg to inform the House that today, the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated March 26, 2026, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 110(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 61(b), this House stands in recess until 4 p.m.

The House recessed from 1148 to 1600.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2026 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L'ONTARIO DE 2026

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I move, seconded by the Premier, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Finance has moved, seconded by the Premier, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

I would now like to ask for all of your indulgence while the pages deliver the budget to each member. I will now ask the pages to deliver the budget to the members.

Of course, we have to check to see if a record has been set. I'm just checking. They're going to be checking the time.

Pages, another record has been set.

I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a great day to be an Ontarian; it's a great day to be a Canadian.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker, I have often spoken of my parents when introducing our budgets.

My parents left war-torn Europe for a better life filled with hope for freedom, opportunity and safety.

They found it here in Ontario—here in Canada.

Sadly, they are no longer with us—my father passed away last summer and my mother some two years ago.

But Madam Speaker, their legacy lives on ...

It lives on—not only in this finance minister—but as well in each and every one of the 124 legislators who serve here at Queen's Park.

Each one of us who works tirelessly—day-in and day-out collectively—so that the Ontario we inherited from the previous generations continues through us for future generations.

Madam Speaker, I dedicate this budget to the legacy of my parents who loved Canada, and every single one of the 124 legislators who work hard each day to carry on that legacy.

The legacy of hope, freedom and opportunity in the greatest country in the world.

Au nom du premier ministre, Doug Ford, et de tout notre gouvernement de l'Ontario, j'ai l'honneur aujourd'hui de vous présenter le budget provincial de l'Ontario 2026 : Un plan pour protéger l'Ontario.

On behalf of Premier Doug Ford, and our entire government of Ontario, it is my honour today to present to you the 2026 Ontario provincial budget: A Plan to Protect Ontario.

Madam Speaker, the last year has been marked by significant change in the world around us.

And while our province has been meeting these challenges head-on, we need to recognize that Ontario does not operate in isolation.

On the contrary—we're part of a vast network of global trade that, until now, has created certainty and growth for generations of workers, families and businesses in this province, and around the world.

I say, "until now," Madam Speaker, because geopolitical forces that may have once felt distant have now reached our shores ...

Global economic and trade tensions ...

Supply chain disruptions ...

Shifting markets ...

Simply put—the world has changed, and we must change with it.

We, Madam Speaker, must continue to stand ready to face whatever these changes may bring.

Across Ontario, we are already seeing the effects that economic uncertainty is having on our nation's economy.

This year alone, we have seen our fellow provinces announce record deficits, increase taxes, and job cuts in the public sector.

Well, Madam Speaker, I'm here to tell you that in Toronto—Ontario; Freudian slip—in Ontario, that is not our path!

Here in Ontario, we believe in making life more affordable for people and businesses!

Supporting job growth!

And delivering on the programs and services that people and families depend on—efficiently and sustainably!

Our plan is cautious where it must be and ambitious where it should be.

Madam Speaker, many said we couldn't do it ...

They said that we would lose jobs ...

That we would lose businesses ...

They said we would come out of this weaker than before ...

Well, Madam Speaker, it is with our head held high that our government can confidently say:

Ontario workers, businesses and families defied the critics!

Not only has Ontario created one million jobs since 2018—but last year created 81,000 new jobs—all of which were in the private sector ...

And our economy grew by 1.2%—higher than projected by the private sector.

Prosperity—Madam Speaker—is Ontario's path.

And we were able to choose this path because our fiscal firepower allowed us to do so.

Our government's prudent and responsible management of Ontario's finances has allowed us to protect and grow our economy ...

All without having to raise taxes or fees on the people and businesses who work day-in and day-out to make this the greatest province—the greatest country—in all the world.

We cannot eliminate uncertainty, Madam Speaker ...

But we can mitigate risks through a responsible, balanced fiscal approach that creates jobs, grows our economy, and maintains the flexibility needed to support vital public services and infrastructure.

Now, Madam Speaker, despite global economic headwinds, Ontario's economy showed resilience in 2025.

Real GDP grew by 1.2%—higher than the 0.8% forecasted in last year's budget—reflecting the hard work of people and businesses across the province.

But we remain vigilant.

Growth is uneven, and the outlook is uncertain.

We know many in our province are still feeling the pressure.

And that is exactly why our pragmatic, stable plan matters ...

Our world has changed, and we must change with it ...

And the numbers show that our plan is working.

Many key projections outperformed the targets in last year's budget and fall economic statement.

In fact, Ontario is one of the few reporting provinces with a path to balance and one of the lowest deficits in all of Canada, relative to GDP.

And for the first time in two decades, Ontario received two credit rating upgrades, maintaining AA ratings across all four major credit rating agencies!

We're not doing these things just to check a box.

They're clear signs that we've been responsible with taxpayers' money.

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When we respect taxpayers' money—when we keep costs down and put more money back in people's and businesses' pockets—we free up more resources to boost our economy and pay for investments in the services that matter most.

We will keep going, Madam Speaker ...

As the Premier has repeatedly said, there is nothing we won't do to protect Ontario.

And protecting Ontario means protecting the economic foundations that make our province strong, and investing to generate sustainable returns that compound for future generations, Madam Speaker.

And to do that, our government is going to be accelerating our investments in Canadian-owned and Ontario-owned companies in the high-growth sectors of most importance to our economic prosperity ...

Sectors like artificial intelligence, defence, advanced manufacturing, life sciences, energy, critical minerals, and many others ...

That is a clear mark of economic maturity, Madam Speaker—and a signal that Ontario must continue to shape its own economic destiny ...

Not outsource it!

We have the markets, Madam Speaker ...

We have the resources ...

We have the workers ...

We have the talent ...

We have the entrepreneurs ...

And we have the political will ...

Our country is ready.

That is why I am pleased to announce here today, that our government is moving to fortify our economy even further through the new Protect Ontario Account Investment Fund!

This \$4-billion fund will be a critical tool for investing in Ontario's growth ... to identify and execute on a pipeline of new opportunities that will advance Ontario's long-term economic growth and strategic priorities ...

Making our province a winner—not just for this decade—but for the next century!

Our strategy is setting the stage for Ontario's continued economic success in the midst of a changing world.

And in this changing world, Ontario must change as well.

We need to diversify ...

Strengthen key sectors ...

And not only retain—but reinforce the competitive advantages that set us apart from the rest of the G7 group of nations.

Because if we want to make this decade and beyond ours ...

We must drive competitiveness to attract new investment and encourage businesses to choose Ontario.

Earlier this year, members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and I each held annual pre-budget consultation tours—some 35 in total ...

Thank you to all of you and the members here for your hard work.

Interjection.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I don't want applause over there.

And in our travels, one message we heard consistently—from organizations like the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, and businesses right across Ontario—was the need to boost competitiveness and reduce the cost of doing business.

We hear them, Madam Speaker ...

And we couldn't agree more.

And that is why I am glad to announce our government's plan to lower the cost of capital investments for a broad range of assets—providing over \$3.5 billion of income tax relief over four years for businesses in Ontario!

Madam Speaker, we have said it before, and I will say it again ...

We will keep going.

Businesses—and small businesses in particular—are the beating heart of Ontario's and Canada's economic engine, and we will always have their backs ...

That is why this year alone, the government is providing \$10 billion in cost savings and support to businesses across this province.

Thanks to the many advocates of Ontario's business community—like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business—we know just how impactful these savings are ...

But at a time when the very heart of our economy is at stake, our government is stepping up to deliver even more ...

And so today, we are also announcing a historic tax cut for small businesses, by lowering their tax rate by over 30%—from 3.2% to 2.2%!

This provides \$1.1 billion in income tax relief for more than 375,000 businesses over the next three years, these small businesses who invest in our economy, invest in jobs and keep moving Ontario forward. We are building the competitive landscape that our economy needs in order to create the environment for even greater job growth ...

In looking to secure a strong economy for future generations, we must also look to help businesses diversify and expand their trade capabilities within Canada and around the world.

Building new partnerships, seeking out new supply chains, and generating even greater opportunities for growth.

Our government's actions are fostering a more predictable, competitive business environment here at home, Madam Speaker ...

Actions that deliver economic prosperity—like our \$150-million Ontario Together Trade Fund—which is

helping businesses diversify into new markets, strengthen trade resiliency and reshore critical supply chains ...

While building new bridges by diversifying our network of reliable trading partners to benefit both Ontario and Canada as a whole.

And we all know, Madam Speaker ...

As Ontario goes, Canada goes.

We are the economic engine of Confederation ...

And that is exactly why we have taken the leadership position in actively advancing Canadian free trade.

We were the first province to lift all barriers under the Canadian Free Trade Agreement ...

And we expanded labour mobility regulations to encourage and empower more workers from across Canada to come work in Ontario.

Our resolve to remove trade barriers and spur economic growth has never been stronger ...

And that strength will continue to grow ...

Because when you are on Team Ontario and Team Canada, your team always wins!

Freeing up Canadian trade is but one pillar—we are also speeding up approvals for major projects, through the One Project, One Process framework for advanced exploration, and mine development and expansion, such as ...

Frontier Lithium's PAK Lithium Project near Red Lake;

The Canada Nickel Company's Crawford Nickel Project, up near Timmins;

And Kinross Gold's Great Bear Project, also near Red Lake ...

And I promise you, Madam Speaker ...

There will be many more ...

Right, Mr. Lecce? Many more.

Because we know now is the time to unleash the untapped potential of our province's critical mineral reserves, bringing much-needed prosperity to northern Ontario and fortifying our economic sovereignty.

And we are doing this alongside First Nations partners—including the roads to the Ring of Fire—with a plan to accelerate construction five years ahead of schedule!

Madam Speaker, while the Ring of Fire has been talked about for nearly 20 years, we are making it happen!

This is a government that doesn't just think big ...

We do big things ...

Bold things!

And it starts with productivity and innovation.

Ontario's long-term prosperity depends on our ability to increase output per worker and per dollar of capital.

And that means we must double down on our efforts to accelerate the development and adoption of new technology, attract private investment, and commercialize Ontario-made research.

This is why we are investing in sectors like life sciences, advanced manufacturing and emerging defence technologies ...

And I'm proud to say that our efforts are garnering results.

For example, our province's higher-than-projected economic growth is a reflection of the hard work and success

of our private sector, including firms in the AI space—of which we already have a world-leading sector here in Ontario.

Look no further than the Vector Institute—one of Ontario's and Canada's leading research organizations dedicated to empowering research and innovation.

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Our \$107-million critical technologies initiative has supported them with a \$27-million investment ...

And by combining their expertise in the field with our powerful balance sheet, we are generating economic growth for the long term.

It has been never more important for us to invest in our homegrown talent and innovation.

But with the development of new technologies rapidly advancing, we must focus on protecting and commercializing our intellectual property to support future generations of economic prosperity.

This is why Intellectual Property Ontario (IPON) was launched three years ago ...

So far, IPON has supported over 1,200 companies with the tools they need to strengthen and commercialize their intellectual property here at home ...

We're making sure that Ontario is the best place to do business—helping companies stay competitive, scale up, and grow right here in Ontario.

To support that growth, we need the right foundations in place.

Take the Building Ontario Fund—our government's out-of-the-box thinking—allowing companies to partner with Canadian institutional investors to build critical projects that might not otherwise get built.

Such as the Re kai long-term-care home project ...

The Toronto Metropolitan University student housing project ...

And High Art's affordable housing project ...

These are just a few.

Because Madam Speaker—the status quo is not acceptable.

Innovation, entrepreneurship and pursuing dreams starts early.

We're taking a comprehensive approach to building Ontario's workforce—from the classroom to the job site and beyond.

That starts in our schools, where we're investing in required technology and skilled trade workshops in high school—so young people can discover their strengths early.

We're also investing an additional \$6.4 billion in our colleges and universities—training students for in-demand jobs by funding 70,000 more seats, including in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, as well as in health care, skilled trades and education. Thank you to the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

And as our plan continues to create the conditions for growth, better jobs and bigger paycheques, we are investing \$1.6 billion this year in skills and employment training—so workers have the support they need to not only retrain and reskill, but to adapt, grow, and succeed at

every stage of their career. I thought that might get an applause for the Minister of Labour.

This is the workforce our government wants to build today, and for generations to come, Madam Speaker.

And I am proud to be part of a government that invests in our workforce pipeline—from end to end—to help make that dream possible.

From grade school to high school ...

From the skilled trades to arts and science ...

From the shop floor to the construction site ...

We will be there for the great workers of Ontario ...

We will be there to help them train, retrain and reskill

...

Not only so we can secure long-term economic prosperity for future generations of Ontarians ...

But so that every man, woman and child who chooses to do so can build a meaningful career ...

Build the life they want for themselves and their family

...

And take part in the greatest workforce the world has to offer.

Our plan to grow Ontario's economy depends on our ability to maximize our leverage and to have every advantage in every sector ...

From excellence in research to our talent pool, and, of course, our heavy industries ...

With power demand set to potentially increase up to 90% by 2050—our ability to position ourselves for the future will depend greatly on our ability to power our economy.

It's called energy security, Madam Speaker ...

And our government is working hard and fighting to ensure it.

We are already advancing early-stage planning for new nuclear plants in Wesleyville and Bruce county, and refurbishing our vast array of nuclear power generating stations at Pickering, Bruce, and Darlington—a project which, if I might proudly add, as the Minister of Energy has told us, came in ahead of schedule and \$150 million under budget! That's my kind of minister.

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Maybe you'll get a few too.

And we are tackling the future of clean energy head-on, with the first of its kind and the first of four small modular reactors at the Darlington nuclear site now under construction!

And it is through the leadership of this Premier, with his vision, that we are generating thousands of jobs throughout the supply chain and powering the equivalent of 28 million homes, Madam Speaker—our government's plan to expand Ontario's clean nuclear energy generating capacity is set to create 150,000 new job opportunities and add over \$800 billion to our economy!

This is about so much more than just keeping the lights on, Madam Speaker ...

It's about economic sovereignty ...

It's about investing for future generations.

It's about protecting Ontario.

As part of our plan to protect and grow Ontario—we are making enormous strides forward in Ontario's advanced manufacturing sector.

Having accounted for 36% of Canada's defence sector employment—the largest of any province—Ontario is well positioned to take full advantage of the growth we're seeing globally in the defence sector, and continue playing a leading role in supplying national defence.

With over 300 companies generating more than \$5 billion in annual revenue and employing over 13,000 people, the defence industry plays to Ontario's strengths—like artificial intelligence, advanced manufacturing, cyber security, shipbuilding, aerospace and others—which are shaping up to define Ontario's bright future as a national and international hub for defence manufacturing and innovation ...

Qualities that—if I might add, Madam Speaker—position us as the ideal candidate to host NATO's new Defence, Security and Resilience Bank—right here in the financial, research and manufacturing heart of our nation!

Madam Speaker, if the Defence, Security and Resilience Bank aims to mobilize public and private capital to support defence, security and resilience projects, then Toronto—as Canada's largest financial centre, with unmatched credibility, market expertise and global connectivity—should be the destination of choice for the bank's headquarters to finance defence projects for NATO members and allied nations into the future!

Because, Madam Speaker, when you invest in Ontario, you're not just moving money—you're building capabilities and developing resilience for future generations.

And building for generations is exactly what our \$210-billion infrastructure plan is about.

It's about a vision for the future ...

A vision that uses the strength of our credit rating and balance sheet to build the critical infrastructure to keep goods moving and people working—to boost economic productivity and prosperity for generations to come ...

Critical infrastructure, such as Ontario's vast highway network ...

We've started construction on Highway 413!

We are building the Bradford Bypass!

We're widening Highway 17 in Kenora!

And we're expanding Highway 7 between Kitchener and Guelph!

At the same time, in my riding, we're expanding Highway 7 from Markham to Pickering to support the innovation corridor and keep people and goods moving across the region.

But we're not just stopping at highways, Madam Speaker.

We're also building subways and transit, with the largest subway expansion in Ontario's history:

The Ontario Line!

The Scarborough subway extension!

And yes, Madam Speaker, bringing back the Northlander!

Madam Speaker ...

Building is more than just getting shovels in the ground—it's about stimulating economic growth ...

It's about creating tens of thousands of jobs and construction jobs right across the province ...

It's about helping people with affordability, so that future generations have the tools to live in the place that they work, and make a meaningful difference in the world ...

And above all—it's about building growing communities.

In that vein, Madam Speaker, I am proud to announce that we are building on our actions so far ... our government, in partnership with the federal government, is proposing to remove the full 13% of the HST for eligible buyers of new homes valued at up to \$1 million!

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This would provide up to \$130,000 in relief, and this amount would be maintained for new homes valued up to \$1.5 million—helping more Ontarians achieve the dream of home ownership, and building stronger communities across the province ...

Communities where a good-paying job, a safe neighbourhood, and an affordable place to call home are not the exception—but the rule!

And as for our municipal partners across the province—they, too, have a role to play by working with us to lower development charges and bring down the cost of housing.

Madam Speaker—just as we always have—we will continue to work with them as one united Team Ontario.

Madam Speaker, I want to make this perfectly clear ...

Every action our government has taken over the course of our plan to protect Ontario has been achievable thanks to the efforts our government has made to maintain a prudent fiscal hand.

Our fiscal responsibility has delivered investments to combat the uncertainty that is affecting Ontario businesses ...

But just as with our efforts to protect and support our businesses, Madam Speaker, we must also look to the people, families and communities who fuel this province and are facing their own challenges as well ...

Not only have we never raised a provincial tax on the people and businesses of Ontario ...

We've, in fact, cut taxes and fees and put more money back in their pockets!

Removing Highway 407 East tolls, saving daily commuters \$7,200 annually.

Launching the One Fare program, saving the daily transit user an average of \$1,600 annually.

And gas and fuel tax cuts, saving households on average a total of \$435 since July 2022.

Madam Speaker, this is a government that invests responsibly so families, businesses and communities can get ahead.

And essential to that are smart investments into public services that our communities depend on.

Not just any investments, Madam Speaker ...

Record investments.

These are first and foremost for the benefit of the students, the patients, and the most vulnerable who depend on them ...

And they are for the benefit of the teachers, the personal support workers, the health care workers, and the social workers who deliver them!

We will continue to be there for them, Madam Speaker ...

Because being a steward of our public services goes beyond just keeping our communities healthy, active, or looked after ...

It also demands that we spare no expense in keeping our families and communities safe from crime.

Our brave police officers are working every single day—putting their own personal safety on the line in order to keep others safe ...

So, before anything else—to every man and woman in uniform out there protecting our families and communities—I thank you.

We will always have the backs of our brave police officers, Madam Speaker.

This is why we will continue to cover 100% of tuition costs for basic constable training and deliver on our \$1-billion expansion and renovation of the Ontario Police College in Aylmer, and the Ontario Provincial Police Academy in Orillia.

We continue to work to make Ontario a safer place to call home, Madam Speaker ...

First and foremost—we are going to continue our calls on the federal government to enact much-needed bail reform—to keep repeat criminals off our streets and behind bars ...

Right where they belong!

And secondly, Madam Speaker, we are going to ensure that we keep building up our capacity to keep those criminals behind bars by building more jails and hiring over 700 more correctional officers, nurses and support staff to manage increased correctional capacity.

Since 2018, our government has allocated over \$375 million to combat guns and gangs.

Madam Speaker ...

Our message to those who would threaten our families and communities with crime and violence will continue to be clear ...

We are coming for you!

And so, I return to my central message: Our plan is working.

It is cautious where it must be and ambitious where it should be.

It protects people and services today, ensuring government programs are being delivered efficiently and sustainably for future generations.

We are strengthening delivery of public services, managing the books responsibly, modernizing our programs, and reducing bureaucracy—so resources can be focused where they matter most: delivering efficient, high-quality front-line services to the people who need them.

Madam Speaker, as the world faces uncertainty, our government is here to tell people, businesses, families and communities that we have a plan.

Uncertainty, although abundant, is not absolute.

And we have seen that there are measures and decisions we can make in order to mitigate it.

Unlike others, Ontario's plan has prepared us for whatever the future may hold, without sacrificing the well-being of our people, our services, or our economy.

Ours is a responsible government.

One that grows the economy by cutting taxes and investing in the industries, sectors, technologies and workers that will power our growth for generations to come.

One that breaks down barriers instead of putting them up.

And one that delivers better services to people without sacrificing the efficiency and sustainability.

Madam Speaker, our government is here ...

Armed with our plan ...

And I stand before you today to reaffirm our commitment to protect Ontario amid a changing and uncertain world.

We will continue to lead by example and work with federal, provincial, territorial and First Nations partners as one united team ...

One united people ...

One united province, in a country that I am so immensely proud of.

Let us work together.

Let us build prosperity ...

Let us be resilient!

Thank you, and God bless the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Timiskaming–Cochrane has moved the adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

INTRODUCTION OF GOVERNMENT BILLS

PLAN TO PROTECT ONTARIO
ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2026

LOI DE 2026 SUR LE PLAN
POUR PROTÉGER L'ONTARIO
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 97, An Act to implement Budget measures, to enact, amend or repeal various statutes and to revoke various regulations / Projet de loi 97, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires, à édicter, à modifier ou à abroger diverses lois et à abroger divers règlements.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Does the House want me to read it again?

Interjections: No.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I heard a no.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Steve Clark: I move adjournment of the House.

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

This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. on Monday, March 30, 2026.

The House adjourned at 1641.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Edith Dumont, OOnt
Speaker / Présidente de l'Assemblée législative: Hon. / L'hon. Donna Skelly
Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day
Deputy Clerk / Sous-Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Julia Douglas, Meghan Stenson,
Christopher Tyrell, Wai Lam (William) Wong
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Tim McGough

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Allsopp, Tyler (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	
Anand, Deepak (PC)	Mississauga—Malton	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London—Fanshawe	
Babikian, Aris (PC)	Scarborough—Agincourt	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia—Lambton	
Bell, Jessica (NDP)	University—Rosedale	
Bethlenfalvy, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (PC)	Pickering—Uxbridge	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Bowman, Stephanie (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de parti reconnu
Brady, Bobbi Ann (IND)	Haldimand—Norfolk	
Bresee, Ric (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)	Markham—Stouffville	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Cerjanec, Rob (LIB)	Ajax	
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough North / Scarborough-Nord	Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)	Willowdale	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Gaming / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et des Jeux
Ciriello, Monica (PC)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Clancy, Aislinn (GRN)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Clark, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby	
Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Cooper, Michelle (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
Crawford, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	Oakville	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises et de l'Approvisionnement
Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC)	Mississauga—Lakeshore	
Darouze, George (PC)	Carleton	
Denault, Billy (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Dixon, Jess (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Dowie, Andrew (PC)	Windsor—Tecumseh	
Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Response / Ministre de la Protection civile et de l'Intervention en cas d'urgence
Fairclough, Lee (LIB)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	
Firin, Mohamed (PC)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
Flack, Hon. / L'hon. Rob (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Premier / Premier ministre Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Leader, Third Party / Chef du troisième parti
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gilmour, Alexa (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Gualtieri, Silvia (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Hamid, Hon. / L'hon. Zee (PC)	Milton	Associate Solicitor General for Auto Theft and Bail Reform / Solliciteur général associé responsable de la Lutte contre le vol d'automobiles et de la Réforme relative aux mises en liberté sous caution
Hardeman, Hon. / L'hon. Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Hon. / L'hon. Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Hazell, Andrea (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Holland, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin (PC)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	Associate Minister of Forestry and Forest Products / Ministre associé des Forêts et des Produits forestiers
Hsu, Ted (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Trevor (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et de l'Agroentreprise
Jordan, John (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC)	York Centre / York-Centre	Solicitor General / Solliciteur général
Khanjin, Hon. / L'hon. Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Minister of Red Tape Reduction / Ministre de la Réduction des formalités administratives
Kusendova-Bashta, Hon. / L'hon. Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Leardi, Anthony (PC)	Essex	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Energy and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie et des Mines
Lennox, Robin (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	
Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Sport / Ministre du Sport
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiwiwinoong	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
McCarthy, Hon. / L'hon. Todd J. (PC)	Durham	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
McCrimmon, Karen (LIB)	Kanata—Carleton	
McGregor, Hon. / L'hon. Graham (PC)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiques et du Multiculturalisme
McKenney, Catherine (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones
Oosterhoff, Hon. / L'hon. Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries / Ministre associé des Industries à forte consommation d'énergie
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	Deputy House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pinsonneault, Steve (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Northern Economic Development and Growth / Ministre du Développement et de la croissance économique du Nord
Quinn, Hon. / L'hon. Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security / Ministre des Collèges et Universités, de l'Excellence en recherche et de la Sécurité
Racinsky, Joseph (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation / Ministre des Affaires autochtones et de la Réconciliation économique avec les Premières Nations Minister Responsible for Ring of Fire Economic and Community Partnerships / Ministre responsable des Partenariats économiques et communautaires pour le développement du Cercle de feu
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Rosenberg, Bill (PC)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Chris (IND)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Skelly, Hon. / L'hon. Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Speaker / Présidente de l'Assemblée législative
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre associé des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Smyth, Stephanie (LIB)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée des Petites Entreprises
Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon. Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué à la Santé mentale et à la Lutte contre les dépendances
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Attorney General / Procureur général associé
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	Deputy Speaker / Vice-Présidente Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Tsao, Jonathan (LIB)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Vaugeois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Vickers, Paul (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
Watt, Tyler (LIB)	Nepean	
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Vacant	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough- Sud-Ouest	