

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

No. 16B

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

N° 16B

1st Session
44th Parliament

Monday
26 May 2025

1^{re} session
44^e législature

Lundi
26 mai 2025

Speaker: Honourable Donna Skelly
Clerk: Trevor Day

Présidente : L'honorable Donna Skelly
Greffier : Trevor Day

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House Publications and Language Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 1180-2987

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 26 May 2025

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 26 mai 2025

Report continued from volume A.

1800

PROTECT ONTARIO BY BUILDING
FASTER AND SMARTER ACT, 2025
LOI DE 2025 POUR PROTÉGER L'ONTARIO
EN CONSTRUISANT PLUS RAPIDEMENT
ET PLUS EFFICACEMENT

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 15, 2025, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 17, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to infrastructure, housing and transit and to revoke a regulation / *Projet de loi 17, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'infrastructure, le logement et le transport en commun et abrogeant un règlement.*

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

MPP Catherine McKenney: I will be splitting my time with the member for Niagara Centre this evening as I rise to speak to Bill 17, the Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act.

I'd like to address the broader housing agenda of this government. It's an agenda that continues to fall short of the bold, evidence-based action Ontario's housing crisis demands. This bill is the Conservative government's latest attempt to convince Ontarians that they are tackling the housing crisis while doing very little to solve it, and in some ways making it worse. When it comes to housing, we are not just in a supply crisis; we are in an affordability crisis, and for many we are in a crisis of survival. When we have an emergency, like our housing and homelessness emergency, we call 911, and people across Ontario are being crushed by the weight of this housing crisis.

Rents have skyrocketed; mortgage rates have risen; evictions from people's existing homes are happening at an unprecedented rate. People are being pushed out of their communities, pushed out of their homes, and too often pushed directly into homelessness. The numbers don't lie. It was reported by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. that 11.5% of Ontarians will experience a core housing need. It means they cannot afford the housing they are currently in.

As of 2023, the Ontario Nonprofit Housing Association found that more than 288,000 households are on the affordable housing wait-list, waiting for rent-g geared-to-income housing. This is a 10- to-12-year wait for housing that is affordable for individuals, for seniors, for families, for workers. Meanwhile, homelessness has become increasingly visible across every corner of our province.

People are living in parks, in encampments, in overcrowded shelters, in stairwells and hospitals, simply because they have nowhere else to go.

Further, in 2024, before Trump returned with his disruptive and destructive tariffs, housing starts in this province under this government were down 12.5% in municipalities across the province, reaching only 81,000 out of the government's target of 125,000. This all happened under this government.

So the urgency now to make it easier to build and build faster has to make one ask: Where were you for the past eight years? Rather than advancing policies that meet the real needs of Ontarians—affordable, accessible and sustainable housing—Bill 17 continues to ignore many of the core recommendations of this government's own Housing Affordability Task Force. Once again, we see a plan that gestures at speed and supply but sidesteps the deeper structural solutions that experts have already laid out. This is the government's own hired experts. Speaker, we all remember that the Housing Affordability Task Force was created by this government. It was not an opposition initiative; it was not a grassroots consultation. This was the Conservative government's own panel of experts. One of its top recommendations was to legalize missing middle housing as of right in all neighbourhoods across Ontario. This would mean permitting the construction of semi-detached homes, townhouses and fourplexes in areas that have long been zoned exclusively for single-family homes.

I actually want to take a minute here to read from the task force, and here's what they said: "We heard from planners, municipal councillors, and developers that 'as of right' zoning—the ability to bypass long, drawn out consultations and zoning bylaw amendments—is the most effective tool in the provincial tool kit. We agree." That is what the task force said.

They go on: "Too much land inside cities is tied up by outdated rules. For example, it's estimated that 70% of land zoned for housing in Toronto is restricted to single-detached or semi-detached homes. This type of zoning prevents homeowners from adding additional suites to create housing for Ontarians and income for themselves. As one person said, 'my neighbour can tear down what was there to build a monster home, but I'm not allowed to add a basement suite to my home.'"

Speaker, that one single change, if implemented, could unlock housing supply in every municipality in this province. That is what we are told this government wants to do. It would allow modest density in existing neighbourhoods—gentle density. It would give more families,

more workers and seniors a chance to live near transit, near schools and near their jobs.

I was a member of council in Ottawa at the time that this report was published. I knew that this was the direction we needed to end exclusionary zoning that keeps young people out of housing, keeps renters out of neighbourhoods, and keeps housing and rental prices high across the city. I was actually looking forward to what this government was going to do, yet this government dismissed that recommendation outright and continues to.

Instead of acting on that expert advice, this government has brought forward Bill 17, a bill that seeks to speed up housing and infrastructure delivery but, in reality, it does neither at a rate that this moment calls for. This bill does not legalize missing-middle housing. It does not fund affordable housing. It does not address the growing encampment crisis. It does not require a single unit of housing to be affordable to those who are of modest and middle income, who are currently unhoused or who are at risk of homelessness.

The Conservative government defines affordable housing as units priced at 80% of the average market rent. But in large cities like Toronto, that still means that a one-bedroom unit could cost nearly \$1,700 a month—that is their affordability. That is not affordable for someone working a minimum-wage job, that is not affordable for someone on ODSP and that is not affordable for the majority of renters in this province. In fact, Speaker, a 2023 report by ACORN Canada found that more than 80% of new affordable units built under this definition were still unaffordable for low- and moderate-income earners, so who are these homes really being built for?

Instead of addressing key issues, this bill continues to let the most vulnerable Ontarians fall through the cracks. It certainly offers no guarantee of housing for the 80,000 Ontarians who have no housing, or the thousands who are living in overcrowded shelters where there is no room for anyone to move out of an encampment into; no relief for renters being priced out of their neighbourhoods; and no meaningful pathway to affordable or supportive housing. For the thousands of Ontarians facing eviction, homelessness or impossible housing costs, Bill 17 offers nothing but empty promises and more delays.

1810

Affordability is not a luxury; it is the foundation of housing policy. And if the government is not addressing affordability, it is not properly addressing the crisis.

Why is this government so resistant to evidence? Why is it unwilling to act on the central finding of its own task force? The task force laid bare the consequences of inaction—and I'll read from it again—"Black and Indigenous home ownership rates are less than half the provincial average, and homelessness rates among Indigenous peoples are 11 times the national average." This is not going to change.

As the report itself warned, "When housing prevents an individual from reaching their full potential, this represents a loss to every Ontarian: lost creativity, lost productivity, lost revenue and lost prosperity for individuals and

for the entire Ontario economy." When will this government stop choosing delay and denial, and finally choose to act?

Speaker, the scale of the housing shortage in Ontario is not in dispute. A 2021 Scotiabank study found that Canada has the fewest housing units per capita of any G7 country—and that supply has actually declined over the past seven years. An update released in 2022 found that two thirds of Canada's housing shortage is right here in Ontario. According to that report, Ontario is now 1.2-million homes short of the G7 average, either rental or owned. And yet we are not operating in a data vacuum. We know what types of housing are needed and where they are needed.

The housing assessment resource tool—HART—was developed by leading researchers at the University of British Columbia and supported by the federal government. It provides detailed community-level data on housing needs across Ontario. You can look it up, you can go onto any neighbourhood, you can go onto any city, you can find out who needs what housing, where and at what cost.

The federal government actually made the housing needs assessments mandatory for municipalities receiving funding through the Housing Accelerator Fund. It shows us that the overwhelming demand is for rental housing that is affordable to low-, moderate- and middle-income households. That is the unmet need: affordable homes, close to services and transit.

Bill 17 does not deliver that housing. It does not allocate resources to it. It does not even acknowledge what types of housing should be built, for whom and at what cost. Non-profit and co-op housing providers are being shut out of land acquisition, denied financing and pushed to the sidelines in favour of profit over people. And yet this government continues to insist that the problem is red tape alone. But I ask, what piece of red tape is preventing someone from affording rent? What zoning variance is forcing a person to sleep in a tent through the winter? I've never had one person sleeping outside or in a shelter talk to me about what type of zoning they need.

What people need is housing that they can afford, where they can afford it. The truth is so simple: Housing costs have completely outpaced wages. People are working full-time jobs and still cannot afford a place to live. Even the government's own task force made it clear: Over the past decades, house prices have increased by 180% while average incomes have risen by only 38%.

People need housing available to middle-income, moderate-income and low-income households. They need supportive housing and they need public investment. They need a real path to stability. This bill offers no such path.

Bill 17 also raises serious questions about the erosion of municipal standards and tenant protections. Instead of encouraging the kind of dense, transit-oriented, climate-resilient housing that Ontarians need, this bill will continue to promote sprawl—sprawl that will pave over farmland, increase greenhouse gas emissions and drive up the cost of public services.

The Toronto Green Standard, which is a key tool in ensuring new buildings are environmentally sustainable, may now be at risk. Bill 17 seeks to speed up the construction of housing, which is a good goal, and growth-related infrastructure—again, another good goal—but it does so by eliminating regulatory requirements, which is precisely how cities implement green building standards.

The Toronto Green Standard ensures that new developments are energy efficient, climate resilient and transit supportive. It reduces greenhouse gas emissions, it improves air quality and lowers long-term utility costs, benefits that matter most to low-income renters and future generations: our kids and your kids.

Green building standards also make housing more affordable. In Ottawa, I was on the board of Ottawa Community Housing, and we redeveloped a housing neighbourhood in the ward that I represented. We took down 27 townhomes that were at the end of their life cycle and we built 41 new homes for people. It was a six-storey low-rise with some stacked homes in the back, just behind. Just across the street, we took down another 99 townhomes that were at the end of their life cycle, and they are currently building approximately 500 new homes.

These are not all deeply affordable—it's a mixed-income community—but these homes built by Ottawa Community Housing, a public builder, were built to net zero and passive standards. Do you know what that means for people who are living there, people who are already of low income? Their annual heating and cooling cost for a unit is \$200. It's what most of us pay in a month. So having good standards for building means that people can afford their housing, and not just people on low incomes. It's something we should all aspire to. If we want to make housing more affordable for people, make it more efficient.

But under Bill 17, the province is seemingly taking steps to centralize control over local planning decisions, including site plan approvals. This opens the door for the minister to override municipal requirements like the Toronto Green Standard, removing the ability of cities like Toronto to enforce energy performance standards that exceed the Ontario building code.

This isn't just about whether municipalities can go beyond the building code; it's about whether this government will keep its promise. Back in 2023, the then Minister of Housing committed to passing a regulation under the Building Code Act that would allow municipalities to maintain green development standards by selecting from a range of provincially authorized options. This was always the government's proposed transition plan: Municipalities would continue setting energy performance standards, like the Toronto Green Standard, but under a standardized framework within the building code. It wasn't ideal—organizations like the Toronto Atmospheric Fund expressed concern about relying on the province to follow through—but it was a compromise many were willing to accept.

In good faith, the city of Toronto began working with the government to align the green standard with this new

framework, expecting that the required regulation would be passed. But it never was, and now, with Bill 17 moving forward and no clear commitment from this government, municipalities are once again left in the dark. It is not helpful for the government to keep saying that municipalities won't be allowed to exceed the building code because the question is not whether they'll be allowed to do that; the question is whether the government will keep its promise to pass a regulation that enables municipalities to maintain existing green development standards under the building code.

1820

Building homes should not mean bulldozing wetlands and farmland. It should not mean gutting conservation authorities. It should not mean locking in a future of climate vulnerability.

Speaker, there is no disagreement that we need to build homes, but we should be building homes that are sustainable, equitable and future-proof. We should be enabling municipalities to develop these projects, not overriding their authority. The same concern is raised for rental replacement bylaws, which require developers to replace affordable units when they propose to demolish them. These protections were already undermined by Bill 23, and now they are seemingly, quietly threatened again.

Again, in Ottawa, we continue to lose affordable market rental housing. People get pushed out of their neighbourhoods when demovictions happen, when renovations happen. We lose something like 31 affordable rental units for every one new unit built. People are sentenced to homelessness when they lose their housing, the only affordable housing they have. If there are 31 gone, you're hardly likely to get that one that was built.

The provision here to eliminate rental control on purpose-built rental properties built after 2018 is an incentive for landlords, developers and REITs to knock down and rebuild. They come in, they know that they have rent-controlled units within their buildings, and they knock them down and they rebuild because that loophole means there is no rent control. They can be gouged, and their rent can be increased to the point where they're pushed out of their housing.

Bill 17 seems to allow the Minister of Infrastructure also to override municipal decisions with MZOs. This is not about efficiency or consistency; it is about power and to fast-track projects that may not serve the public interest. When you chip away at these protections, you are not cutting red tape. You are cutting climate action, you are cutting affordability, you are cutting tenant stability and you are cutting municipal authority.

We also must not forget the damage already done by Bill 23, which stripped municipalities of significant development charge revenue. At that time, this government promised to make municipalities whole. Speaker, has that happened? Have cities received the revenue they lost to cover growth-related infrastructure? No, they have not. Perhaps this government is waiting for the federal government to make good on its election promise to pay municipalities 50% of lost DC revenue. Maybe that is an

answer we can get: Is that where we're looking for the money?

Bill 17 now further amends the Development Charges Act without addressing the fiscal holes this government created in towns and cities across Ontario, funds that are required for essential services in new neighbourhoods, like water, waste water, roads, sidewalks, transit, libraries and recreation centres. Let's not forget that this government has issued more MZO's in the past five years than all previous governments combined. Many of these have been used to push through development on sensitive land or to benefit a select few—a well-connected select few, as we've learned.

At the same time, municipalities are being stripped of their ability to collect development charges, which again they use to fund critical infrastructure, the city of Toronto alone has warned that Bill 23 and related policies could cost them more than \$2 billion in lost revenue.

We know that municipalities today cannot afford to keep up their infrastructure costs. They receive 10 cents on every dollar that is earned from taxes and they are responsible for 17% of expenditures. They continue to go in the hole, and they are the level of government closest to people, providing things, like I said, like recreation, libraries, the things that people need in their communities. How are municipalities supposed to support new housing without the funds to build the infrastructure they require? How can we expect communities to grow sustainably if we are undercutting their ability to plan, build and pay for essential services?

Bill 17 also extends the powers granted under the Building Transit Faster Act and seemingly expands the reach of the Minister of Infrastructure over transit-oriented communities. But let's look at the government's record on this. The Mimico transit-oriented community, touted as a flagship project, collapsed when the private partner went bankrupt. Today, there is nothing there—a hole in the ground where housing was promised.

No one needs a reminder of the debacle that was the Ottawa LRT, a failed P3, so poorly built and maintained that this government was forced to call for an inquiry into the system. A new train, a brand-new train that derailed within months, broke down almost daily, had wheels that had trouble remaining round—

Interjection: They were square.

MPP Catherine McKenney: They were square. They actually were square wheels. Yes, tracks falling apart after only months of operation.

Yet this government now asks the public to trust it with even more power to hand over public infrastructure to private entities without oversight, without results. It doesn't work.

Instead of working in partnership with municipalities, this government is sidelining them. Instead of listening to local residents, it is silencing them. If we are serious about solving the housing crisis, we need to work collaboratively across all levels of government, not bulldoze over local democracy in the name of speed.

Speaker, the housing crisis is complex, but the solutions are not a mystery. The government has the road map. It paid for the road map. It chose its own experts to give it the road map, and now it is choosing to ignore it.

Real leadership means:

- legalizing missing middle housing, as the task force recommended;

- investing in deeply affordable and supportive housing, not just market-rate units;

- protecting rental house stock through rental replacement bylaws;

- preserving environmental standards; and

- ensuring municipalities have the fiscal tools they need to support growth.

Instead, Bill 17 is another missed opportunity, another step away from affordability and stability.

Ontarians deserve better. They deserve a government that builds the housing they need. The missed opportunities from a government that took Ontarians to the polls this winter, almost two years earlier than necessary, to get a stronger mandate to protect Ontario have already begun to add up.

The first order of business for this new Legislature was a government speech from the throne, outlining key government initiatives. What we got was heavy on rhetoric, but light on relief, a message that failed to meaningfully address the serious issues facing our province, with no plans to build affordable housing, fix publicly funded and publicly delivered health care, invest in critical infrastructure, double ODSP and OW, restore rent controls, or protect workers threatened by tariffs.

1830

Since then, we've been presented with a number of pieces of legislation tabled by the government that followed a similar style-before-substance pattern. One of those bills, the Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act, has First Nations and environmental groups raising alarm bells for its gutting of the Ontario Endangered Species Act and disregard for free, prior and informed consent on the Ring of Fire.

The Safer Municipalities Act doubles down on expensive and failed policies to address people without housing and without shelter—the most desperate, marginalized people in our province—and it will cost taxpayers more, without any meaningful impact to address the growing and persistent unhoused and unsheltered population. As I pointed out in my debate on this bill, there are other jurisdictions, other provinces—for example, led by Manitoba's Premier, Wab Kinew—making meaningful progress on ending encampments by housing people. That's why he's Canada's most popular premier.

In the face of Trump's economic threats and a cost-of-living crisis that continues to spiral out of control, now is the time to be strengthening and building Ontario, not cutting corners and delaying necessary investments. So, while there are things to support in this bill—get it to second reading—we need questions answered. It does not do what is required in this extraordinary time.

My priorities and those of our party over the coming months and throughout this term will be shaped from what we heard from people on their doorsteps, what people are telling us they need to make their lives more affordable. We will continue to advocate for new and bold direction, including thousands of permanently affordable non-market homes built quickly with rent control and strong tenant protections; a fast-tracked and concrete plan for school repairs, better transit service and critical public infrastructure. We will push for supportive housing solutions for our neighbours living in overcrowded shelters and in encampments, with access to wraparound mental health and addiction supports. We will push for investments in training, in apprenticeships—especially for youth, newcomers, under-represented workers to build the workforce we need now and into the future—and a clear plan to retain health care workers and hire more to fill the growing need for health care.

Now, there is some good news lately in the rental market with one-bedroom rents going down. It's a 5% decrease in the rental rate in Mississauga and about 9% here in Toronto. But at the same time, we've seen rents in other places increase because people in Ontario now are driving until they can afford housing, and they are driving literally across the province. The average one-bedroom apartment, according to liv.rent, here in Toronto is \$2,200 a month. But this levelling off is still unaffordable across the province. We know that rents have increased, on average, 30% since the pandemic. This is more than just a supply problem.

The minister, in introducing this Bill 17, talked about a sense of urgency to build purpose-built rentals, to supportive and affordable housing, to transit-oriented communities and to single-family homes. But there is nothing here that will address the absolute crisis that people are in today.

As housing expert Carolyn Whitzman reminds us, we need to be serious about who needs what housing, where and at what cost. To start with, we need one definition of affordability—that is, no more than 30% of pre-tax household income; this is the CMHC definition—and the use of five income categories—this is the work of HART—based on Canadian and US best practice, and it should be linked to the average median household income. We need to consider people who are very low-income, people making less than 20% of average median household income, what housing they need and at what price; low income, 21% to 50% of average median household income; moderate, and higher income. In general, very low- and low-income individuals and households are most at risk of homelessness. Moderate- and median-income households are also being left behind in terms of affordable and secure housing, and moderate- and median-income seniors are worried about aging in place and need rental accommodation near where they live today, with services.

As Professor Whitzman has so often pointed out, if you're talking about \$2,000 a month for a one-bedroom apartment, that means that a middle-class household needs

to be content living in a one-bedroom apartment. But if you are a moderate-class household, say, a nurse or a teacher, or if you're low income—the very workers we count on in our service industry—it is impossible to find a two-bedroom place to rent. There is simply no housing in our urban centres, many of our cities and many of our towns for people who are moderate and low income.

Now, before we throw our hands up and give up here, the provincial government could move immediately to acquire units in order to keep their affordability—acquire them and turn them over to non-profits and co-ops to operate. We know that for every new affordable unit built in this province, we lose so many more to renovictions and demovictions. We could change zoning and building codes immediately to make it easier to build those low-rise and mid-rise apartments that families need. We could put in place tenant protection, rent controls, strong short-term rental bylaws, get rid of vacancy decontrol and make all units covered by rent control, and we can tighten up above-guideline increases. People simply cannot afford to foot the bill for these measures aimed at increasing profit alone.

Under the National Housing Strategy, the Apartment Construction Loan Program, which was about \$55 billion, saw very little affordable housing built. But we know that units built by non-profits have rents that are 20% less after 20 years, and 33% after 30 years, because they are not maximizing profits. So the political headlines could be, “We are going to enable a new generation of low-priced family homes near jobs, transit and services.” It could be, “We are going to protect renter rights.” It could be, “We're going to end chronic homelessness.” Or it could be, “We are going to create a new generation of options for seniors to age in place.”

Bill 17 is not a real housing plan. It will not make homes more affordable. It will not address homelessness. It will not build the kind of inclusive, livable, climate-resilient communities that Ontarians deserve. We are in the middle of the worst housing crisis in a generation. People need real solutions, they need leadership, and they need a government that puts people, and not profits, first.

Speaker, I urge this government to go back, listen to housing experts, listen to municipalities, listen to Ontarians and bring forward legislation that actually addresses the crisis, not just the headlines.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Brian Saunderson): The member from Niagara Centre.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I'm pleased to rise and give some comments on Bill 17. I want to thank my colleague from Ottawa Centre for their words.

I know we all feel, in our caucus, privileged to have such a great bunch of new members. My friends from Hamilton Centre, from Ottawa Centre and Parkdale-High Park are doing a great job—all the new members that I've heard, actually, on all sides of the House. I'm really impressed by their work.

1840

This bill I would characterize as being not so good, not so bad. It certainly does not rise to the occasion of the housing crisis. I think most folks, from the comments that

I've heard, would agree with that. But there are some bright spots in it.

I've been the municipal affairs critic since 2018. Over the last couple of years, I've been a part of a travelling committee on governance, and that committee has garnered a lot of really good consultation from municipalities that have taken part in it. I've travelled around to two-tier municipalities and heard from them on all kinds of issues.

"Use it or lose it" was a good example of a policy that we were pushing for a long time. The government heard loud and clear from municipalities during those committee hearings in places like Waterloo and others, and they implemented a certain version of that.

In this bill, there is housing-enabling infrastructure for water and waste water desperately needed. It's something I think the government heard loud and clear from municipalities as that committee travelled.

Also, smaller municipalities without housing targets—it's good to see that being considered. I'm not sure how this bill is going to roll out in terms of that, but I come from a small municipality, Thorold, where I live, and they have been begging for housing targets because they're the eighth-fastest-growing municipality in all of Canada and are far exceeding every expectation, but they were unable to tap into those funds.

I'm not sure how I feel about these housing targets or if they've really done any good, but if there's going to be a fund for municipalities to take advantage of, I think we should have a system that's fair for all municipalities. So I hope that Thorold and other small municipalities without housing targets become part of that.

We must do better in municipalities like Niagara. I'm going to talk about some infrastructure issues in Niagara. I know a couple of my colleagues, like my friend from St. Catharines, raised some questions in Question Period this morning. We'll talk a little bit about that, and there are concerns in this bill around infrastructure as well.

While we do support many aspects of this bill, I am in agreement with a lot of housing and municipal affairs experts who say that it really doesn't meet the moment, so we're hoping to see a lot more.

John McGrath, for example, from TVO said, "Both provincial and federal governments acknowledge we're in a housing crisis, but the package of measures announced" in this bill "doesn't really meet the moment. Under the cover of the crisis, the government is giving the development industry in Toronto specifically two clear favours, but those measures will be of limited importance elsewhere in the province. Many of the other measures announced ... might someday end up being more than marginal, but we'll have to wait and see. As someone who hoped that the newly re-elected ... government would at least use some of its political capital" right after an election "to take some big swings on the housing file," this bill is a letdown for many people and "a worrying primer for the next four years."

I tend to agree with McGrath. This government was elected on a mandate to get Ontario building, but the bill misses the mark when it comes to building affordable homes, especially as my friend from Ottawa spoke about.

Last year, Ontario was on track to record the lowest number of annual housing starts for detached homes since records began in 1955. At this rate, we'll never reach the 1.5-million-home target. It's another housing bill that still does not implement top recommendations of the Housing Affordability Task Force, which my friend also mentioned, including legalizing missing-middle housing options like semis, townhouses and fourplexes in all neighbourhoods. These types of homes would be more affordable options for a wider range of income levels.

In 2023, housing starts declined by 7% in Ontario, while in British Columbia, where the government adopted many recommendations from Ontario's Housing Affordability Task Force, housing starts rose by 11%. According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp., urban housing starts in Ontario are down 17% from 2023, in stark contrast to increases of 30% in Quebec and 35% in Alberta. In November 2024 alone, monthly housing starts jumped by 143% in Montreal and 52% in Vancouver compared to the same month in 2023, while remaining completely flat in Toronto. Data published recently by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. showed that housing starts in Ontario in March were down 46% year over year for communities with 10,000 people or more. Ultimately, this bill falls short of addressing the urgent housing crisis we are facing.

There are limitations on municipalities' ability to impose inclusionary zoning, as has been mentioned. It's a new regulation that was first proposed three years ago and only enacted now. It represents a substantial reduction in the ability of municipalities to impose inclusionary zoning rules in their cities near protected major transit station areas.

As McGrath also pointed out, Toronto had adopted rules requiring up to 22% of gross floor area to be dedicated to affordable housing for a period of 99 years. Provincial rules will limit that to only 5% of floor area for 25 years.

The NDP has been advocating for the government to enable inclusionary zoning bylaws for over a decade. Critics of inclusionary zoning claim it's effectively a tax on development and a disincentive to home construction. A badly designed inclusionary zoning policy could indeed be that, Speaker, but properly designed, an inclusionary zoning policy should function as a form of land value capture. That is a tax on speculative profit the landowner did nothing to earn.

Had inclusionary zoning bylaws been in place 10 years ago, municipalities might have been able to capture more of the rising land values for the public's benefit instead of these gains flowing to landowners in the form of speculation profit—and we've been talking about this since 2018, the need to clamp down on speculation. In a time of housing affordability crises, especially in cities like Toronto, this reduction will significantly limit the availability of affordable homes for low- and moderate-income residents.

As I mentioned, there are some bright spots in the bill, and one of those is the level of collaboration between

municipal partners. It is a positive step to see the government working more collaboratively with partners, something we've been calling for after several years of a very heavy top-down approach from this government.

In a statement on the bill, AMO said, "This legislation is a marked departure from Bill 23"—which we all remember—"which introduced significant across-the-board reductions and discounts to DCs. This new bill provides the framework changes and room to consult on how best to accomplish them in future regulations." So I hope that in committee this bill undergoes some changes, and we see some of those assurances from the government.

AMO continues to call for adequate, predictable and sustainable provincial funding for municipal infrastructure. As we all recall, Bill 23 took away development charge revenues that municipalities count on to build infrastructure, community services and housing. The minister at the time promised to make municipalities whole, a promise that was never fulfilled. I'm not sure how many questions I've asked in this place about when the government would fulfill its promise to make municipalities whole from Bill 23, and it's never happened. It results in higher taxes, obviously—double-digit tax increases—and cuts in municipal services.

Lindsay Jones, the AMO director of policy and government relations, said, "This is not another Bill 23," so hopefully we're heading in a more positive direction. "This is a bill that was developed with prior collaboration...."

The recent announcement included the government increasing its investment in housing-enabling infrastructure, which I've mentioned, and I'm going to talk a little bit about Niagara in a moment. From what I can see and judging from what I've heard in past committee work from various regions that we visited last term, this government seems to have listened to what a lot of those municipalities told them, especially around that issue of enabling water and waste water infrastructure, and funds for municipalities that don't have housing targets.

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I'd like to talk for a few moments about housing in Niagara. Ultimately, the goal of this bill is to build more housing, yet the government has been in power for nearly a decade, and people in my riding tell me they've yet to see any changes that have made housing more affordable in Niagara. As a matter of fact, it's getting worse. Housing affordability was one of the top concerns among residents in the last election—what I heard was health care and housing.

According to Nanos, 72% of respondents believe that affordability in the Niagara region has worsened over the past five years, and 89% agree that it's more difficult to find housing now than it was five years ago. That's a clear failure on the part of this government with respect to the region that I'm from. One in three residents indicated they're considering leaving Niagara in search of more affordable housing options. Additionally, 89% believe it is significantly harder for young people and first-time homebuyers to afford a home in the region today compared to five years ago.

This bill will not ensure the delivery of new housing for people living in encampments or on the streets, as my friend from Ottawa mentioned. It does not provide for direct public investment in affordable housing, as the NDP has long called for. Niagara region's by-name list recorded 1,136 individuals experiencing homelessness at the end of 2024. That's something that obviously shouldn't be happening. The primary reasons for homelessness: conflict with a landlord, 24%; financial hardship, 20%; unsafe housing conditions, which I'm hearing more and more of in Niagara, 12%. And the barriers are that rent is too high, income is too low, housing conditions are poor, there's discrimination—especially discrimination around mental health.

Now I want to turn for a moment to something I mentioned earlier. My colleague from St. Catharines talked about it in question period this morning. She asked the minister about the south Niagara waste water treatment plant. The local government officials in Niagara are not getting the answers that we believe they should be getting from this government, and it has not been taken with the seriousness that it should be. There was a recent article in our daily newspaper in Niagara, from Bill Sawchuk, that talked about Niagara mayors warning both the federal and provincial governments that their lack of support for a new half-billion-dollar waste water treatment plant will definitely stall local development and endanger housing starts. We're in a crisis. We have a monumental issue in Niagara, and we're, incredibly, not getting answers from the government.

"If we don't put a full-court press on this project, we're going to be shutting down development in Niagara." That's from the mayor of Thorold, Terry Ugolini. "With the new government and ministers coming in, we need to ensure we're front and centre and step up to the plate." Everyone knows we need this, but in recent inquiries, we've gotten nowhere.

The south Niagara waste water treatment plant is the largest single infrastructure project in the upper-tier municipality's history. It will be on 44 hectares, equivalent to about 30 Canadian football fields. It will handle about 30 million litres of waste water daily, with the treated outfall going into Chippawa Creek. Construction of the facility was expected to start in 2027. Once complete, it would serve Niagara Falls, parts of Thorold, St. Catharines, Niagara-on-the-Lake, and reduce some of the infrastructure strain in those communities, many of whom are trying to build housing as quickly as possible.

The region's official plan projects Niagara's population will grow by more than 214,000 residents by 2051, bringing the total to almost 700,000.

For its part, Niagara Falls has a provincially assigned housing target of 8,000 units by 2031, and those are, of course, in danger. That's what the mayors are saying.

The fact that the plant's funding package isn't in place has concerned many of the mayors, including Mayor Siscoe, who said he's getting nowhere with government representatives. This government says they're serious about housing, but they're getting nowhere with this

government when it comes to enabling infrastructure that the region is completely dependent on to build new housing. “The overriding message I was given” from the government, said the mayor, “was, ‘Stop looking to us to figure out how to fund this project—you need to come forward with a better plan than what we’ve been presented....’”

The region’s chief administrative officer said the only real alternative without federal and provincial assistance is having Niagara taxpayers fund the project through water rates, and so there you go, what we were talking about earlier: The government can come forward with whatever they want to build, but if they’re not willing to actually take action in the areas of the province that desperately need it, housing starts are going to stall.

How bad is it? The Niagara Falls plant recently violated federal waste water systems regulations for the second time in just more than a year, and this is infrastructure that’s already in place. A discharged sample collected on April 26 for testing by the federal government killed 80% of rainbow trout in a lab tank over a 96-hour period. That’s how bad it is. A result exceeding 50% is considered noncompliant. So this is existing infrastructure that’s not working, and if it’s not replaced, not only will this dangerous situation continue, but we can forget about housing starts in the future, because that’s going to stall.

The province’s More Homes Built Faster Act isn’t helping with the new plant’s financing, and the folks in the region are desperate. Niagara Falls Councillor Joyce Morocco said permits are sitting and waiting for builders to develop, but municipalities need improved infrastructure.

So that’s a situation, Speaker, that is a specific situation, and just coming up with a bill that puts money into a fund—if the government is not speaking to the municipalities that need that money and finding ways to partner with the federal government and the municipal governments, these projects are not going to move forward in time for them to have a real effect.

I can remember: I was a councillor with my friend from St. Catharines; we were on the same council in St. Catharines together for eight years. I was elected in 2006 to that council, and we all remember the financial collapse in 2008 and the federal Conservative government coming out with an infrastructure program—a huge infrastructure stimulus package, and that was based on a one-third/one-third/one-third share between the federal government, the province and the municipality. We built all kinds of projects with that fund, and that’s obviously the way forward for giant infrastructure projects like this that exist not only in Niagara, but all over the province. The province needs to come to the table.

They don’t need to pay for the whole thing. If they have a certain amount of money in the enabling fund, then that money is something the government decides on the amount of. But we know how much the project in Niagara costs, and if the province doesn’t come up with one third and if they don’t partner with the federal government, then the municipality is not going to be able to build that critical infrastructure. So it needs to happen, and it needs to happen soon.

I would encourage this government not to just come forward with bills like this one that, as most people agree, don’t meet the moment. We’re happy that they’ve put more money into that fund. We’re happy that they’ve listened to municipalities in some areas, like smaller municipalities that do not have housing targets. But they have to be more targeted. They have to listen to municipalities, like Niagara, that come forward and want to work with them, and partner with the federal and provincial governments to make sure that these projects move forward.

Speaker, I’m not going to have time to speak about green standards, but my friend from Ottawa did a great job with that.

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There are a lot of questions in this bill. I did want to mention that there was some confusion last week when we asked for a briefing. It was actually my friend from the Liberals who asked for a briefing, and our researcher in the NDP caucus was told that they weren’t welcome in the briefing. That’s the first time I’ve seen that as the municipal affairs critic over the last almost eight years. Usually those briefings are there for a specific purpose which is not always partisan; it’s actually so that we can all understand the bill and understand which parts are actually in the bill and which are regulations that can be enacted. and ask other questions.

I’m troubled by that, and I hope we work that out with the government because when we have briefings, those should be open to both staff and politicians from all parties.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you very much for the member opposite’s thoughtful conversations. One of the things that this bill provides is something that’s probably near and dear to everyone in this room, which is supportive housing and affordable rentals and long-term-care homes. This bill will actually remove and eliminate the DC charges to spur on faster construction. So does the opposition support these cost-saving reforms that will help these institutions, these places get built a little faster?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): I recognize the member from Ottawa Centre.

MPP Catherine McKenney: Thank you for that question. Yes, the reduction of DCs for long-term-care homes is a good indicator, absolutely. It’s not clear if that’s just for not-for-profit long-term-care homes or if it’s also for for-profit, which we know we’ve had considerable issues with. So, those are questions that we will seek answers to in committee.

But just to be clear, I think that when we’re talking about supportive housing, what we need for supports is actual operating dollars so that we can wrap around mental health and addictions services for people who need those types of supports. We will be looking further to that and look forward to much more conversation.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: My question is to my colleagues. Thank you for your explanation of what is and isn't in Bill 17 here. But I want to highlight to my colleague from Niagara Centre—he mentioned the south Niagara waste water treatment plant, which is quite an issue right now within the Thorold, Niagara Falls and St. Catharines. With new housing developments in Thorold encroaching into my riding of St. Catharines, the treatment plant needs to be operating at full capacity to serve the growth of the population.

Schedule 4 in this bill changes how development charges are applied, but let's be clear: Development charges are how municipalities fund infrastructure, like waste water plants. Local taxpayers should not be expected to foot the bill for projects like this and making their property taxes skyrocket. I do believe that we have worked together. The municipality has worked with federal, they've worked with the province and the municipalities—one third/one third/one third—to get things done. But I'm not hearing that from this government and I'm not seeing in this bill that the provincial government will not go—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): I recognize the member from Niagara Centre.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I think the problem with the way the government approaches development charges is they're looking at them in a very short-term way as a way to make things easier for their friends in the development community rather than looking at it as a long-term strategy.

In Niagara, something like the waste water treatment facility—the new one that needs to be built—that's a long-term strategy. So tinkering around with development charges, which this government is doing in the bill, is going to do nothing to provide actual long-term infrastructure and solve those long-term problems that municipalities like Niagara are facing.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question? Question?

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: I appreciate the member from Niagara Centre for contributing to debate this evening by sharing his perspectives on Niagara. I'm glad always to hear a fellow colleague from Niagara bring forward Niagara issues. I will say he talked about enabling water systems, but he didn't talk about the funding that is actually already flowing into the Niagara region through those grants.

So I'm wondering if he could share a little bit more about the \$20 million to Welland, the \$13 million to Lincoln, the almost \$20 million to Niagara Falls, \$4 million to West Lincoln and millions of dollars to St. Catharines as well through that fund, what that's already doing in terms of building out water-enabling infrastructure in the Niagara region, and if you could share a little bit about what you heard from those in the community, who obviously wanted to see more housing built, specifically in the home-building community, and why they thought that was such a good program.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I did mention in my comments that there are some positive aspects to the bill—the \$400

million. We all want to see money flowing to our communities, but in relation to the huge problem that this treatment facility presents, that needs a specific solution. It needs partnership with the federal and provincial governments. It's not going to be helped by these funds that are flowing to individual communities, which are very welcome.

I am hoping that communities like the one that I live in, Thorold, will be able to be rewarded for the success of their home-building efforts, because they've been left out up to this point. So there are definitely some positive aspects of the bill, and I hope that in committee we work out more of the details of those things.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much to my colleague the member from Welland. I miss being on the committee with you. We had some good times. I know how hard you fight for housing to be built in Ontario. I'm just wondering what you think of what Bill 17 is doing to the green design standards right across Ontario.

Mr. Jeff Burch: That's a really good question and very difficult to answer because what is actually happening with green standards is a bit murky. What you're seeing out there in the media is people trying to understand exactly what is happening with green standards. There's a lot of commentary that a lot of the efforts that municipalities are making around their plans. Most of them have to do with sustainability. The word “sustainability” is in most municipalities' plans, and partly built into that are green standards for buildings in their municipalities.

So when the federal government comes along and unilaterally changes those things and lowers standards, that has a ripple effect on all the municipalities that have been working so hard with green standards to work toward zero emissions in their communities.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Time for a short question and response. Question? Question?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you to my colleagues from Ottawa South—

MPP Catherine McKenney: Centre.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: —Ottawa Centre and Niagara South—

Mr. Jeff Burch: Centre.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Centre—they're both “Centre.” Okay.

I understand that Toronto had adopted rules requiring up to 22% of gross floor area to be dedicated to affordable housing for a period of 99 years. But the new provincial rules will limit that to 5% floor area for 25 years. So this seems like a deliberate reduction of a requirement to build affordable housing. Member from Ottawa, would you like to comment on that?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): I recognize the member for Ottawa Centre.

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MPP Catherine McKenney: Thank you for that question. You know, when we provide added density

bonuses to developers, when we build out our LRT and our transit into transit-oriented communities, one of the ways that we ask for something back is through what's called inclusionary zoning, which is the opposite of exclusionary zoning. It means that people can live together in mixed communities, mixed-income communities. Really, that reduction to 5% for such a low period of time really will make very little difference in any affordability in any municipality. That was certainly a disappointment to see.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Further debate?

Mr. Adil Shamji: It's an honour to rise in this chamber to discuss Bill 17. I will be spending our next hour together with the member for Orléans and the member for Scarborough–Guildwood as well; we'll be sharing our time. And we will be sharing our time to debate Bill 17, the so-called Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act, 2025. At first glance, that title might offer hope, because Ontarians do need protection—protection from rising housing costs, from inadequate transit infrastructure and from bureaucratic red tape that's stifling progress at every level. That we can agree on.

But Ontarians also need protection from this government, which has introduced over 10 pieces of housing legislation since coming to power. And each of these pieces of legislation usually undoes the policies in the bill before. The ensuing chaos has driven builders, developers and municipalities into disarray. It is a direct reason why this government has fallen so far behind on its home-building goals. Allow me to elaborate on that. Early in its mandate, this government promised that it would build 1.5 million homes by 2031, a promise that would require 150,000 homes built per year. Well, less than two weeks have passed since the budget was introduced, which even at that time already had the government admitting failure and promising this year to build no more than 78,000. As though that isn't embarrassing enough, as though that isn't a failure enough, not even a week has gone by since the CMHC has come out indicating that this government will actually build fewer than 50,000 homes this year.

Builders can't build under this government because they don't know if a project will pencil. They don't know whether their project will face development charges or not. Bill 23, a few years ago, said that they wouldn't. But then the Premier came back and flip-flopped on that. Let's be clear about something: This bill contains some good ideas, but it is far from the bold, transformative action that Ontarians need. It is, in fact, a missed opportunity, evolutionary when it could have been revolutionary. This government is proposing to defer development charges when it should be eliminating them. This government is proposing to keep thinking about single-stair egress changes to our building code, even though they've been thinking about this for years. They're still leaving Housing Affordability Task Force recommendations on the table when we need real action now.

So to all government members in the House: enough with the talking. We're in a housing crisis. We are in an

affordability crisis. We are facing climate challenges, population growth, aging infrastructure and rising inequality. Ontarians are looking to this government with urgency and for leadership. What they're receiving is a half-measure that is dressed up as a master plan.

Let me begin by acknowledging the aspects of this legislation that we do support—and there certainly are some—before I address this legislation's shortcomings. First, the provisions in schedule 1, amending the Building Code Act to streamline the approval process for innovative materials, are reasonable. Eliminating the need for dual approvals from both the provincial Building Materials Evaluation Commission and the federal Canadian Construction Materials Centre will reduce red tape and unnecessary costs. It is a positive step towards standardizing housing construction and encouraging innovation in building materials. Likewise, harmonizing sustainability standards province-wide—rather than allowing each of Ontario's 444 municipalities to impose bespoke requirements—will help the modular housing sector and prevent obscure or onerous building standards from slowing the pace of desperately needed development.

Second, there is value to schedule 2, which amends the Building Transit Faster Act. Treating all Metrolinx-led projects as provincial transit projects and applying fast-tracking mechanisms like simplified land assembly and utility relocation to more projects is a logical step. We should be streamlining such processes to get more infrastructure built and more trains into service. But should we trust the same government that can't open the Eglinton Crosstown to be the one to propose these changes?

There are practical ideas in schedules 3 and 7, including allowing as-of-right minor variances to setback requirements. This can reduce planning bottlenecks for homeowners and small-scale infill developers. Cutting down on the need to appear before committees of adjustment is a good policy, and it could help unlock more missing middle housing—the duplexes, triplexes and laneway units that we so badly need.

Additionally, allowing schools to be built as of right on residential lands is overdue common sense. For too long, outdated land use planning rules have made it difficult to build schools in the very neighbourhoods that need them most. In a growing province, that's simply not tenable.

The changes to development charges in schedule 4 also contain important ideas. For example, allowing development charges to be paid later in the construction process for non-rental housing, merging development charge categories for credits and eliminating development charges for long-term-care homes are all constructive proposals—though, as I will explain shortly, they are inconsistently applied and raise important questions about equity and priorities.

Finally, in schedules 5 through 8 we see the province seeking more data from municipalities and aiming to increase transit-oriented development. That's a promising vision—one that we can support—but vision without execution is a promise left unfulfilled.

Madam Speaker, for every measure in this bill that is helpful, there are others that ring hollow, seem delayed or are politically cynical. Let's start with the most glaring issue: the gap between enabling legislation and actual implementation. This bill is thick with provisions that authorize the minister to create regulations, but not to actually implement them. Whether it is merging development charge categories, standardizing "complete application" studies or defining "local services," this bill punts all decisions down the road. In the meantime, the status quo remains.

Madam Speaker, we've seen this movie before. With past legislation, this government has proudly passed sweeping housing bills, only to let the regulatory framework languish. The result? Delays, confusion and, most importantly, no new housing. That's not governing; that's posturing.

Take the inclusionary zoning changes. The government has implemented a 5% cap and a 25-year affordability window in protected major transit station areas. But the consultation that recommended these changes ended in 2022. Why did it take two and a half years to implement a change that, quite frankly, weakens municipalities' ability to require affordable housing? This is a pattern: Delay the tools that would make housing more affordable and fast-track the ones that benefit friends and donors.

Even some of the more pragmatic measures in Bill 17 reveal the government's selective urgency. For example, long-term-care homes will be fully exempt from development charges—a sensible move, most certainly, given the growing demand for long-term care. But if the minister agrees that development charges are an obstacle to timely construction for LTCs, why will he not extend the same logic to residential housing, and especially to affordable housing units? Is it because there is a political benefit to announcing LTCs in targeted ridings while leaving municipalities on the hook for other infrastructure costs? Either we want to accelerate housing development or we don't. We can't pick and choose based off press releases.

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And what of the so-called streamlined planning for schools? While exempting portable classrooms from site plan control will save time, it also points to a deeper failure: this government's refusal to address the \$22-billion school repair backlog. Allowing portables is not a solution; it is a band-aid. It says to parents and students, "We'll make it easier to add trailers, but don't expect permanent classrooms, modern heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems, or safe drinking water any time soon."

Another glaring issue is the performative nature of the government's Transit-Oriented Communities Program. The bill expands definitions and powers related to TOCs. Great, but the truth is, over the past seven years, this government has failed to deliver meaningful housing growth and infrastructure near transit hubs. Each new legislative session seems to bring another tweak, another announcement, yet another promise, but the results remain

elusive. In theory, and if executed properly, transit-oriented communities could be a crown jewel of modern urban planning: dense, mixed-use, walkable communities near subways and LRT lines, with schools, cultural opportunities and plenty of supporting infrastructure. But in practice, this government's approach has been secretive, inconsistent and donor-driven. Without a public framework and proper oversight, TOCs become another backroom deal and not a transformative housing solution.

So, Speaker, I want to be clear that I want to be fair. This bill contains decent measures, but what we needed was bold leadership, not cautious legislation. We needed a clear commitment to affordability, not endless consultations. We needed immediate action, not a promise to draft regulations at a later date. We needed municipal empowerment with accountability, not unilateral ministerial discretion. Above all, we needed urgency. Because while this government dithers, the housing crisis worsens. Families are being priced out. Renters are stuck in limbo. Young people are giving up on ever owning a home. And Ontarians across urban, suburban and rural communities are asking, "Where is the plan?"

And today, that's what I'm asking: Where is the plan? Because the plan is not in this bill. This bill does nothing to address out-of-control rent. It does nothing about issues with the Landlord and Tenant Board. It does nothing about eliminating land transfer taxes for first-time homebuyers or not-for-profits. Nothing for actually giving first-time homebuyers hope that they will actually be able to purchase their first house.

Madam Speaker, let me close with this: There are kernels of good policy here; ideas that are worth exploring; mechanisms that are worth refining. But why is this government only doing this seven years after its first mandate? I have to call out what this bill is: It is a thin patchwork of half-delivered promises and vague intentions, cobbled together to create the illusion of momentum. Ontarians deserve better. They deserve real leadership, transparent planning, urgent action and a government that doesn't just pass the buck or consolidate power, but actually builds housing, expands transit and restores affordability. This bill does not meet that test.

And now I turn it to my colleagues.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): I recognize the member from Scarborough–Guildwood.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Madam Speaker, for seven years this government has promised to build faster, but the only thing that's accelerated is a backlog of delays and frustration from the people of Ontario. Today, I rise to speak to Bill 17, the Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act, 2025, with a focus on schedules 2 and 5. I rise not just as the transportation critic, but as a voice for communities, communities like Scarborough–Guildwood, which are tired of being an afterthought in Ontario's infrastructure plans.

Bill 17 asks communities to trust a government that has ignored them, municipalities to surrender to a minister who wouldn't answer questions and families to uproot themselves for a promise that keeps breaking. The

government claims it aims to streamline transit development and enhance infrastructure, but we must critically examine the implications of these amendments and hold this government accountable for the impact on local communities across Ontario.

Let's first discuss schedule 2, which amends the Building Transit Faster Act, 2020. This schedule replaces the term "priority transit project" with "provincial transit project," effectively broadening the scope to include all transit projects authorized by Metrolinx. Madam Speaker, this government is rebranding failure as speed. By broadening the definition to provincial transit projects, schedule 2 lets Metrolinx bypass essential due process, including expropriation protections. This is a significant change that warrants clear oversight. They couldn't finish the four original priority projects, and now this government wants control over all transit projects in Ontario. And all of this comes on the heels of a budget that tells us exactly where this government's priorities lie—and it's not with transit riders. While ridership rebounded and demands grew, the government kept transportation funding flat, ignoring skyrocketing costs, growth and the public's urgent need for safe, accessible transit. The government is rebranding failure as speed. They are not speeding up transit; they are steamrolling over communities. You can't pave over accountability and call it progress.

Now to schedule 5, which amends the Metrolinx Act. The definition of "municipal agencies" is expanded to allow the minister to demand information from municipalities about transit and transit-oriented communities. It also limits Toronto's ability to independently plan or lead rapid transit projects under Metrolinx jurisdictions. At first glance, these adjustments might seem like coordination, but they raise serious concerns about centralized control, local governance and public transparency. Madam Speaker, the government says they want to build smarter, but is it smarter to silence the people who know the communities best? Toronto's own TTC is being sidelined. The province is overriding local knowledge and community engagement.

This is not a partnership. It is a takeover. When you remove the brakes, you don't just go faster; you lose control. That's what Bill 17 does. It strips away local checks and hands the wheel to a government with a track record of steering us into delay after delay and dysfunction. Let's remember that the Ontario Line, Scarborough subway, Eglinton Crosstown West and Yonge North subway extension are still incomplete, with little or no updates, no transparency from Metrolinx, no accountability from this government. So while I acknowledge that Bill 17 presents some potential benefits, including economic growth and job creation, we must face the reality of this government's track record.

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Madam Speaker, what makes this government think they can handle over 50-something transit projects across Ontario when they couldn't even manage the four priority projects outlined in Bill 171? Because let's not forget—

and this is hot off the press—we only just found out that the same government behind Bill 17 quietly cancelled a 25-year operating deal between Metrolinx and ONxpress. No public explanation, no financial breakdown, not even a meeting of Metrolinx's own board. This was the largest P3 transit contract in Ontario's history, and it was abandoned behind closed doors, yet again.

All I can say is, I'm not surprised, based on the government's track record. Madam Speaker, I said it then and I'll say it again—I want this to be on record two or three times—I'm not surprised, but I'm deeply disappointed. After seven years of this government, Metrolinx can't make well on a promise, let alone a subway line.

We cannot allow this government to expand control over every transit project in Ontario when its track record shows delay, mismanagement and broken promises. Residents in Scarborough–Guildwood and across Ontario have been vocal about their frustration. They fear their voices are being erased, their communities reshaped without their input.

Across Ontario, we are just exhausted—not just by traffic, but by this government's broken promises. They are waiting on platforms for trains that never arrive. They are stuck on congested roads late for work, late picking up their kids, spending more time in traffic than they do with their families. Seniors in Scarborough who once relied on the LRT now walk longer distances or take multiple buses just to get to medical appointments. I hear these complaints come into my constit office on a daily basis.

Scarborough, Madam Speaker, is going through a horrible connectivity crisis, with no end in sight of any one of the three projects in Scarborough to be completed. Small business owners along Eglinton West have closed their doors after years of watching customers disappear behind construction fencing and false hope. Small businesses in the Golden Mile area in Scarborough are also forced to close their doors due to a decrease in foot traffic and revenue. This is not just an infrastructure issue, Madam Speaker; it is a quality of life issue, it is an economic issue, it is an equity issue. These delays don't just cost time, they cost people their livelihoods, their patience and their trust.

In Toronto, streetcar delays are up—just like everything else is up in Ontario—33% in some parts of the city. Storefronts have permanently closed because they simply couldn't wait anymore. And in Scarborough, a transit desert—it is a transit desert, Madam Speaker—has grown deeper after the LRT was shut down prematurely, with no reliable replacement in place.

Ontarians deserve a government that treats public transit like a public good, not a political bargaining chip. During the last election, we made it clear: We'd invest in safety, mental health supports and platform infrastructure. This government, instead, walked away from those commitments, choosing cuts and silence over real service for the people that live in and call Ontario their home. Nonetheless, we are told to be patient, to wait, that help is coming, but for Ontarians who have waited seven years, watched their commutes grow longer, their streets more

dangerous and their neighbourhoods more unaffordable, patience has run out. This government hasn't built faster or smarter; it's built confusion, delay and despair. And nowhere is this more concerning than in discussions of gentrification.

Transit-oriented development often leads to rising rents and then displacement of low- and middle-income families, Madam Speaker. In Scarborough, areas around hubs like Scarborough Town Centre and Malvern Town Centre are on the brink of change. We welcome that change—of course we welcome that change—but we do not welcome displacement of our people.

Bill 17 offers no guarantees that the communities they are talking about will actually include the people who already live in them. You can't call it a transit community if the people who need transit the most can't afford to live there. That's why on April 9, 2024, I tabled Bill 184, my private member's bill, to amend the Metrolinx Act. Today, I want to emphasize the critical importance of part II of my bill, which addresses urgent concerns about gentrification in Scarborough and across Ontario, particularly for low- and middle-income families striving to become homeowners in transit-oriented communities. My bill proposed a modest 20% affordable housing requirement on surplus Metrolinx land. This government couldn't even say yes to that.

Madam Speaker, transit development must be about more than speed. It must be about who we are building it for, and that is the people that live in Ontario—and we must not forget it's the same people who voted us to come back in this House after our recent snap election—no, sorry, tariff snap election? What kind of Ontario are we shaping? One where low- and middle-income families are pushed out of their neighbourhoods or one where infrastructure serves the public not just private profit?

Displacement and the loss of our social fabric are tragedies that will have lasting impacts. Gentrification strips away the diversity and vibrancy that make Scarborough special. We cannot allow this government to bulldoze our values in its rush to build faster.

We have also seen resistance from municipalities, rightly so, concerned about their role being diminished. Collaboration is essential to successful project execution. If municipalities feel undermined the result is tension, Madam Speaker, not progress. Despite this, the government is obsessed with the word “control”—control over municipalities, over transit and ultimately over the voices of over 16 million Ontarians. And in exchange for that control, what do we get? Mismanagement, delays and secrecy.

Madam Speaker, the people of Ontario continue to grapple with gridlock, congestion and a connectivity crisis. They're asking this government, can you finally get the job done on time, within budget, with transparency?

Residents across Scarborough–Guildwood and across Ontario want to see local involvement in planning. We are not asking the government for much. We are asking this government to be inclusive at all levels of their planning process. The people of Ontario want updates. They want

to be included. They want real consultation, not just press releases and ribbon cuttings.

This government's track record in transportation speaks for itself and we must hold them accountable for their past failures. It is our duty to ensure the needs and voices of vulnerable communities are at the centre of every project.

As the critic for transportation, I will continue to champion local governance, inclusive planning and advocating for reliable transit.

So, in conclusion, while Bill 17 may present opportunities for growth, we cannot overlook the consequences. I hope that this government listens to Ontarians and focuses less on spending billions on the wrong priorities and instead focuses on getting the job done on time and within budget. We cannot build faster or smarter when the budget is built on the wrong foundations.

This is a government that consistently prioritizes press conferences over service delivery. And while they brag about breaking ground—because we always hear “breaking ground, breaking ground, but we cannot hear the end of why they are breaking the ground—riders are still waiting, sometimes years, for the promised train to arrive.

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The future of Ontario depends on our commitment to accountability, transparency and community-driven development. Let's build transit that works with our communities, not over them.

I can tell you, I feel so proud and honoured being in this House today and representing the people of Scarborough and the people of Scarborough–Guildwood.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): I recognize the member for Orléans.

Mr. Stephen Blais: It's an honour to speak to Bill 17 tonight.

Interjection.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I appreciate the enthusiasm from the minister for my remarks. I look forward to meeting his expectations.

It's always challenging to follow my colleague from Scarborough. She's a passionate public speaker and has a booming voice, so I will do my best at this late hour to meet the moment.

Madam Speaker, let's start with the obvious: Ontario has a housing crisis. But it's not just one crisis, Madam Speaker. I would suggest that it's two. In some communities, red tape, financial delays and politics are stopping housing from getting started, or in some cases getting finished. These are the issues I think the government believes Bill 17 will help to address.

I sat on city council in Ottawa with councillors who would vote against almost all new housing construction. They would vote against housing in the suburbs. They would vote against infill developments in the core of the city. They would lift delegated authority and lengthen the approvals process over the smallest of issues. And, Madam Speaker, if you were to drive by many of these developments today, years later, one would be hard-pressed to see what the problem was or even identify what the new construction is compared to the rest. As I said, I

suspect these are some of the issues the government believes Bill 17 and some of their other measures will address.

But there's another aspect of the housing crisis that the government really doesn't have a plan for. In places like Orléans, many new homes are being built. In fact, it's one of, if not the, fastest-growing part of the city of Ottawa. But as the houses are being built and new neighbours are moving in, the roads, the bus routes, the schools and the protective services aren't keeping up. Families are stuck in traffic, they're waiting for schools to be built and they're hoping that the ambulance isn't coming from 15 minutes away.

Now, this isn't a problem unique to Orléans or to Ottawa. It happens in new communities across Ontario. Whether you're in a booming suburb, a small town or the biggest of cities, the cost of buying a home is growing further and further out of reach, especially for young couples and growing middle-class families. So, yes, Madam Speaker, I'll be voting for Bill 17 here at second reading, because we need to act. We need to cut red tape and provide greater clarity and definition to the industry that works to build the homes we so desperately need. But let's not confuse support with satisfaction. While this bill might move the needle, it doesn't meet the moment.

Madam Speaker, you can't call it smart growth if you're building homes without the roads. And you can't call it affordability if the average family can't afford to buy the front door. While Bill 17 shifts the gears, the truck, unfortunately, is still stuck heading in the same direction.

Now, as I've said already, and I think others this evening have pointed out quite clearly, we have a housing affordability crisis in our province. But when I talk about affordability, I'm not talking about subsidies or gimmicks or giant, bloated bureaucracies like some other parties in the Legislature propose. I'm talking about the dream that if you work hard and play by the rules, you can own a home—not some day, but soon. Ask any young family in my riding, and they're doing everything right. They've gone to school. They've done an apprenticeship. They've landed good jobs. And they're ready to put down roots. But what they're finding is sticker shock: townhomes that used to be the starting point, townhomes in Orléans, going for \$750,000; detached homes for well over \$1 million. And that's in a suburb of Ottawa; it's a much, much bigger problem in Toronto and the GTA. That's not sustainable. Many young families are putting their dreams on hold. They're renting longer, occupying units that should otherwise be available to the next family coming up the housing ladder, and that problem filters all the way down the system.

We've heard some in this House claim that there's a big difference between investing in shelters and deeply affordable housing and building homes in the suburbs, and of course, the type of home that is needed in those circumstances is different. But you need to invest in and support and encourage the entire spectrum of housing if we're going to solve the process, because if people who could otherwise afford a home 10 or 15 years ago can't

now buy one and are stuck in a rental, then that next family can't come up and you backlog the entire housing ladder.

Many families are putting their dreams on hold, as I've said. But housing affordability shouldn't mean settling. It should mean starting strong in a community where you can put down real roots. For too many people in Orléans and in Ottawa and across Ontario, that just isn't possible at the moment.

Madam Speaker, there are some who want to blame developers for this problem. We heard that earlier tonight as well. I'm not going to do that, because we won't solve the housing shortage by attacking the people who are building the homes. Are there bad actors? Of course there are. There are bad actors in every sector. But in my experience, most builders want to be part of the solution. They want to get shovels in the ground, they want to build high-quality neighbourhoods and they want to meet the growing demand. They want to build the parks where our kids learn to play and learn to ride a bike. They want to be involved in solving issues around commuting and neighbourhood connectivity.

I remember when I was on city council, a very important road in south Orléans—which is, as I said, one of the fastest growing parts of the city—Brian Coburn Boulevard, was stuck. The city didn't have the money to build it. The homes that were needed to pay the development charges to allow the city to have the money to build it couldn't be built unless the road got built. And so it was this classic conundrum; nothing could move. The home builders were very happy to work with the city to advance the construction of that road by years, reducing the overall cost, and lo and behold, because they participated in the design and construction process, it was actually less expensive to build and get up and running, and so it advantaged everyone. It benefited the residents who already lived in the neighbourhood, it advantaged the home builders by freeing up the opportunity to add the next phases to their subdivision and commuting got easier.

But too often, Madam Speaker, home builders are made out to be the bad guys. Too often, bureaucrats give them whiplash, changing the studies and the requirements that are needed to build, even throughout the process. Too often, politicians use them as whipping boys to cover up for their own failures and their failures to make the tough decisions. What we need and what they need is a system that works: a system that's predictable, that's fair and that is fast. And what residents need is an assurance that as new homes go up, the supporting infrastructure to build complete communities will be there when they move in or soon thereafter.

Another story from when I first got elected to city council: There was a huge problem with parks. There was one park in particular, Vista Park. It was to be what the city called a community park, so we're talking about a five-, six-, seven-acre park. Seven years after the homes were built, the park was still an empty field. There wasn't even a concept plan for what the park would look like. Families had bought homes, paid a premium for their homes to be near the park, moved in, and seven years later

the park still hadn't been built. Their kids were now teenagers and didn't need a play structure and a splash pad anymore; they were into other things. And so, the whole benefit of buying a nice house near a park was lost to them and their family.

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But we worked with the home builder to get that park built once I got elected, a park the city couldn't afford to build, and it actually unlocked funding for a second park. In total, we built a dozen new parks while I was on council, and we built most of them working with the home-building industry, working to get the parks and infrastructure built faster, while at the same time we worked to get their subdivisions approved faster. It was a win-win for everyone. That's the type of thing the industry needs in order to get things built faster, in order to keep costs under control. By working together, we built complete communities and we built a mix of housing within them to ensure that families of all shapes and sizes could afford to live there.

So, Madam Speaker, this is where this bill really misses the mark. It says a lot about building homes faster but almost nothing about building the things that make the neighbourhoods livable, about the roads that connect new subdivisions to the rest of the city, about the recreation centres and district parks where our kids are going to play and learn to swim, about the paramedics, the firefighters and the police services that keep our neighbourhoods safe.

Right now, the cities are struggling to keep up, especially when development charges are being capped or deferred, and that's a fiscal gap that legislation has created, but it has created a real-life service gap to these new homeowners, and it's a service gap that has only gotten worse over the last number of years. As some politicians and bureaucrats have made it harder and harder to get neighbourhoods approved, as timelines have gone from months to years and, in some cases, approaching a decade, it's no wonder that the costs have gone up and it's no wonder that builders are more and more reluctant to do some of these extras to get infrastructure online faster. They have to be conscious of their own costs as well.

In fact, just last week, I met with officials about getting a school site approved—a school site that this government has funded the construction of the school for, but the site isn't approved. A piece of land that was brought into the urban area of Ottawa 13 years ago has not yet received approval to start construction. A stormwater management issue and process that started one year before I left council, so going on six years now, still hasn't been solved, and this is to build a school that the government has already funded construction for.

In Orléans, homes are going up, but the roads to serve them aren't being built; families are stuck in traffic before they've even unpacked the boxes and moved in. Growth without infrastructure isn't progress; it's gridlock by design. You can't pave the way to new homes if you can't afford to pave the roads, and that's exactly what's happening across Ontario.

As the government has continued to change planning roles, as they flip-flop back and forth, six or seven

different pieces of legislation, each undoing progress that was said to have been made in the last, things have only gotten worse, and as they get more and more out of the business of funding local infrastructure, the problems get even worse beyond that. We're pushing growth—and the government's pushing growth—without really having a plan to support it.

Thousands of new homes, thousands of new units are being approved without investing in the core infrastructure that makes those homes livable. And what's the result? The result is congestion that we can't get out of, schools that we can't get into and emergency services that aren't keeping up. And, at the end of the day, municipalities are being left to foot the bill, forced to stretch their budgets further and further and further, and to defer the basics. We have in Ottawa, again, instead of investing in growth-related services, like buying equipment to support new neighbourhoods, the city of Ottawa is using that money on other priorities, and new neighbourhoods are being left out.

You know, Madam Speaker, I've thought this for a long time, and I'm sure most people in here would agree with this, but it's sometimes something that we forget: A home isn't just four walls and a roof; it's the neighbourhood that it's in. It's the schools, it's the parks, it's the recreation centres and the emergency services. And if we don't build those things alongside the homes, we're not really solving a crisis. We're just cementing the consequences.

Some of these new neighbourhoods that don't have these services are not living up to the middle-class dream that I think most of the people who bought those homes thought they were getting when they put their life savings down.

That's what the consequences look like. It means gridlock because thousands of new residents are funnelled onto roads that are already overcapacity. It means emergency response delays when the police, fire and paramedics can't get to where they need to go fast. It means overburdened schools where kids learn in portables for years while new buildings sit on a wish list. And it means recreation centres that are at full capacity, or simply non-existent, leaving families with fewer and fewer options for healthy living.

Madam Speaker, perhaps the government might be more interested in this point: It means rising property taxes because municipalities are forced to play catch-up with yesterday's growth on today's budget.

These are not hypothetical problems. They are baked-in consequences when growth outpaces infrastructure investment. If the government refuses to plan for both, then it's not building communities, it's going to simply build resentment.

So let's be clear: When you green-light the homes but ignore the services, you're not meeting the needs of families. You're creating frustration, you're creating gridlock and you're creating decline by design.

The bill gives Queen's Park more control over planning and approvals. It limits what municipalities can ask for. I was reminded of this earlier this morning. I remember a

time when the Premier of Ontario was in favour of green building standards for new home construction. I'm not referring to a previous Premier of Ontario; I'm referring to the current Premier of Ontario. I am told that, in fact, the current Premier of Ontario chaired the committee at the city of Toronto that marshalled those standards through and into force.

The Premier knew then what we all, I think, ought to know now: Energy efficiency standards save people money. A tighter building envelope means lower electricity bills and lower natural gas bills. Better stormwater management means reduced property taxes and lower condo fees. In an affordability crisis, helping Ontarians save on their monthly bills should be a top priority.

Now, you might remember, Madam Speaker, that this government promised to cut hydro rates, but hydro bills are higher now than they've ever been. They're higher now even as families adapt to using less and less energy and become more energy efficient. So imagine a government that promised to reduce hydro rates actually now making it tougher for cities to help new homeowners have reduced hydro rates by making the building more hydro efficient. That's kind of like a double whammy. It's actually like a whopper, Madam Speaker. It's a whopper for new families.

As I mentioned, hydro bills are up and up and up. We also have to remember that the government voted to take HST off of those hydro bills. They voted to take HST off of natural gas and heating bills as well, a tax cut that would have saved families money each and every month. So, as they are against allowing cities to help new homeowners make their energy bills and the envelope of their home more efficient, they're also at the same time against taking taxes off of those energy bills, tax savings that would save families hundreds of dollars a year.

Madam Speaker, there are parts of this bill that I can support. Clarifying the zoning for schools, that's good. Standardizing the application requirements, that's not bad. Moving to get transit projects built, who could argue against that? But the bigger questions remain unanswered: How will cities fund the infrastructure that growth requires? What's the plan to close the gap between permits and pavement? And how will we make sure housing supply translates into real affordability for middle-class families?

Because, Madam Speaker, the real test isn't how many permits can be issued. It's how many families can get the keys to a home that they can afford, in a complete community where their kids will have an opportunity to learn, play and grow up.

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The housing affordability crisis is only getting worse. And while the government has finally admitted they will not meet their goal of building 1.5 million new homes—I have to commend them for that; it takes courage to admit that you're failing—more needs to be done. This bill won't fix the housing affordability crisis. It won't dramatically change the number of homes that will be built. It won't finish the roads. It won't build rec centres or close the gap

between promise and delivery. But it's a nudge, Madam Speaker. It's a nudge. It's a nudge when we need a leap, but it's a nudge nonetheless. The government needs to do more, they need to do better and, if they're serious about making home ownership real for Ontario's middle class, then they have to work together with everyone.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

Mr. Lorne Coe: I wanted to talk about timelines and accountability into the planning system, something that will resonate with the member from Orléans. Like him, I served for 13 years on the Whitby town council; 11 of those were for the planning and development committee that I chaired.

What our plan does do, though, is give builders and municipalities a shared set of rules and clear timelines—clear timelines—so housing applications don't get caught in the limbo, the limbo that the member for Orléans saw, I saw, the member from Niagara Centre saw, the member from St. Catharines saw during their time on regional council. We all saw it. They're nodding tonight.

Speaker, Ontarians deserve a system that works for the people, not one that rewards delay. We've seen it. Does the opposition agree that time frames and accountability are essential? Or are they happy with business as usual?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): The member for Orléans.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Yes, timelines and accountability are essential. As I mentioned in my remarks a number of times, the industry needs a clear set of timelines and a clear set of parameters that they're working to in order to build the homes that we need to support our growing population.

But the government has a responsibility to ensure that the money is there to build the infrastructure while the homes are being built, so that kids have schools to learn in, that they have rec centres to learn how to swim, that parks are there so they can learn how to ride their bike, so that people can walk down a sidewalk, so that police and fire and ambulance are close by. The government has a responsibility to invest in those services at the same time that the homes are being built.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): The member for Sudbury.

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to my colleagues from the third party on their debate. It was, uh—

Mr. John Vanthof: Riveting.

MPP Jamie West: No, there were so many different topics, so I was trying to say—a good way of saying the broad spectrum of what was covered on it.

The number one thing I think about with housing—and it's probably all of us in the same way—is my kids. I have three adult children who don't see a future the way my wife and I had it. When I was going to school, post-secondary, I basically only worked on the weekend to cover my rent. Everything else was sort of a luxury item on top of that—you know, spending money.

My kids have friends who work several part-time jobs and all live together, these strung-together jobs that make up full-time hours but aren't full-time jobs. And my kids—

my oldest, who has a really great career, doesn't ever see himself owning a house unless my wife and I pass away.

How is it that after seven years of the Conservative government, we're in a situation where our kids think that their lives are going to be less promising, less affordable than our generation or the generation ahead of us?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): The member for Don Valley East.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I thank the honourable member for that existential question.

Each of us here—the dream in Ontario is that every generation does better than the one that came before it. Regrettably, in housing, that's not the case; in health care, that's not the case; in education and post-secondary education, that's no longer the case. For as long as we have a government that drags its feet on implementing the vitally needed solutions to the challenges that we face right now, the next generation, regrettably, has every right to wonder whether they'll be able to own their own home.

The honourable member who asked the question before us had said, do we agree that there needs to be accountability and transparency? One hundred percent we do. Today I'm demanding that accountability. Why aren't we building 150,000 homes this year? Why does it take two and a half years to take a consultation on inclusionary zoning and translate that into new regulation? For as long as we have this kind of dithering and delay, then we in this chamber are failing the generation to come, and at least those of us on this side of the house aren't willing to do that. We're inviting the government members to join us in making real change.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question? I recognize the member from Don Valley West.

Interjection: Beaches—East York.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Let me try again—Beaches—East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Beautiful Beaches—East York, right here—thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Yes, no one in this house can top the passion from the member from Scarborough—Guildwood, I think, when she speaks, or come close to that. But to the member, my colleague: Scarborough is lucky to have you, and you really bring your passion and their ideas and their voices to the chamber.

I just wonder, with regard to transit, as you mentioned—if anyone has been to Kennedy Station with the two platforms, it's like Lester B. Pearson airport, only there are no subways going; there are just buses galore. When do you think Scarborough is finally going to get the transit they deserve?

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you to the member from Beaches East York. For the people that live in Scarborough and reside in Scarborough—Guildwood, we face this connectivity issue every day. And, my goodness, the LRT—we've got a subway derailed. There was nothing that replaced that.

While we continue to suffer the connectivity and congestion in Scarborough—you're right: If you look at

Kennedy Station, if you are new coming into Scarborough, you're going to get lost. You will not find your way. You will not know which bus to take.

To the people of Scarborough: We deserve better than the buses; we deserve better than the connectivity issue that we are experiencing, and we want a win.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Then vote for our budget.

MPP Andrea Hazell: To the Minister of Transportation: Please give us a win. I'm talking through the Chair, please. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I was listening to the member from Don Valley East speaking about development charges in Bill 23. Are you aware that your leader sent out a postcard to every resident in Mississauga against removing development charges from affordable homes and purpose-built rentals, and used taxpayers' money from the city of Mississauga? Will you apologize to the people of Mississauga for wasting that money because your leader lost the election and was not here today?

Mr. Adil Shamji: I am aware that our leader actually put forward a policy that you guys should have adopted yourselves, a policy that would have had development charges on middle-class homes eliminated and infrastructure funded from a better communities fund.

Instead, a plan vastly superior to this lackluster proposal that comes before us in this Legislature that proposes to do nothing more than defer development charges—I will wait for your apology for putting this—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Please direct all of your comments through the Chair.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I will wait for his apology for presenting this half-baked, lackluster plan that is seven years in the making and will do nothing but let the next generation down. I'll be over here. You know where to find me.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question?

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is also for the member from Don Valley East. When he was talking—the bill really is not up to what is needed. But when you were talking about schools and the need to upgrade our schools, what difference would it make if we had good ventilation in our schools? What difference would it make if kids were safe going to school? What difference would it make if we had a bill in front of us that would guarantee that when our kids go to school there is clean air for them inside of the school, that they are allowed to drink the water because it's not contaminated with lead? What difference would that make?

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Mr. Adil Shamji: I thank the honourable member for her question. She raises a really foundational issue, which is that the legislation before us essentially legitimizes putting our students and keeping our students in portables at a time when we have a school repair backlog of \$22 billion—\$22 billion that ought to be invested to improve

our ventilation, to reduce our class sizes, to make our schools safer and to invest in more schools instead of subjecting, in the midst of the province's largest outbreak in three decades of measles, our most vulnerable young people to stale air, mouldy portables and schools that are decades behind in their repairs.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos):

I'd like to ask members on all sides of the House to keep your conversations low or to take them outside so that we can hear everyone as they're providing their remarks.

Further debate? I recognize the Minister of Infrastructure.

Interjections.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm so glad we have so much energy at 8 o'clock this evening.

I'm honoured to rise and speak to our government's Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act. Ontario and Canada are facing unprecedented challenges. With our long-standing partnership with our neighbours to the south derailed, our province and our country has pulled together to tell our story, to demonstrate to our American friends that we are united—united as North American partners in a competitive global economy.

While that outreach continues, our government is working fast to build up and protect Ontario: how we forge our global trade, how we train our workers, how we secure foreign investment and how we build our communities. Speaker, our government is doubling down on our over \$200-billion capital plan. It's a generation-defining investment that will deliver new transit, roads, hospitals, water and waste water systems, and other critical infrastructure across all corners of our great province.

By investing in communities, we're enabling the building of hundreds of thousands of homes along transit in the greater Golden Horseshoe. We will help people across Ontario have more options for where they work and where they live. Madam Speaker, we are thinking big and we are building big. We are building up Ontario like we have never built before. Every shovel in the ground, every worker on the job, every project under way makes our economy stronger.

Speaker, the Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act is central to how our government is preparing Ontario for this unprecedented era of economic uncertainty and tariff threats.

I would now like to share with the House more details about items in the proposed legislation that are being led by the Ministry of Infrastructure. The first series of measures relate to the transit-oriented communities, or TOCs. These are vibrant mixed-use communities built around transit stations.

Speaker, we know the greater Golden Horseshoe is one of North America's fastest-growing regions. It is projected to grow from 10 million to 14.9 million, adding nearly 50% more people by 2051. Also, we know that gridlock costs Ontario more than \$56 billion a year, according to the Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis. If left unchecked, the annual cost of gridlock could reach \$108

billion by 2044. That's why our government is delivering the largest subway expansion in Canadian history with our landmark projects: the Ontario Line, the Yonge North subway extension, the Scarborough subway extension and the Eglinton Crosstown West extension, which runs through the great riding of Etobicoke Centre. We are also building the Hamilton LRT and extending the Hazel McCallion LRT into downtown Mississauga and Brampton. In addition, last year our government announced the largest GO service expansion in more than a decade, adding more than 300 weekly train trips on the Milton, Lakeshore West, Lakeshore East, Kitchener and Stouffville lines.

As we work to deliver rapid, more reliable and seamless transit, we are seizing a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create new communities closer to transit stations. Through our Transit-Oriented Communities Program, we are creating more housing, including affordable housing options, and connecting it with public amenities and entertainment within a short distance of transit stations, as well as greater access to jobs and retail. Speaker, carefully aligning the development of our transit system with building new mixed-use communities offers multiple advantages, including allowing us to increase transit ridership and reduce traffic and congestion, which we all know is very much needed; stimulating the economy through major projects that create jobs; and helping us bring commercial and community hubs like community centres and libraries within a short distance of public transit stations. Our Transit-Oriented Communities Program also creates opportunities to work with building partners to leverage the cost of station construction, saving taxpayer time and money. To make sure these projects meet the needs of local community, we work closely with our municipal partners, Indigenous and other stakeholders, and the public.

Speaker, I believe it to be helpful context for the House if we go a little deeper into the transit-oriented communities and how they actually look like in practice. A good example is the transit-oriented community we are working to build around the future Thorncliffe Park station on the Ontario Line. This proposed site will feature more than 2,600 new housing units, as well as ample office and commercial space for new jobs, new parkland, open space, and public realm and streetscape improvements over five blocks. Public realm improvements such as the new transit plaza will also make the neighbourhood more walkable and connected for pedestrians. The TOC will be served by the Ontario line and will provide direct and speedy connections to downtown Toronto.

Another good example of a transit-oriented community is the future East Harbour transit hub that will serve the Riverdale, Riverside and Leslieville communities in Toronto. Once complete, this historic project is expected to serve approximately 100,000 riders split between the Ontario Line and GO Transit. The East Harbour transit hub will also accommodate more jobs in the area and create thousands of new residential units.

This past January, I was pleased to join Minister Sarkaria and MPP Oosterhoff as we announced the next

steps for a new Grimsby GO station. Our government is advancing these plans as part of the Niagara GO extension project while also exploring transit-oriented community opportunities in the region. The province is collaborating with the regional municipality of Niagara and the town of Grimsby, and will be initiating an engineering assignment as part of the process for identifying lands required for the Grimsby GO station. The new GO station will be a game changer for the Niagara community, giving more commuters convenient access to fast, reliable and affordable public transit.

As part of the Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act, we're looking at measures that, if passed, would streamline the planning and delivery of transit-oriented communities. This would create even more jobs and housing options closer to transit. Firstly, Speaker, we would start by amending the definition of a TOC project in the Transit-Oriented Communities Act, 2020. The Transit-Oriented Communities Act, 2020—let's call it the TOC Act—enables the Lieutenant Governor in Council to designate land as TOC land to support a TOC project. A TOC project in the TOC Act is currently defined as “a development project of any nature or kind and for any usage in connection with the construction or operation of a station that is part of a priority transit project, and includes a development project located on transit corridor land...” This excludes transit projects along the GO and LRT lines, limiting the province's ability to designate TOC land for GO or LRT TOC projects.

2020

Therefore, in amending the Transit-Oriented Communities Act, we would match similar amendments proposed to the Building Transit Faster Act, 2020, to now include transit projects on the GO and LRT lines as priority transit projects. This would enable the province to designate TOC lands to support more TOC projects. We believe this measure would incentivize more building partners to work with the province on TOC projects along GO and LRT lines.

Secondly, we are proposing additional amendments to the Transit-Oriented Communities Act, 2020, that would help streamline the implementation of TOCs. As part of the current process, the province enters into resourcing agreements with partner municipalities and auxiliary agreements with building partners, as required by the project agreement. Presently, the TOC Act requires order-in-council approval to execute any agreement with municipalities or building partners. The proposed amendment would enable the province to execute agreements more quickly, reducing red tape by eliminating the need for an order in council when other approvals are already in place. Also, further updates to the TOC Act would enable the minister to delegate certain responsibilities to Infrastructure Ontario, supporting the streamlined delivery of the TOC Program. Infrastructure Ontario is a delivery agent of the TOC Program and has a proven track record in engaging with municipalities and building partners to advance these important projects. Speaker, the goal of these measures is to streamline processes, reduce red tape and help the TOC Program reach its fullest potential.

Also worth noting is that to further streamline delivery of the TOC Program, an order in council was approved on May 8, 2025, to allow the Minister of Infrastructure to issue, amend and revoke minister's zoning orders for TOC projects. Zoning is a key feature of the TOC Program, as it enables the province to ensure the development of TOC sites is aligned with provincial priorities. A minister's zoning order is one of the province's primary tools to ensure the delivery of zoning certainty. Previously, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing had sole authority to issue, revoke or amend MZOs. This resulted in a division of accountability for TOC deliverables between the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Minister of Infrastructure. In some cases, this division of accountability led to confusion among building partners about which ministry to engage at what time. Providing the Minister of Infrastructure with MZO powers for transit-oriented communities as the minister responsible for the TOC Program will create a more seamless, one-window approach and offer more certainty when planning these multi-year projects.

Ontario's Transit-Oriented Communities Program is already moving full speed ahead and delivering results. The province is currently working to deliver 20 distinct transit-oriented communities at 12 future stations along the Ontario Line, the Scarborough subway extension and Yonge North subway extension. These TOCs will create approximately 56,000 new residential units, which will include affordable housing options and create space to accommodate 75,000 jobs.

In addition, work is under way at 21 GO and LRT TOC sites, and we are exploring additional opportunities across the GO and LRT transit networks. These have the potential to deliver up to 285,000 new units. That's a total of over 340,000 homes that our TOC program would deliver across the greater Golden Horseshoe, a huge win for many people in Ontario looking for more options to buy or rent homes. In particular, this program will help make the dream of home ownership possible for young people who have struggled in Ontario's tough housing market. And by giving residents the opportunity to live near transit, we're making it easier for people to take new jobs, visit friends or family, and access retail and other services that they may need.

Speaker, these proposals are the kind of bold action we need to protect Ontario and safeguard our future. With this proposed legislation, our government would also enhance the decision-making process with our municipal partners as we plan critical infrastructure projects, such as new transit lines. Our government is proposing to amend the Ministry of Infrastructure Act, 2011, to provide the Minister of Infrastructure with the authority to request information and data from municipalities and municipal agencies when it is needed to support provincially funded infrastructure projects. This might include contracts, surveys, plans or any other information deemed necessary.

This proposed measure would support the province in its work with municipal partners to effectively plan and stage the construction of critical infrastructure projects to keep them on schedule and to deliver them on time.

Interjections.

Hon. Kinga Surma: I'm glad you guys are still awake.

This proposed measure would support the province in its work with the municipal partners to effectively plan and stage the construction.

Speaker, while we are discussing how the province and municipalities work together to protect and build Ontario, it is also timely to focus on the critical work we are doing together to build more homes faster. On May 12, and to coincide with the introduction of the proposed Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act, our government boosted its historic investment in housing-enabling infrastructure.

We added \$400 million in immediate funding to the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund and the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program, in addition to the \$2 billion that we provided previously. This new investment bolsters our work to get more roads and water systems built in our growing communities. We have heard from communities across the province that infrastructure like this is often the bottleneck to getting new housing built. In response, our programs will help municipalities unlock approximately 700,000 new units.

Most recently, we allocated \$175 million through our health and safety water stream, which will help municipalities and First Nations build, rehabilitate and expand aging critical infrastructure to ensure communities have safe, reliable water services and are protected during extreme weather events. Applications for the stream are now open, and I encourage municipalities to apply.

Our government is also providing up to \$1 billion in loans to provide municipalities with more flexible financing options to support the construction, expansion and rehabilitation of drinking water, waste water and storm-water infrastructure projects that enable new homes. This new housing-enabling water infrastructure lending stream is open for applications and is managed under Infrastructure Ontario's long-standing loan program.

Speaker, to provide an example of how these programs are making a difference for municipalities, I would like to highlight two water infrastructure projects. In September 2024, I joined the Premier, Prince Edward County mayor Steve Ferguson and members of the local council to announce up to \$18 million from the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund to replace the local water treatment plants in Wellington and Picton. This is transformative for the county and will help enable the construction of almost 4,000 new homes, something the hard-working MPP for Bay of Quinte supports.

We're also hearing from our partners across Ontario's municipal and development sector. They're encouraged that our government is at the table, doing all we can so that communities are primed to grow, workers are kept on the job and, together, we can build homes Ontarians so desperately need.

Here's a selection of feedback we've received. Marianne Meed Ward, mayor of Burlington and chair of Ontario Big City Mayors, said this: "Ontario's Big City Mayors welcome the additional investment of \$400

million in the province's" housing-enabling fund. "These programs are essential to supporting community growth and unlocking the housing our residents urgently need. This funding will help build the roads, bridges, water, waste water and other ... infrastructure required to support new and expanding neighbourhoods. We thank the province for its continued commitment to getting more homes built faster in partnership with municipalities. We look forward to working together to ensure that we build complete, vibrant communities where people can live, work and thrive for years to come."

2030

Madam Speaker, in the face of economic uncertainty, our government is doubling down on its over-\$200-billion capital plan. We are proposing legislation to make it easier and faster to build new homes and infrastructure like transit, roads, and water and waste water systems. This would encourage new investment and increase Ontario's economic competitiveness. By removing unnecessary barriers to building, we can get shovels in the ground sooner for vital projects and keep workers on the job during the time of increasing U.S. tariffs. We can put the conditions in place to spur the construction of new housing, all types of housing, to suit all types of budgets.

Speaker, Ontario and Canada are being severely tested. We face a long and difficult road ahead, but Ontario has shown time and time again its resilience. We have the skills and the resources, and most importantly the people, to stand strong. Our government will be there every step of the way. We will do everything we can to deliver on our promise to protect Ontario for today and generations to come.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: We have had much discussion today, both during the budget debates and the housing debates, about the infrastructure dollars that we're investing: the \$1.3 billion that we've invested in the HEWS funding, with another \$1 billion in infrastructure funding, and the proposed \$400 million in this year's budget.

But we know, Madam Speaker, and we've heard throughout the province from municipalities—I come from Simcoe-Grey, and Simcoe-Grey is part of the 16 municipalities of Simcoe county. During the governance review last year, we heard from many mayors that the infrastructure pinch point is blocking development, and they can't get beyond that without the money.

So my question is, can the Minister of Infrastructure explain why the government is exploring use of a public utility model for water and waste water systems? How could this help us across the province to deliver this critical infrastructure more economically, more efficiently and to a greater population?

Hon. Kinga Surma: I want to thank the member very much for the question and, of course, congratulate him. I know his community was a recipient of some of the funding that we provided: \$2 billion worth of water infrastructure funding. We were very pleased that during

the budget, we increased it to \$400 million more, which means we'll be able to support many other water, drinking water or waste water projects across the province, which ultimately means that we'll be able to build even more homes beyond the 600,000 or 700,000.

But we want municipalities to be flexible. We know that the cost of building water infrastructure is expensive, is a big burden on municipalities, which is why the province is stepping up and providing that additional funding. But we want them to have different options, and the public utility model is one of those options that we believe municipalities will proceed with in the future.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I'm going to direct my question to the Minister of Infrastructure. As you know, the south Niagara water treatment plant is necessary to increase flow capacity to the city of St. Catharines and basically all of Niagara. In 2023 and 2024, your government came forward and said that you would come to the table and help with developing and making the south Niagara water treatment plant up to capacity.

With new housing developments encroaching within St. Catharines and Thorold—and Thorold has made their targets for their housing plan—our mayor of St. Catharines has said that he is not happy right now with the message he's getting back from this government. He's looking for one third, one third, one third. Will you be willing to commit to funding this program before construction is set to begin and work with the federal government to ensure local infrastructure is in place to reach housing goals within the Niagara region so that people have clean water? Will you be willing to do that, to ask the feds?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Well, of course. I've mentioned it several times during question period and in this House. For two years we told the federal government to invest, to join the province and be a contributor to water infrastructure because we knew, we heard from municipalities, that in many cases this was creating a bottleneck for more housing outcomes. For two years we advocated. Unfortunately, the federal government chose not to participate. Now, that is up to them. They will have to come up with their own strategy of how they're going to incentivize more housing. But the province stepped up and provided \$2 billion and another \$400 million more, which you voted against.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question?

MPP Stephanie Smyth: To the infrastructure minister: I heard our member from Scarborough—Guildwood talking about transit and the issues and mentioning the issues through St. Paul's, my riding, with the Eglinton Cross-town, but also some other issues she talked about in terms of displacement. That comes with the transit going on there or the efforts to build public transit, and she talked about losing the affordable housing that we already have, that we're already trying to hang on to beyond what we're trying to build, beyond what's trying to get built. She said

you can't make good on a promise, let alone the subway lines.

My question is—she feels like neighbourhoods and communities are being paved over instead of being lifted by the government and the efforts to get public transit going. I'm wondering what your reaction to that is. I can see on your face—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): The Minister of Infrastructure.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Yes, I think my face did say it all, actually, like, for years. Look, Toronto is the biggest city in Canada, and it doesn't have a proper subway system. It does not have a proper way to get around. In fact, it's extremely challenging to go to different parts of the city, and you're often taking buses, and it takes two hours and it's so completely unproductive. It's a huge error.

This province is trying to rectify this error by finally bringing fast, reliable public transit out to Scarborough—which, by the way, the people support wholeheartedly. And not only are we doing that, not only are we building a subway out to Scarborough, we're also going to provide more housing so that people have a place to live in Scarborough—younger and future generations—that's affordable, with community amenities.

So yes, my face says it all. We are absolutely doing the right thing, and I stand by this 150%.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): I recognize the member from Thornhill.

Ms. Laura Smith: The minister was talking about so many of the investments that have been made, and I would be remiss if we didn't talk a little bit about the \$35 million that was provided, which was actually through the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund, which allowed for over 20,000 future homes in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, in my riding.

She talked about the partnerships that were made with the municipalities that really help get data in place so that they can help build and get the right projects done at the right time. I'm wondering if she wants to talk a little bit about that partnership and how municipalities help us build for tomorrow.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Well, I will give a shout-out to Mayor Del Duca, who is a great partner to this government, who is also, in many ways, leading the path forward of what needs to be done at the municipal level in order for us to incentivize the building of homes during these tough market conditions. He had great courage to come out and make changes in his community in order to enable more homes. So if the mayor is watching, or should he see this tomorrow: We are certainly grateful for his leadership.

But look, \$35 million—I was there in your community, joined you, and I know you advocated very strongly for those funds. That will enable 20,000 more homes in that community where people can live. Just like the mayor from Vaughan had said, he wants to know that his children and his grandchildren will be able to live in the communities that they were raised in, and we are providing that opportunity.

2040

Again, to the members opposite: We asked the federal government to join us. Think about how many more projects we could support across the province, how many more housing opportunities we could create, if the federal government were a reliable partner. They unfortunately chose not to support the program.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): A quick question and response.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Speaker, through you to the minister: Does the government and the minister intend to keep their promise to maintain the Toronto Green Standard and other similar municipal development standards?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Well, I think Bill 17 is very clear. Look, the process for building—and I will use the city of Toronto as an example—is cumbersome. It takes five, seven, 10 years just to approve a medium-sized development—just to approve; we’re not even talking about actually constructing the project—because there are 50 studies that you’re expected to do, and then there are all these other requirements. The truth is, that has delayed how much housing you can build in a municipality.

Look, the region of Peel, for example, is using a new system so that approvals can be given faster. It does not mean that you lower the standards or you don’t follow the building code. That will continue to absolutely happen, but it shouldn’t take seven years—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Thank you.

Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I’m happy to say a few words about Bill 17, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to infrastructure, housing and transit, and to revoke a regulation.

The bill has many schedules: Schedule 2 talks about the Building Transit Faster Act, schedule 3 is about the City of Toronto Act, schedule 5 is about the Metrolinx Act, schedule 8 is about the Transit-Oriented Communities Act. I wanted to highlight those four acts because I don’t represent Toronto and, of 33 communities that I represent, most of us do not have public transit. But we still need housing to be built faster. We still need infrastructure. We still need housing.

As you know, most people know Nickel Belt because of the nickel mines, but there are many other mines, many of them with the critical minerals that Ontario needs. Many of the communities are in expansion right now because people need the critical minerals that are in Nickel Belt, because the mines are expanding. We also need access to more housing.

But I will tell the story of one community, the community of Gogama, which is across the street from a brand new gold mine called Iamgold. The mine has been in process since about 2015. In 2020, they invited everybody to come to the grand opening.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Order, please.

M^{me} France Gélinas: The Premier was there and basically saw that Gogama is on one side of the 144; Iamgold is on the other side of the 144, and it is a brand new mine.

On January 6, 2021, I wrote to the Honourable Premier of Ontario, Honourable Doug Ford—I also copied his chief of staff at the time, who was James Wallace—and basically said:

“Premier Ford,

“I am writing to you about the economic potentials of Côté gold mine for my constituents and for the community of Gogama. Gogama is a beautiful, small, isolated northern community in my riding of Nickel Belt. It was once home to 1,200 residents.” There are about 200 left right now.

“I want to thank you for attending the ground breaking ceremony of Côté gold mine on September 11, 2020. As you know, the mining company Iamgold is opening a new gold mine across the street from the community of Gogama. This mine is an opportunity for Gogama businesses and people to flourish. Unfortunately, there are currently very few opportunities for potential businesses, mine workers and their families to purchase properties in Gogama.

“The community is home to many abandoned homes and lots. These homes are on paved roads, with street lights, hydro, telephone, Internet, water and sewage. For example” the Ministry of Natural Resources “used to have many houses in Gogama. They have not used them for over a decade. They are being managed by CBRE. Many people are interested in purchasing these homes. Other lots have been cautioned by the Ministry of Finance, but they cannot be sold or acquired as crown land by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. And since Gogama is an unorganized area, they also cannot be acquired and resold by a municipality.

“In September, at the ground-breaking ceremony for the Côté gold mine, you spoke about the potential of the gold mine to bring economic prosperity to change lives in Gogama. Unfortunately, without land for businesses to set up shop and houses for people to live in, Gogama will be missing out. Workers will commute directly to the mine and leave once their work is done. Many people want to live in Gogama, send their kids to the local school, be part of the community. Some fully serviced lots as well as lots on crown land could be purchased by people who want to move and set up shop in Gogama in order to work for or do business with Côté gold mine. If you are serious about this mine having a positive local impact, then the government needs to create avenues for people to purchase these properties in Gogama.

“Premier, will you create a clear and simple process for people to purchase government-owned properties in Gogama? People and businesses need a single point of service that they can reach out to for help in acquiring these properties. You often speak about the government’s commitment to cutting red tape. Please don’t let red tape stand in the way of the economic opportunities for this community. Stand by your commitment at the Côté gold

mine ground-breaking ceremony, and allow Gogama to benefit from the gold mine across the street!”

I sent this letter to Premier Ford on January 6, 2021, but I didn't want to take any chances, so the next day, on January 7, 2021, I wrote to Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy, who was Minister of Finance, and basically told him the same story but added that, “When I met with MNRF”—the Ministry of Natural Resource and Forestry—“on December 4th, they advised me that the Ministry of Finance has a list of forfeited properties which is circulated annually to MNRF, and that it is likely the abandoned properties in Gogama are on that list.”

So I asked, “Minister, will you review the Ministry of Finance's list of forfeited properties and work with the” Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry “to create a clear and simple process for people to purchase government-owned properties in Gogama?”

I didn't take any chances; I also wrote to the Honourable Laurie Scott, who was the Minister of Infrastructure at the time, and I told her, “In October 2020, the Ministry of Finance informed me that the Ministry of Infrastructure”—her ministry—“is responsible for property owned by dissolved corporations. Is your ministry aware of any properties in Gogama that are under the purview of the Ministry of Infrastructure? We previously reached out about one property in particular, located” at the corner of Highway 144 and Highway 661, and I gave her the registry number—264454—“which the ministry was unable to provide any information about.

“Over the past several months I've” contacted the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, “the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services trying to determine how these properties can be sold, and so far I have not gotten to the bottom of the issue. Minister, will you work with your colleagues in these ministries to create a clear and simple process for people to purchase these government-owned properties in Gogama? People and businesses need a single point of service that they can reach out to for help in acquiring these properties. Your government speaks often about its commitment to cut red tape. Please don't let red tape stand in the way of economic opportunity for this community.”

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More specifically, I was talking about the government. I know that they are the law and order, but in northern Ontario they are the government of defund the police because they actually defunded the police, which means that the OPP station in Gogama had to close. The home where the OPP officer used to live is a beautiful home in Gogama with great big trees and all of this. It's one of the properties where the government pays to have the snow plowed in the winter and they pay to have the grass cut in the summer—they pay to have the edges cut and everything—but they won't put it up for sale.

I also wrote to Lisa Thompson, who was the Minister of Government and Consumer Services at the time, on January 7, 2021, and I told her that I had been in contact with Diana Hari in the realty management branch of her

ministry: “She informed us that their office accepts applications to purchase forfeited properties under the Forfeited Corporate Property Act and has opened a disposition file for an abandoned property” in Gogama.

“However, there are still many empty properties which have unclear processes for acquiring ownership. For example, the MNR used to have many houses in Gogama. They have not used them for over a decade. They are being managed by CBRE. Many people are interested in purchasing these homes. Other lots have been cautioned by the Ministry of Finance, but they cannot be sold or acquired as crown land by MNRF.”

So I wrote to that ministry. I didn't take any chances. I also wrote to the Ministry of Natural Resources and basically told them that MNR used to have many homes in Gogama. On December 4, just a month before, I had met with Adam Bloskie from the office of MNRF to discuss the issue, but, unfortunately, it has not been resolved: “Time is running out as people will want to begin moving into Gogama this spring. While I know that some of the lots are under the purview of the Ministry of Finance, I hope that your office will be able to address and manage the lots abandoned by MNR years ago.”

Nothing happened for a long time, until about that summer. That summer, I received a letter from the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services telling me, “Thank you for bringing to my attention the empty properties on service roads in Gogama, and the community's interest in purchasing these properties to realize the economic potential of the area surrounding the new Côté gold mine.

“Your concerns pertaining to these properties belong to the Ministry of Finance ... and the Ministry of Natural Resources.... I understand from my colleagues at MNRF that you will be contacted soon regarding crown land that may be available. In unorganized territories of Ontario, provincial land tax, which is equivalent to municipal taxes, is collected under the Provincial Land Tax Act which is administered by the Ministry of Finance.... Questions about specific properties can be directed to the manager”—and he gives me the phone number.

“One of the primary goals of the government's Forfeited Corporate Property Program is to put forfeited corporate property back into productive use. Now that our ministry is aware of the forfeited property ... in Gogama ... our ministry is proceeding with due diligence and approvals to dispose of the property, in keeping with the Forfeited Corporate Property Act.” So I thought, “Hey, they know about it, and they're doing due process.”

We are now in the summer of 2021, but I don't take anything for granted, so I continue to, this time, talk with the Minister of Infrastructure, Zane Colt, Adam Bloskie and Erika Robson. I basically sent them the list of all of the properties owned by the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Ministry of Infrastructure. I won't show it, but basically, I have the list—MNRF, roll number 52-blah, blah, blah, 52 Conrad. I gave them all the lists of all of the properties that were owned by the Ministry of Natural Resources, that are owned by the Ministry of Finance, and

say, “Yay, you’re working on this. Let me know when things are moving forward.” So I sent this letter on June 30, 2021—dead silence. I wrote back on August 24, 2021, to say, “I reached out to you. I haven’t heard anything. What is going on?” They actually answered back, which made me happy, and they were still working on it. Good.

Fast-forward to August 11, 2023. You remember, we’re now in the summer of 2021. I get the letter. They are doing due diligence. They’re working on it. Summer of 2022, we have an election. After the election, I start over, writing the same letter to all of the same ministers: “Hey, how is due process going?” It took a full year. On August 11, 2023, I heard back, telling me—it was basically a cut-and-paste of the same letter I got in 2021. They sent back to me in 2023 to say that they were working on it with due process. It took two years. Nothing had happened. I get an identical letter telling me that prior to any sales of MOI-controlled property, Ontario’s Realty Directive “to ensure that the property is surplus” to the government—basically, they were going to do due diligence and move through the disposition process, and this work is currently under way for the resident properties of Gogama.

So, the exact same letter I got in 2021, I get again in 2023. They wrote back to me on August 11.

On August 24, 2023, I wrote back to the Minister of Infrastructure to let them know that:

“I am writing to you in follow-up to your letter dated August 11, 2023, about the issue of purchasing abandoned and crown properties in Gogama. As Premier Ford said at the groundbreaking ceremony of the Côté Gold Mine in September 2020, ‘the new mine has the potential to bring economic prosperity and to change lives in Gogama.’ Unfortunately, without land for businesses to set up shop and houses for people to live in, Gogama continues to be missing out.

“Thank you for confirming that all the surplus properties in Gogama are considered active disposition files and explaining the process, in detail. While I understand that the process must be followed and that it takes time to do due diligence, a timeline of an additional ... 24 months is disheartening. Minister, I wrote to your Premier and predecessor over two and a half years ago, the process has already taken 30 months, and nothing has changed.”

So, I received a letter back in September 2023 that basically tells me:

“Thank you for your letter regarding the empty properties on serviced roads in the community of Gogama, and the interest from the community in purchasing”—and it’s a copy-and-paste of the letter that I got in 2021, that I got again.

“The government is committed to helping more Ontarians find homes that meet their needs and budget by identifying unused government properties as potential sites for attainable housing across the province. We hope to announce potential locations across Ontario in the coming months, delivering on our goal to build at least 1.5 million homes by 2031 and ensuring there is a path to attainable ownership for all Ontarians.”

They were still going through due process. Fast-forward to 2024: Absolutely nothing happened. Fast-forward to 2025: a new election. I start all over again, writing to the Minister of Infrastructure, who is standing here now:

“Urgent Action Required on Long-Delayed Disposition of Surplus Properties in Gogama

“Dear Minister Surma,

“I am writing to express deep concern and growing frustration regarding the prolonged and unresolved issue of surplus, serviced properties in the community of Gogama”—I would say, five years and counting later.

“—Why have none of the identified surplus properties in Gogama been listed for sale, despite being in Infrastructure Ontario active disposition files?

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“—What is the current status of each of the surplus properties in Gogama? We are requesting a timeline for their disposition.

“—Why has this process taken over six years, while other regions in Ontario, particularly in” southern Ontario, “have seen more expedient action?

“—What steps is your government taking to ensure northern Ontario communities like Gogama are no longer left behind in provincial infrastructure and housing initiatives?”

I wanted to put those on the record because we matter in northern Ontario. We also need a place to live. There are a lot of work opportunities in the mines throughout my riding, but people need a place to live. They need a place for their kids. There are beautiful homes that the government owns, that they pay for, that nobody can gain access to.

Then people will come to me and say, “Why is it that it took three weeks to put the greenbelt up for sale?” People, \$8 billion worth of property was put up for sale in three weeks, and it has been six years for beautiful little homes, probably worth, now, about \$200,000 a home. How long does it take this government to assess a \$200,000 home and put it up for sale?

It has been six years, and they haven’t had the time to do this. That tells us in northern Ontario that we don’t count, that we don’t matter. We’re not on the calendar for this government. Six years, we’ve been going back and forth to put modest homes that you pay for. You pay for snowplowing. You pay for grass cutting. You pay for everything. Put them up for sale now.

Thank you, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to my colleague from Nickel Belt for telling the story about six years of asking for housing that can help solve the housing market around Côté gold mine in Gogama.

We have a mining structure—I remember being there with the Prime Minister and the Premier for the groundbreaking ceremony, and my colleague as well. I’ve heard all this week and last week about Bill 5 and how mining brings prosperity to the north. Côté gold mine was one of

the presenters, and they did a great job with that, but I'm sure that gold mine company would love the ability to have these government-owned houses brought to market so that their workers can live in Gogama, where they are.

Can you just explain—what's the disconnect that's taking six years for us to provide existing housing to people who work in a really lucrative market?

M^{me} France Gélinas: The member is absolutely right. Côté gold mine has about 900 workers every single day that sleep in bunkers because there is no home. They have hundreds of people who come to the mines to provide all sorts of services that cannot find a place to live although there is a community across the street with beautiful, empty homes that the government owns but won't put up for sale.

If you say that mining is going to bring prosperity to the north, then they need to be allowed to buy those homes. It's not only in Gogama. If you go to Foleyet—there is a new mine around Chapleau—same thing. Foleyet has all of those empty houses that the government owns, that the government pays for, that people want to buy, but the government won't put them up for sale.

If you want the north to benefit from the prosperity of all of those new mines opening up in my riding, they need a place to live. You need to do your homework. Put those homes up for sale. You know the guy who got the greenbelt in three weeks? Put him on the file and put those homes up in three weeks, please.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions? I recognize the member for Niagara Centre—West? West.

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: Close enough.

I want to thank the member for her passionate and very detailed addressing of the problem that we have with red tape and the need for a dedicated Minister of Red Tape Reduction, which we have here in this government.

I know she talked a lot about letters she wrote, but she's here in this chamber. She sees the Minister of Infrastructure. She sees the Minister of Housing. She sees these ministers directly across her. She talked a lot about the dates that she wrote certain letters into mailboxes and such. I'm just wondering: Did she walk across to the ministers and actually bring this to their attention one-on-one?

We know it's important, of course, to write letters and also important, as MPPs, to go out and advocate one-on-one with those ministers. I think it's also important that we bring measures forward that accelerate systemically the construction of new homes, and that's what this legislation does. My question to the member would be: Is she going to vote yes or no on this legislation?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Yes, I do go across the aisle, and I have spoken to the ministry. I have spoken to the minister that was there in 2020, in 2021, in 2022, in 2023, in 2024 and in 2025. I must say that the minister that is currently in charge of those files—it's a pretty good relationship. They are telling me that they are working on it, that they are hoping that things will come, but I'm a bit skeptical,

because the ministers before told me the exact same thing and nothing has moved.

So yes, they speak to me. They are open. They even come to me to let me know that they are working on it. But I haven't seen any action. The people in the north haven't seen any action. Until we see a for sale sign going up and a lineup of people who want to buy those homes, then we keep thinking that we don't matter because we're from northern Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: To the member from Nickel Belt: You talked about workers really living in bunkers because there's nothing else available. I wonder if you can tell us a bit about the difference between living in a bunker and living in a home—what a difference it makes to building a community.

M^{me} France Gélinas: The workers all sleep in bunkers. There's over 900 of them on every shift, on every day. Many of them come from my area. As I say, Gogama used to have 1,200 people. When the forestry and the recession went, a lot of people had to leave. They did not have jobs anymore. They abandoned the community. But now they want to come back. Their parents are still there. Their brothers are still there. They work at Iamgold just across the street, but they can't stay in Gogama because they're not allowed to buy anything, because the government owns it all.

Most of them come from Sudbury or come from Timmins, so they leave, they go, they do 10 days of work at Iamgold, and then they drive back to Sudbury or to Timmins. But they want to live in the area. This is where they come from. Living in a bunker and working 10 shifts on, seven shifts off is really tough. It's tough for your family. You're not there for your kids for those 10 days. If you were able to live across the street, you would be there for your kid's birthday and school play and everything else. You would be part of the family. Working 10 days away from your family every two weeks is tough.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you to my colleague from Nickel Belt. I really have to say congratulations on all of your advocacy, because I think that was quite an impressive recitation of hard work on behalf of your constituents that we could all learn lessons from.

The member from Niagara West just referenced the need for systemic approaches to our housing crisis in Ontario, which sounds deeply ironic when housing starts under this government are down. They're at the lowest level they've been since 1955. They're actually down this year from last year. The government had projected 92,000; now they're saying 71,000.

Does the member, from your experience in Nickel Belt, have any confidence in this government's ability to find and implement those systemic solutions, when they can't even take housing that already exists in Gogama and make it available to workers?

M^{me} France G linas: We have many, many doubts in the north. I can tell you about one development project manager who came to see me. They submitted on August 21, 2024, to the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks, the species-at-risk review for Hanmer Dreamhomes development. So Hanmer Dreamhomes development submitted all of this on August 24. They never got an answer back from the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks until January 17, 2025.

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In the answer back, the government asked for massasauga rattlers and eastern hognose snakes—they want to study on those. There has never been any of those in Nickel Belt. We are not on the side of the Great Lakes or the St. Lawrence. There are people in this ministry who are asking for things that will cost a ton of money and take, like, eight months for an answer. Meanwhile, the Hanmer Dreamhomes development would be ready to put shovels in the ground tomorrow morning. They’ve already done their assessment. We don’t have rattlesnakes in Nickel Belt.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: The deputy from Nickel Belt touched on something interesting, and that was what she perceived or what she said “might be an unnecessary study,” which would not normally be required, at least in her opinion and perhaps even in the opinion of others. That seems to touch on the idea that, in some instances at least, some studies are not necessary or seem unreasonable. So I would offer that to the member and ask her: Isn’t that a justification, then, for special economic zones?

M^{me} France G linas: Speaker, I want to protect species at risk. I live in northern Ontario. We respect the environment. We respect the animals, the plants and everything else. But when a development project manager has done the study, has submitted it to the government, and it takes nine months to get an answer, I say this is not what you need to build.

We have many builders that are ready to go ahead, that have submitted all of their papers to the government, to the Ministry of Northern Development and conservation and parks, and then they wait for—one showed me—18 months for an answer. That’s way too long.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Further debate?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Good evening, everyone. It’s so great to be here in the evening. Had we sat more than seven weeks in the last seven months, we might not need to be in here. But I love being at Queen’s Park representing beautiful Beaches–East York.

So I’m honoured to be here addressing the House again and representing my riding, beautiful Beaches–East York, today to speak on Bill 17, Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act, 2025. Bill 17 is an omnibus bill that affects the Building Code Act, Building Transit Faster Act, City of Toronto Act, Development Charges Act, Metrolinx Act, Ministry of Infrastructure Act, Planning Act, and the Transit-Oriented Communities Act. It proposes:

- adjusting, delaying, and in certain cases, eliminating development charges on various infrastructure;
- lifting certain restrictions that prohibit where schools and portables may be built;
- establishing preferential treatment for Canadian manufacturers and incentives for production of innovative materials;
- affecting the share and lifespan of inclusionary housing;
- instituting new practices and methods of municipal reporting;
- permitting skirting public consultations and other previously standard procedures;
- eliminating the need to apply for approval of certain minor variances;
- limiting the amount and type of additional studies and reports that can be requested by municipalities, while centralizing decision-making power in the provincial government;
- introducing requirements for reserve spending; and
- negating the incentive for developers and municipalities’ authority to impose green development standards.

Let’s be clear, while this bill certainly proposes measures that I would support—notably expanding land that may be permitted for school development; removing restrictions pertaining to the zoning of portables to accommodate growing student populations; introducing digital reporting; approving four-storey townhomes; and, finally, dropping development charges for non-profit long-term-care homes—when it comes to killing green standards, negating community consultations and reducing maximum share of affordable residential units, as well as the maximum affordability period, I cannot stand behind it.

We are certainly in a housing crisis and I support moves toward the intensification of housing development. My solid—rock-solid—track record on housing as a Toronto city councillor proves this, as I was always a “yes in my backyard” leader. And while the bill offers some viable programs for the intensification of residential development, it continues to villainize the wrong culprits for housing unaffordability and shortage, despite ample evidence to the contrary.

Looking at the initiatives that have the potential for positive impact, Bill 17 proposes to eliminate certain zoning restrictions, specifically as they apply to school construction, portable allowance and four-storey townhomes. This measure permits not only more housing to accommodate more people but also increasing stable community hubs, like schools, that encourage well-resourced communities to build up all around and should be acknowledged as a fruitful step forward towards developing vibrant neighbourhoods.

It is of the utmost importance that we create the conditions necessary to build and repair schools. Second Elementary School, which you will recall from my speech a few hours ago on the budget, is a great school in beautiful Beaches–East York. It was number four on the list for

project-ready capital funding with the TDSB and it is in desperate need of a new school to replace its aging portapack portable system—the oldest and the largest in the TDSB system. That area of Main and Danforth is actually oftentimes the number one place new immigrants land when they first come to Toronto. They are welcomed with a school where they are stuffed into boxes basically, with horrible air quality and no hope in sight of any improvements, thanks to this government.

Furthermore, I support the bill's introduction of constraints on the authority of the Building Materials Evaluation Commission, in cases meant to encourage Canadian-made products and innovative materials, as outlined in schedule 1. It is a timely strategy in a period when we definitely need to prioritize Canadian-made products and stimulate the Canadian economy. I hope that mass timber construction and the allowance of CLT—cross-laminated timber—products in construction are mightily welcomed. Ontario has been lagging behind other jurisdictions on this front for years. As well, I hope that panelized builds are as much of a preference as modular housing. Both types of construction should be valued due to their efficiency, sustainability and cost-effectiveness. Come for a tour in my riding if you want to see a funky panelized building.

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: Where?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Coxwell and Queen. Do you need a map?

Despite this step forward, it is important to consider the other schedules in this bill that may have a potentially mitigating impact on innovative materials integration. In schedules 3 and 7, Bill 17 disincentivizes developers and discredits authority from municipalities to create by-laws that would bolster use of innovative materials, especially the green standards and regulations aligned with urban design.

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, this bill fails to facilitate long-term impact in certain instances, specifically with regard to affordable housing, major operating savings for homeowners and builders and the lack of local consultation.

While the government frames the bill as a solution to Ontario's housing crisis—boldly proclaiming this bill as a rejection of the status quo that stifles growth and slows down progress—in many instances, it will further alienate people from the residential market, deny homeowners and developers significant savings and rebates, prevent the creation of more climate-resilient infrastructure and stifle municipal and local consultation.

The government emphasizes that green development standards are not eliminated: They are still available to developers who choose to use them. While on paper this may be the case, in practice, this bill effectively kills green development standards all across Ontario.

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The bill's entry on the Environmental Registry of Ontario details items that municipalities will be prohibited from requiring as part of a developer's complete application. Some of these include considerations of the

impact of the proposed development on wind conditions in surrounding areas, lighting and lighting levels on the site, and urban design elements, which would address how a proposed development may align with municipal guidelines and provide for environmental standards to be imposed.

The ERO's entry for Bill 17 claims to have a neutral expected impact on the environment, as key studies would be identified in official plans or permitted by regulation. However, Efficiency Canada found that Ontario lacks timelines for achieving net-zero energy-ready buildings by 2030 and has failed to adopt a tiered code that could accelerate the update of energy-efficient buildings. Quelle surprise.

If the green development standards are the primary source of achieving these energy efficiency goals, how would this legislation, which bars municipalities from implementing these standards unless they ask the minister for permission, have a neutral impact on the environment?

Furthermore, Bill 17 stipulates that the minister must approve changes to official plans. The municipality's autonomy is further implicated by the bill's creation of a proscribed list of studies, and prohibited list of studies, that the municipality may request to be included in a complete application. These lists are mentioned in the ERO with little elaboration on what they may include. It is disingenuous to ask the public and key experts for their feedback on the proposed legislation when they are not privy to the whole picture.

Additionally, regulation is more malleable to change at the will of a new government or a new minister. Despite claiming this act, if passed, will help usher in certainty to the construction process, there is nothing certain about these regulations. Take, for example, Minister Clark's—the former Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing's comments around the green standards back in 2023, when Bill 23, the More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022, was put forward. The minister at the time clarified: "It was not the intention of the government through Bill 23 ... to prevent municipalities from using site plan control to promote green standards...."

"I also wish to clarify that aspects of the green standards that are not brought into Ontario's building code because they do not involve building construction ... will continue to be optional standards that can be required through municipal bylaw and implemented through site plan control."

On consolidating green standards into the Ontario building code, he said: "We plan to work with interested municipalities and other stakeholders on transitioning certain green building standards related to building construction ... into the Ontario building code. This will be achieved through an interim building code amendment by the summer of 2023."

This comes in stark contrast to Bill 17, which creates strict rules based on ministerial discretion around what reports can and cannot be asked for, and what regulations can and cannot be enforced by municipalities. Moreover, the building code amendment of the summer of 2023 never came.

These comments from the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing at the time are vastly different from the changing philosophy of the minister occupying that position currently. This underscores the dangers of vague legislation and regulations that are not spelled out at the outset, and their ability to increase confusion, especially where ministers may change over the course of multi-year projects, contrary to the bill's stated purpose—which we've seen many times in this chamber, I might add.

Importantly, municipal bylaws that the bill alludes to, specifically green development standards, are not in contrast to the provincial building code, because the green standards do not prescribe construction standards. Rather, they are intended as a complementary feature that introduces outcomes-based asks with flexibility on how to achieve them.

For example, where the building code may prescribe specific window types or wood products that must be used, the green standards of Caledon ask that, "Using the resources provided, implement at least two measures to increase resilience to climate-related impacts in the areas of basement flooding, high wind and/or extreme heat." How a developer chooses to achieve this end is up to them. See how much flexibility there is?

Municipal representatives as the experts and advocates for their local communities are stripped of their ability to create regulation that would augment the framework for building that the provincial code was intended to provide. These municipal regulations are key to tailoring developments to the distinct needs and priorities of the community.

Relatedly, Bill 17 demands municipalities defer to the minister to amend official plans of municipal developments and mandates that municipalities must accept materials if they are provided by prescribed professionals. Not only does the bill negate the ability for municipalities to act in accordance with their community priorities regarding the development, but the power to make decisions that intimately impact a municipality now lies with the provincial official or prescribed professionals who are deemed fit using criteria currently unbeknownst to us.

When municipalities are now required to get approval from the provincial minister for amendments to the official plans, developers now have no incentive to pursue these steps, seeing as the government would hold the power to promote or reject regulations under this legislation—the same government that repeatedly tried to repeal environmental protections, whether through the greenbelt or now as we are seeing it in Bill 5. The potential that they would actually approve a municipal request to implement green standards on a project seems highly questionable.

Bill 17 misplaces blame in removing the ability of municipalities to make regulations such as the Toronto Green Standard. Despite Bill 17 toting building homes faster and making them more affordable, as the purpose of the bill, housing starts have not been affected by the green standard. Notably, in 2023 Toronto exceeded its housing target by 51%, with approximately 96% of housing starts adhering to the Toronto Green Standard.

Did you hear that? No, you didn't, because you're not listening.

Moreover, this provision will limit the ability of municipalities to address important aspects of urban design such as flood protection, air quality and your favourite topic of all time, climate change. Without these considerations, homes in Ontario will lack certain efficiencies, and as a result homeowners will pay higher operating costs, and homeowners and developers will lose out on significant rebates, such as Toronto's development charge refund program, which has delivered almost \$120 million in refunds back to developers and adds comfort and emergency preparedness.

We're getting short on time, so I'm going to have to skip a few things, but that is okay, because you're not paying attention anyway.

I just want to tell you, maybe to get your attention—I'm going to tell you, with the green standards—

Interjections.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Okay, let me tell you who supported the green standards: EllisDon. Anyone ever heard of EllisDon? Yes, EllisDon supported the green standard, stating, "We strongly support the adoption of the Toronto Green Standard version 4 and request the city move forward with stronger incentives for projects that meet the ambitious tier 2 and 3 requirements." Can you believe that? EllisDon is asking for the green standards. Do you know who else is? Minto, Tribute, Tridel. Look at all these great developers who get it—because it saves them money. It might be a little bit more costly on the outlay, but then they save money, the homeowner saves money, your residents are happy, your area is producing fewer greenhouse gases and is sustainable.

Here we are: Minto supported the green standards, stating, "On behalf of Minto I would like to express our appreciation to the city of Toronto for the implementation of the Toronto Green Standard ... and express our support for its continuation and future enhancement." There we go.

We also have other communities across Ontario with green standards. Put up your hand or yell out if you hear your riding: Halton Hills, Hamilton, Oakville, Caledon, Brampton, Mississauga, King, Vaughan, Richmond Hill, Toronto, Aurora, Markham, Stouffville, Newmarket, East Gwillimbury, Pickering, Ajax, Whitby, Clarington.

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Later I'll read you former Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing's letter.

And here's the kicker, the final kicker—hold your breath. The Premier, the now Premier, former Toronto city councillor, voted yes for the Toronto Green Standard, along with another amazing, spunky and funky city councillor named Mary-Margaret McMahon. We were on the same page in fighting for sustainability.

So if you live in these areas, you have a lot of explaining to do to your communities because they fought hard to have the green development standards. And they do not hold up housing at all. They have not held up housing starts. That is patently false. Your Premier, your leader of

your party, supports the Toronto Green Standard and green development standards right across Ontario. The proof is in the pudding. I have the vote here for you, if you'd like to go take a trip down memory lane. I'm sure he still feels that way.

All right. I will give you also—yes, the Toronto Atmospheric Fund can give you the straight facts on the green development standards. If anyone would like a 101 on that, we can add a bit of time, but come and see me later to find out more as to why it's very important that Ontario does not go backwards. We just go forward. So remove that section from this Bill 17 and, possibly, we may be able to support it.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to my colleague from Beaches–East York. One of the things I like about us all being members from across the province is an opportunity to get to know other ridings. Sudbury is not very similar to Beaches–East York, but I have been there a couple of times. When it comes to housing, ownership or a rental property, what are some things that may be unique to Beaches–East York and what are some things that may be similar to other places in the province?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much to the amazing member for Sudbury. Let me know when you're in my riding again.

Well, if you've been to beautiful Beaches–East York, you know that it's like a small town down by the water. It's like a seaside resort where you have different styles of housing. You have a lot of rentals: fourplexes and sixplexes down by the water. You have laneway suites. Thank you to myself for leading that, spearheading that policy at the city of Toronto—with a team, of course. And then you have more high-rises further up when you get closer to the subways, where we want transit-oriented communities. We have high-rises and single-family detached homes and semi-detached and co-ops—the whole gamut.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you to my colleague from the Beach for her passionate presentation tonight and her advocacy on the environment. She quite rightly pointed out, not only did the Premier vote in favour of the Toronto Green Standard while he was a city councillor, I'm led to believe that he actually chaired the committee that marshalled it through city council and led the way to push the Toronto Green Standard forward.

Now, I know there is much more French spoken in Orléans than there is in the Beach, but in Orléans we have a mot en français for that: It's called “le flip, le flop.” So I'm wondering if the member from the Beach can discuss the important point of maintaining some consistency when we talk about green initiatives and helping homeowners reduce their home energy consumption.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much, and I will borrow that word: “le flip, le flop.” Backwards and forwards, whatever it is. What I want to

say is obviously, the Premier believes—believed—in sustainability. And if you see the Premier, what you see is what you get. He is very candid and wears his heart on his sleeve and he is very frank. I believe if he voted for this, since he voted for the Toronto Green Standard—it was a unanimous vote by the way. No one voted against it. There were 34 people voting for it; no one against it, a few absences. He believed in it then in 2013, and I know he wants to work well with Ontarians and developers who also believed in it—and many residents. It saves people money which—I know this government wants to be fiscally responsible.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Yes, I've reviewed this legislation. There's nothing in this legislation that prohibits anybody from building a greener home.

But on the topic of development charges, this act will require the deferment of development charges until such time as an occupancy permit is issued by the municipality, which is something that the town of Amherstburg already does. I'm very proud of that because that's my hometown. The town of Amherstburg is a very forward-looking town. I think this is a very positive thing for the province to be legislating because it's actually very onerous for a home builder to pay up front a fee for which he gets no service in return immediately. That is better deferred until such time as the homeowner sells the home and receives payment and then can pay the fee.

I think that's a good idea. I invite the member to comment one way or another.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: What I would say is because you were whispering so much, I could barely hear you, but I think I heard you. That is, you were referring to development charges. And if you recall, it was the Liberals who proposed scrapping development charges for middle-class homebuyers. You did not pick that up or you did not support that at the time.

Definitely, we want to get shovels in the ground, but all this back-and-forthing with these bills, and flip-flopping, is wasting people's time. As you know, time is money for a developer. It's quite disrespectful, actually. To borrow a line from Billy Joel's song—and I could sing it if you want me to—“get it right the first time.” That's the main thing. Okay? I would encourage your government to do that.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I know you spoke a fair bit about the green standards and there's been—the government is saying that they're not going to lower standards, but it does sound like those green standards that are in place in Toronto are at risk. Could you please clarify that for me?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Yes. Toronto city staff, councillors, the mayor at the time, the community, working with developers—there's the difference with this government—working with people, and working with people ahead of time, before drafting up motions and policies and legislation, working with them—everyone saw the benefit in making your homes more energy-

efficient. And why? Because it adds more comfort, it reduces greenhouse gases and it saves people money. It's a win, win, win. Nothing wrong with that. So why get rid of it? If it ain't broke, don't fix it. And we are in a climate emergency.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question?

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Thank you to the member from Beaches–East York for your very thoughtful debate tonight. I really appreciated the walk down memory lane and some of the great things that you brought forward. You've given us a lot to think about.

But I have to say that the most striking element of what you presented for us tonight—to me—was the uncanny impression that you did of our government House leader, Mr. Clark. I'm just wondering: Do you have any other impressions in your repertoire, and would you be willing to give us a sampling of some of those tonight?

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Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Well, if we're considering this an open mic night.

I respect everyone in here deeply, and I know we're all here because we love our communities, we love people, we want to serve and we want to make the world a better place. I think we're all trying to do that. Maybe we have different ideas of policies, but I know that you're going to support me and preserve the green development standards in Ontario. Thank you in advance.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): A very quick question and response.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Quick question for the member for Beaches–East York: Why do you think the current Premier, when he was serving as a city councillor, voted for green building standards, and is now seemingly opposed to green building standards?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Well, you know, the Premier is fiscally responsible, so I know that he understands that he can save Ontarians money by supporting green development standards. I think maybe, possibly, he has a lot of things on his mind right now and it seemed to slip his mind that he voted for the Toronto green standards—wholeheartedly and unanimously, and was proud of that vote—so I will just remind him in a friendly manner tomorrow.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's always a pleasure to rise in the House, and tonight to debate Bill 17, the government's housing bill. I'm going to present my comments tonight in the spirit of working across party lines, to encourage the government to improve this bill.

The reason I think it's so important to improve this bill is that we're in the worst housing crisis this province has ever faced. Housing starts are at an all-time low. Housing prices are at an all-time high. A whole generation of young people are wondering if they'll ever be able to afford a home. There is no city in Ontario where a minimum-wage worker can afford the average monthly rent, and we have

an outstanding number—over 81,000 people—experiencing homelessness in this province.

I would argue that while this bill makes some improvements, it doesn't meet the moment, and in some places it actually takes us backwards. So I want to zero in on two schedules. I'm hoping the government members will improve this bill at committee.

First of all, schedule 4, development charges: Why don't we just get rid of development charges on first-time homebuyers, homes under 2,000 square feet, built within existing urban boundaries, so we can actually start building homes people can afford in the communities they know and love, without paving over our farmland, and can save people up to \$140,000 on a new home?

Now, we need to keep municipalities whole, but the government could do that with an affordable communities fund, just like the province used to do prior to 1989 when development charges were brought in.

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: How would you fund it?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: How would you fund it? I wouldn't hand \$200 cheques to people. Why do millionaires and billionaires need \$200 cheques? That's \$3.2 billion right there, Speaker.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Order. Order, please, from the member for Niagara West.

Please continue, the member for Guelph.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Unfortunately, I'm going to lose my time to give the member these other important suggestions, so let me do another one for the member. Not only could we save homeowners up to \$140,000; we can also help them save on their energy costs if we actually have green building standards. That's exactly why the Premier, when he was a city councillor, voted for green development standards: because he knew it would save residents money.

When this bill goes to committee, I encourage the government to help people save money as new home buyers, to save money as existing home buyers and listen to my suggestions.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: If we took the offer from the leader of the Green Party, if we took him up on his suggestion and got rid of all development charges, or only the development charges which were suggested by the leader of the Green Party, one would assume that would add up to several billion dollars. I don't know if anybody has done the calculation—maybe a few million.

But that's the question I have: Has a calculation been done that would estimate the amount of money needed to replace the loss of those development charges which were suggested by the leader of the Green Party?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Yes, I appreciate the member's question. It's a great question. First of all, I only suggested removing development charges on houses under 2,000 square feet built within existing urban boundaries where we already have infrastructure in place because that's the

fastest, cheapest way we can quickly increase supply. The estimated cost of that—

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: How much would it cost?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: If you would actually listen to me, I'm going to give you the number, okay?

The estimated cost of that: \$4 billion a year—\$4 billion a year—to help first-time home buyers save up to \$140,000 on their home. We used to do this in Ontario prior to 1989.

The \$200 cheques for millionaires and billionaires cost \$3.2 billion alone. The licence sticker gimmick is costing us about \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion a year. We have money, but we could help save people money on their homes if we have the political will to do it.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question?

M^{me} France Gélinas: The government had their own Housing Affordability Task Force that recommended legalizing missing middle-housing options such as semis, townhouses and fourplexes. Does the member think that this is something that should be included in this bill as of right?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member for Nickel Belt. I don't think there's any member who has talked more about legalizing fourplexes and four storeys in this entire chamber than the member from Guelph over the last number of years. On top of that, I would say the housing task force also recommended legalizing six- to 11-storey multi-residential buildings along major transit and transportation corridors in larger urban centres. Developers have told me that would cut their development times in half.

That is the fastest and cheapest way to quickly build homes people can afford, but, for whatever reason, the government keeps saying no to their own task force.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you for your passion, to the member for Guelph, who mentions fourplexes the most in the chamber.

How illogical do you think it is to kill the green development standards in 2025, in a climate emergency?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): The minister—the member for Guelph.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: If you want to make me a minister, Speaker, I'm happy to take that job, but for tonight, I'm not so honourable.

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Yes, I know.

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: No, I'm going to run out of time, and I want the member from Kitchener–Conestoga to be able to ask a question.

I just want to say that the key reason I talk about this is it is going to save people money and reduce climate pollution at the same time—win-win for everyone.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): The Minister of Natural Resources—a very, very quick question.

Hon. Mike Harris: It's great to take part in debate tonight. Listen, I am all for figuring out a way to make life easier for Ontarians, figuring out a way so we can help our developers build homes.

But I will ask this: The region of Waterloo is sitting on \$200 million of development charges that they say are allocated, but I have not seen a transparent allocation. What do you have to say about that?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the question from the member who represents a riding in the region of Waterloo. I would recommend that he do what I do with my region: I call the city up and I get answers to my questions about that. That's what I would do. I'll call them for the member, if that helps.

2150

I will tell you this: Municipalities have development charges in place to pay for the things to unlock housing: water and waste water, roads, sewer, fire—

Interjections.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Well, then you're going to have to pick up the phone and call Waterloo, because in Guelph, I actually just called—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Further debate?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I am really delighted to speak on Bill 17, the Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act, 2025.

I'd like to give some context to the times that find us. The times that find us today are serious. The times that find us today have challenged us to be smarter, to be more innovative, to be more imaginative, to look at our world and, specifically, our Ontario in a much different light.

I want to speak about why this bill is so important today and why we need the leadership of Premier Ford now, more than ever, why we need a government who will understand that what our parents had of home ownership—and the opportunity that our parents had and that our grandparents had should be something that we pass to our children and our grandchildren.

The times that find us today are difficult. We've never imagined a time when our closest friend has challenged the relationship. And the threat of tariffs and the threat of economic penalties that come with tariffs are something that is changing the dynamics of our province.

We have to be bold, and we have to be bold now. Our province and our country have faced down challenges before, and each time, we've emerged stronger and more united.

Monsieur le Président, notre province et notre pays ont déjà fait face à de graves défis. Chaque fois, nous en sommes sortis plus forts et plus unis parce que nous croyons en notre province et en notre avenir. Ensemble, nous bâtissons l'Ontario.

We have to believe in our province, and we have to believe in our future. Together, we can always build a great Ontario.

So that's what finds us here today, to talk about a way that we can pass the benefits that our grandparents gave to

us, that our parents gave to us so that we will be able to pass it down.

I was chatting with people this evening on when we bought our first home. Each of us here has our own story of home ownership. There is nothing more important than growing up in our province and wanting to find our own path to home ownership.

In my own case, I bought a home in a riding and a constituency that I proudly represent, York Centre. My wife and I have been married almost 30 years. And 30 years ago, you could buy a lovely home, a modest home, a three- or four-bedroom home, for about \$300,000. In those days, interest rates were about 8%, so you needed about \$60,000 or \$70,000 to buy that home. That home today, we know, is over a million dollars.

This story replicates itself throughout our province. You work hard, you put a down payment down, you have a job, and you've hit that milestone of home ownership. The goal, one day, is to pay off your mortgage so you can rip it up, you can burn the mortgage safely, and you can say, "I own this home." That's what we all aspire to. We want to have an ability now so that we can pass to our children and our grandchildren this legacy.

In my case, my wife and I are proud to be parents of three very, very educated young adults. My youngest will be graduating—please God—this summer from Queen's University in concurrent education. I have two other children who have graduated and who are now starting their steps, but they deserve the same opportunity that my wife and I had to buy our own home.

What Bill 17 does, Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act—I'll give you the key goals of this act, and we've talked about it during our debate. We want to accelerate home building. How? By simplifying and standardizing the development charges in consultation with municipalities. We want to help reduce local fees that can significantly increase housing costs. I'll talk about this as well in my remarks.

We want to encourage innovation. We are the province with limitless opportunities. Every day, we talk about the potential of Ontario. Premier Ford has reimagined Ontario by saying we want to be a province of the future. That's why we're looking at the north—and specifically the Ring of Fire—and the amazing resources that we have that we have to find a way of harnessing to help build our economy of tomorrow.

We want to boost transit-oriented communities. That affects us in York Centre. That affects me in my own riding, because we have multiple subway stops that people will want to live close to so they can access transit. We are spending billions of dollars to expand our transit infrastructure. This is bold. This is leadership by Premier Ford.

We want to standardize construction rules so that every municipality has the same level playing field, so that a developer doesn't have to reinvent the wheel because a municipality may not have a standardized approach. That's very important. We want to simplify the planning process. We've got to get it done.

In February of this year, Ontarians returned our Progressive Conservative government to its third majority. We ran on a platform, actually, of protecting Ontario. I've said this many times: Protecting Ontario means protecting us economically, protecting us from a public safety point of view. I can tell you, as Solicitor General, this is personal to me.

Pour moi, c'est personnel. Monsieur le Président, rien pour moi, en tant que solliciteur général, n'est plus important que la sécurité de notre province.

For me, public safety is important every single day. It's important to our Premier. Protect Ontario public safety. Protect Ontario economically. Protect Ontario so that the next generation can find their way to prosperity.

To date, as the Minister of Infrastructure, who spoke so eloquently earlier on in the debate—she gave the amount of money that we're spending towards our infrastructure. It's game-changing. And by the way, to the Minister of Infrastructure, I had the privilege of going out last week for a meeting with the mayor of Prince Edward county and seeing how happy he was with the investments that we're going to make in Prince Edward county, in the riding of the Bay of Quinte. Stories like this go all over Ontario.

I want to talk for a few minutes about some of the components of this bill which are important. I think it's important to know that, when it comes to the development charges, one of the things we're doing thanks to my great friend and colleague, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: We want to defer the occupancies of the DCs. We want to defer it until occupancy. This is important. This will encourage developers that they don't have to finance another charge which actually is paid for by the end user. When you look at it, this is an example of bringing down the cost of housing. And we want to have it eliminated for the long-term-care homes, and I think this is great. Again, I want to thank the minister for bringing this forward.

The Minister of Natural Resources, in his question to the member from Guelph in debate, brought up the fact that municipalities—and in his own municipality of Waterloo, there's \$200 million plus sitting in a bank account for development charges that have been collected. There's over \$10 billion in development charges that are held. That's ridiculous. When we look at the responsibilities that municipalities have to do their part, sitting on a hoard of cash of \$10 billion, this is not helpful.

2200

Why is it important that we go back to the building code? Because we want one standard and we want one code. This is very important because if there's a variation from one municipality to another, this costs a developer money. This is a disincentive for them to build housing. I want to talk about something that the minister has put in the bill—that we will explore the idea of the concept of municipal service corporations. I'll tell you why, Mr. Speaker: Infrastructure is expensive.

The governments, both municipally and federally, and of course in our case provincially, spend billions of dollars because we have to. This is how we build Ontario: by

ensuring that we have infrastructure. You can travel to different countries around the world and some of them have really excelled in building out infrastructure, so that as they go forward—the basic infrastructure. When a builder builds a building, they call it a rough-in. You're putting the services in, so one day when you find a tenant—and I know a little bit about this because I had a lifetime as a property manager. I was in this business and I saw it first-hand.

When you build the infrastructure, if you have to build out the premises, you've made the groundwork to do it. This concept of exploring the use of municipal service corporations will allow other investors, such as pension funds, to come forward and to be a partner in making sure that infrastructure is built. I've heard the member, and I have great respect, and she knows that the member for St. Catharines—in her community, there has to be a build-out in infrastructure. In every member's community, there has to be a build-out. We have to be able to find a sustainable and innovative pathway to do it, because we have one taxpayer. Somebody has to pay for what is being built.

I have to tell you, when we look at who supports Bill 17—let me tell you some of the people that have said this is actually a great idea. The big city mayors have said thumbs up. AMO said thumbs up. Ontario Home Builders' Association, thumbs up. BILD and Rescon, thumbs up. So this government has to be bold and we have to be innovative.

Mr. Speaker, when we ran in February, during the election, we all had an opportunity to knock on thousands of doors in our own respective constituencies. The role of a member of the Legislature is to listen when the door opens up. It's not always to agree with the person, but it is to be a good listener and to listen respectfully.

The role of a government after the election is to lead. That's why I support Premier Ford as the members of our caucus do morning, noon and night. He has asked us to come forward with bold and innovative ideas. He likes to say that the only idea that is not good is an idea that you fail to mention, that you fail to bring forward, because we don't know whether that would have been good or not.

I can tell you, the members of our government caucus are bold, and we're innovative. We come forward with ideas that are practical. The concept of looking at the development charges with a way of helping to bring house prices down and making them more affordable is a very, very good idea. The way that we want to look at development charges again to eliminate them for long-term-care homes is a great idea.

When the Liberals were in power—and Premier Ford has spoken about it; in fact, he spoke about it this morning. He reminded everyone that in 15 years they couldn't even build 1,000 new beds in a long-term-care home. I think it was less. I think it was about 600. We've set a goal that we will probably surpass. I'll tell you why—and we're talking about tens of thousands. We're talking about understanding that you can't do it if you're not bold.

When it came time for the Minister of Infrastructure to recognize that she had to come up with a plan that would

be unsurpassed in the history of Ontario to build hospitals and to build subway lines and to build bridges and to build out the infrastructure that would carry our province from the south to the north—and by the way, anybody that's travelled our province, and we know this here in the Legislature, it's large. It's hours to go from the most easterly point in Hawkesbury, Ontario—I was there with our great member from the region just a few weeks ago—to the most northwestern part, the member from Kenora—Rainy River, which I hope to get to soon.

But I can tell you, wherever you go in Ontario, there's a fundamental common denominator and that is that we love our province. I like to say, Mr. Speaker, it's not only the Americans. I'll give them credit for being proud of the holidays that they celebrate and to be proud when their flag is flown, to be proud when their anthem is sung at sports games. But let me tell you something, we are not insignificant. I have never seen a greater outpouring of Ontario pride, of Canadian pride, than I see today.

And I want to acknowledge the visit to Canada today of His Majesty King Charles III, who has come here with Queen Camilla, who has come here in solidarity with the Canadian people, who has come here to send a message that our sovereignty is ours, our country is ours, no one will ever take that away from us, and we will stand a little taller. We will stand a little prouder. We will understand that when we see our Canadian flag and our Ontario flag flown it means something. It means that the generations before us fought for it. It means that we are going to pass this lineage, this legacy of who we are, to our children. And everything good that came our way during our lifetimes will be passed, please God, to our children and they should have equal or more to the greatness that we have enjoyed.

So what are our responsibilities here tonight as legislators, as privileged people whose number is less than 2,000? We're about 1,990 or less of people who have had the privilege of being honoured to serve in this Legislature.

I'll remind you where I started. We have an opportunity to be bold. We have an opportunity to be innovative. We have an opportunity to set an expectation and a tone and a can-do attitude that in our Ontario there is nothing we can't do. And this bill is part of a chain. It's part of a chain that will go from one generation to another.

We want to build faster. We want to ensure that we're going to leave an infrastructure for another generation that perhaps—the 15 years that they were in office, the Liberals, they left us nothing. They did nothing to build Ontario. They built nothing. We're not going to do that.

2210

We're going to be bold. We're going to be innovative. We're going to be proud. And when we see our flag flying over Queen's Park, we will know we contributed to the future of our province. Thank you, monsieur le Président. Merci beaucoup. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): It is time for oral questions.

Mme France Gélinas: I think we all agree with the end goal that we want more construction of housing, that we

need more construction of housing so that everybody has a place to live, including affordable housing, including supportive housing.

We also know that when you break ground, you have to respect the species at risk and the species that are threatened.

Do you think it is okay for the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks' species at risk branch to take between nine and 18 months to review the work that has been submitted to them in order to be able to build?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I think, with the greatest of respect to the member from Nickel Belt, she's talking about Bill 5. But what I want to do is again go back to, really, one of the cornerstones that I spoke to in my remarks. We have to do something to reduce the cost of housing for our children and grandchildren, and one concrete way we can do this is by addressing the development charges.

There are two things with that: Number one, again, we want to defer it to occupancy. Why? It means the developer doesn't have to front the money and borrow money against it which, ultimately, is paid by the end user.

The second thing is, let's agree that by removing the development charges on the long-term-care homes, that will actually save the taxpayers money, because in the end of the day, we are fronting so much money to build the long-term-care homes, we might as well save that money for the taxpayers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Further question?

Ms. Laura Smith: Earlier tonight, the minister and I were talking about homes, and I was discussing the fact that my parents bought our first home before I was born for \$17,000 in downtown Toronto. Going forward, I purchased my first home for \$300,000, and I believe the minister had a similar scenario in his area.

I'm just wondering how Bill 17 will support affordability, given that we have to build for the next generation and help more Ontarians achieve their dream of home ownership, especially as the parents of kids who want to live near their parents, and I want them to live near me.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to thank my great friend from Thornhill. We found out tonight that, I think, at the time we both bought our homes, they were about the same price. When you look back on it, who would believe that you could buy a home with that down payment and just be able to make the whole transaction work?

I think, in the end of the day, I'd say to the member from Thornhill, one of the things we want to do is cap the amount of special and unique reports, because that adds to the cost. You can't go in as a developer and find out that you need to have another five reports or 10 reports because everything adds to the cost.

When the government lays the foundation and sets the standard of expectation of that home ownership, it's because we're cutting the red tape. We've got a great Minister of Red Tape Reduction—I want to acknowledge her as well—the member from Barrie–Innisfil.

But let us get on with it. Do it respectfully, but get on with it because that will help reduce the cost of housing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Further question?

Mr. Jeff Burch: It's farming season. Crops are being planted, and one of the things we haven't heard asked is that the bill specifically does not address some concerns raised by farmers who have been required to pay development charges to pay for stormwater infrastructure that they can't use. Was that an oversight by the government? Is that something they're going to consider in committee? Why was that left out of the bill?

Michael S. Kerzner: I'd say to the member opposite, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing will look into this, and this is something we're going to do.

Look, the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane knows that my wife's family is from small-town Ontario. I guess that makes me from small-town Ontario by the extension of her.

There's never been a government that's also been more sensitive to the agri-food business in Ontario. We've got a great minister who understands that what we grow in Ontario is so large in the volume of the produce and everything we do in agri-food that we have to export quite a bit of it. The farmers are the backbone of our province, and this government will always stand up for them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Further questions?

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: I always love hearing the Solicitor General talking about the importance of housing. And when it comes to women, women need housing to ensure that they are safe and they have access to a safe space to be able to focus on things like economic development. So can the minister talk about how important it is for us to have measures in place to ensure that housing is built, so that women can succeed financially to be able to take care of their family and future generations in communities?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to thank my colleague. Look, as a proud dad of a daughter who's finding her place as she will leave the concurrent education program at Queen's University, the minister is absolutely right: We have to have an ability where we have not only safe communities, but we have to tie it into everything that a community should represent, where everyone has a chance to succeed and thrive—and do so, I might add, in a safe way.

I think I would say to the minister, the member from Brampton, how important safe communities are—it's not only that we have to look at it, as I said, from protecting Ontario economically, but look at it from a public safety point of view as well. And I'm proud to be part of a government that has prioritized—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Further questions?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I just want to ask a few questions—one question in particular.

Despite the ambitious targets to build 1.5 million homes by 2031, we're seeing housing starts drop to historical

lows. If this government were serious about accelerating houses, it would start by legalizing more modest-density homes, semis, fourplexes and multiplexes in different neighbourhoods. We're not seeing that in St. Catharines or across the Niagara region.

So how does this government intend to tackle affordable housing? Our wait-lists are anywhere from 18 to 20 years for affordable housing at the regional level, where thousands of people are waiting for affordable housing. So how will this government look at that within this bill?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Mr. Speaker, I say to my friend across the way that we have to lay the groundwork for it and we have to be bold.

I think one of the ways that I feel is very important is addressing the development charges. In some municipalities, they've gotten way out of hand.

And I also want to again go back to the Minister of Natural Resources, who made mention to his comment in debate with the member from Guelph that there's \$200 million just sitting there. We have to do something now that lays the foundation. That's what we need to do. That's why we will be bold. That's why we will be innovative.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Further questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Nobody asked us to be put in this situation where we're fighting a tariff war with presumably our best friend in the world. I blame Donald Trump for all these problems.

I want to ask the Solicitor General: If he was giving advice to his family, to his children—advice for the future—what advice would he give?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): A quick response.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: My advice is: Don't give up on Ontario. Don't give up on Canada. Be proud of who we are. And if it took a couple of generations from the First and Second World War, and for the veterans that served and the people that fought and brought us to where we are today, I'd say to them, Canada and Ontario is worth fighting for.

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I can tell you this: I'm not going to give up. Premier Ford's not giving up. Our government's not giving up. We're just getting started. And we will do everything that we can to protect Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Further debate?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I am sharing my time this evening with the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North. I am rising this evening to speak about Bill 17, the Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act, which is a title that just proves that irony is not dead. This bill is supposedly about building housing, but this bill and the government's budget last week make it very clear that this government has just thrown in the towel on housing in Ontario. They have quietly admitted that they are not on target to meet 1.5 million new homes by 2031. In fact, the budget shows that they had projected last year that there would be 92,000 new starts in 2025, and now they're saying it will be only 71,000.

In fact, housing starts in Ontario are the lowest they've been since 1955. I won't tell you exactly how many years before I was born, but a couple of decades before I was born. That's how low this government's record is on building new homes. There were no new measures in the budget to support housing. In fact, they've cut funding to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. And there's no new measures in this bill that are going to make a significant difference, like the measures that were recommended by this government's own expert task force, like legalizing fourplexes, something that BC has done to great effect.

In fact, the measures that are in this bill were described by TVO journalist John Michael McGrath as "fiddling on the margins." That just shows how much the government has given up the fight, which is incredibly unfortunate because the fight is needed now more than ever. When we look at what the outcome of this government's record on housing have been over the past seven years, we are talking about a crisis where people in Ontario cannot afford a home, whether they rent or buy.

In Ottawa, average rent is now more than \$2,000 a month. That's an increase of \$400 per month over the last five years. For the average family, they're now paying \$5,000 a year more in rent than they were just five years ago. The average home price in Ottawa has increased by 44% over that same period. Last week, I had Liz Vittorini, an Ottawa realtor, come to my office to share some advocacy on behalf of the Ottawa Real Estate Board. Liz's number one advocacy plea to this government was for real rent control. The reason for that is because Liz says rent is now so high that nobody can save up the money for a deposit towards a home. So the only way that we are going to get people into the housing market where they can afford a home is if we control rent so that they can actually accumulate the funds over time to pay for that down payment.

Having knocked on doors in my riding to share my tenant guide with tenants over the past week, I can also attest that it is badly needed. People are paying 80% to 100% of their income on rent, so there's no money left to pay for groceries and bills, let alone start saving towards buying a home someday. Yet these same tenants who are paying exorbitant amounts of rent are seeing above-guideline rent increases year after year after year. The tenants at 1300 and 1310 McWatters Road—there's 300 of them in two Homestead buildings and they are currently fighting rent hikes as high as 11% through an above-guideline rent increase. They are being asked to pay this increase by their landlord at the same time that their landlord just took away their pool, their gym and their sauna in order to build a luxury tower that will not have rent control applied because this government removed rent control in buildings constructed after 2018. The tenants never got a rent reduction when that service was taken away from them, so they're being asked to pay more while receiving less, and they're also dealing with cockroaches to boot.

I was in Parkwood Hills on Friday, where there's many, many rentals owned by Minto, and I spoke to tenants who

were paying AGIs of 3.7%, 7%, 11%, year after year after year. Data that was acquired through a freedom-of-information request by ACORN, which showed AGI applications to the Landlord and Tenant Board between 2017 and 2022, showed that just for the Minto buildings on Meadowlands Drive in Parkwood Hills, there were 40 AGI requests during that period. For some of the buildings, they had three or four requests during that five-year period. In one building, it was a similar story to what's happening on McWatters. The landlord allowed the pool to fall into disrepair and now they are charging the tenants an above-guideline rent increase to demolish the pool that they no longer have access to.

There are also buildings where the landlord has screwed in new railings on the stairs and told the tenants that they have to pay an AGI in order to pay for that railing. Tenants in another building had a Landlord and Tenant Board hearing last Thursday. During that hearing, it came out that Minto was trying to include a charge that did not apply to that building: It was a renovation that was happening in another building. And when they were called out on it, their reaction was basically, "Whoops, my bad." For tenants who didn't participate in the application to the Landlord and Tenant Board, they're already paying that rent increase even though it doesn't apply to their building. And those tenants who participated in that hearing, Speaker, they came home from the hearing to find that Minto had sent them another above-guideline rent increase notice for the following year.

In Accora Village, tenants are fighting a 5.5% above-guideline rent increase that was applied last year, while basic maintenance to doors and windows isn't even being done. Parkway Towers, which is owned by Osgoode Properties: an above-guideline rent increase of 3% to 4% per year for the next 11 years. It was just approved by the Landlord and Tenant Board, and that's despite the fact that this following list of issues is going on unaddressed by the landlord: There's very poor accessibility, no ramp in front, ramp in back not to code and the railing in the front is unsafe; there are ants, cockroaches and rodents in the building; the windows do not close tight; there are ongoing water issues; there are illegal surcharges for replacing appliances. And tenants suspect that these AGIs are not about repairs to the building, which the landlord has already demonstrated they're not interested in doing, but about raising the rent in the building to make it comparable to new builds where rent control doesn't apply.

According to that FOI data that ACORN collected, over the past two decades the number of AGIs in Ontario have gone up by 107%, and nearly 80% of those applications are from big corporate landlords. They are not from small mom-and-pop landlords who are just trying to pay for badly needed repairs. This is an attempt by big landlords to maximize their profit.

And so, Liz is right: Reinstating real rent control and banning above-guideline rent increases is one of the most important things this government could do to make homes affordable. Another thing that the government could do, Speaker, is get government back into the business of

building housing, because that is something that we saw between 1940 and the 1990s is incredibly effective in providing affordable housing to the people of Ontario.

In addition to these measures, which would actually make meaningful progress on providing people in Ontario with a home that they can afford, I also want to comment on the parts of this bill that are about building standards, Speaker, because what we too often see with this government is any talk of standards immediately becomes a race to the bottom. They consider any form of protection for people, for tenants, for consumers to be a form of red tape. They do not believe that we can protect health and safety in Ontario. I'm incredibly concerned that when we're talking about banning any standards that are not in the provincial building code, we're actually talking about standards that protect people that municipalities have adopted because the province won't.

The city of Toronto has a standard that buildings above four storeys that are multi-unit buildings have to have a backup generator. And in Ottawa, we've seen, through multiple natural disasters, how dangerous it is for people to not have that backup generator. The tornado knocked out power for nearly a week. The derecho knocked out power for up to two weeks for people in parts of the city. This had people trapped without access to food, water, medical care. It put people in incredibly dangerous situations, going down staircases in the dark. One elderly woman had nothing but a jar of peanut butter to eat for five days because nobody came to check on her and she was trapped in her apartment. There was a woman I spoke to who was so traumatized by that experience that she has buckets of water in her apartment at all times, because without the generator, the water also doesn't work. You can't flush your toilet, but you also can't drink water out of the tap, and this woman is so afraid that this is going to happen again that she always has water around her in case the power goes out.

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But when I proposed the Protecting Human Rights in an Emergency Act so that we would actually require all buildings in the province of Ontario to meet this standard, the government voted against that bill and argued that people in Ontario did not deserve that kind of protection. That is what I'm worried about happening when the government is talking about harmonizing everybody, that it's going to be the lowest common denominator and we are going to leave people at risk once again.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): I recognize the member for Thunder Bay–Superior North.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I have a number of things I'd like to say about this bill. I think that it's been seven years of this government, and it's almost like, "Okay, let's hurry up and push things through." And I think, "Well, how much time did we spend on the greenbelt that had to be rescinded? How much time did we spend trying to take away charter rights from education workers that had to be rescinded?"

So I laugh a little bit, and then I think about the member from Nickel Belt talking about six years to get the

government to put houses up for sale that are already built and paid for by the government—six years. The haste, sometimes, that is behind some of these bills I find really—it would be entertaining if it wasn't so upsetting.

Also, in Thunder Bay, in the north, we see lots of above-guideline rent increases, so we need to be asking ourselves, why is there so much of a housing shortage in the first place? Well, we've had no control over rents. We have people getting kicked out of their apartments. Sometimes they don't know their rights. I know of two entire apartment buildings that have been converted to short-term rentals. That's affordable housing that no longer exists. There are tools that this government has, if they chose to use them, that would also be addressing the housing crisis and the affordable housing crisis.

But I want to focus a little bit on the fact that it is National Accessibility Week. I heard this afternoon from David Lepofsky, chair of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance, who wrote to me about Bill 17 and his disappointment on this. I'd like to read this out loud:

“They have not consulted us on this. There is a very long failure by the Ontario government to enact proper, current and mandatory standards for new construction or renovations in Ontario, whether residential or other forms of construction. This has led to new buildings being built with new barriers that could have been prevented at little or no cost. This all flies in the face of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. It gets even worse when public money is used to finance this construction in whole or in part. Public money should never be used to create or perpetuate barriers against people with disabilities.

“The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance has been asking the Ontario government to effectively address this. Premier Ford has never agreed to meet. The accessibility minister has not met to have a substantive discussion with us on this or any other accessibility issue for over three years. Rich Donovan, the person the Ford government selected to conduct the most recent independent review of the disabilities act, declared two years ago that Ontario is in an accessibility crisis. He called for the Premier to lead a crisis response. The Ford government has implemented no crisis response. It has not even acknowledged this crisis.”

I want to thank David Lepofsky for this, and I would like to recommend, first of all, that the Minister of Housing and that the Premier meet with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Alliance. It's incredibly important. If we are building anew, why aren't we building with the best possible standard? I would like to make a bold recommendation: Why don't we make it standard to have wider doorways right from the get-go? It's not expensive when you do it the first time; it's very expensive if you've got to cut away drywall and two-by-fours in order to put in a new door. Why don't we make that standard? Make the hallways standard so they're wide enough that you can take a wheelchair down them.

If you do it right the first time, it's not much of an additional cost. In fact, over the long run, it means that the

places that you are building could be occupied by anyone with a disability, without a disability, or somebody, as they age, who needs to use a walker to stay in their own place. They'd like to stay in their own places, but they need to be accessible. Let's do it right.

I saw something in my briefing notes about a regulatory proposal posted to the environmental regulatory office saying the government intends to prohibit the requirement of site plan studies concerning sun, shade, wind, urban design and lighting. To me, this is a health and safety issue and a wellness issue, and I'm really surprised to see this seen as some kind of undesirable red tape.

I think of my mother, who's living in a seniors' place right now. She's 97. It's actually too dark. You know, having a place where the sun comes in makes an enormous amount of difference to people. You can put up blinds if it's too bright, but if there's no light, there's nothing you can do. And it affects people, particularly over the winter, particularly, frankly, as you age. If you don't have the same level of mobility, you can't just go outside and take a walk because if the sidewalks aren't clear—as often happens in Thunder Bay, I have to say—getting out for a walk is difficult.

Again, I'm thinking let's do it right the first time. Let's have accessibility standards as the standard for new building, and let's be thinking about and not dismissing the idea of not paying attention to light, wind, good air circulation and urban design and lighting. They seem like very practical, basic things to me.

I've just got a couple more minutes. Just to note, Thunder Bay actually doesn't have development charges and is doing reasonably well with getting new buildings up. Their requirement is 30% affordable units in each new building. I probably should have written down the total number, but it's 30%. I note that the province is actually planning on reducing the requirement to 5% of floor area, and just for 25 years. That seems like a shockingly low requirement for affordable housing. I want to note that Thunder Bay, right now it's 80% of market rent, but they're going to get rid of that and make it based on income, so that if prices keep going up but incomes stay the same, people are not going to be penalized and pushed out of their homes.

I do want to note that people should recall that 200 seniors were evicted last year from Heritage Glen in Mississauga—outrageous, really shameful. They were bought out by Minto, and what really struck me was that they should have had the right to go to the Landlord and Tenant Board, but they did not get that letter from the Minister of Housing until three months after they had already been removed. That is also shameful.

I don't see anything in this act—I see some good things in this act. For example, standardizing the materials used for road repair sounds like a really good thing. I have actually seen problems when it's not standardized, you fill the hole, and you drive past 10 minutes later and it's all scattered across the road—a completely useless exercise. I shouldn't have done that. I've lost my train of thought—seniors, right, and what happened with Heritage Glen.

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I don't see anything in this legislation that actually addresses the abuse of increased rents, the abuse of the renovations to increase the rent. There's nothing to stop renovations. When you have a 25-year limit—that's the time that those people lived at Heritage Glen, and they had no protection whatsoever.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

Ms. Natalie Pierre: My question is for the member from Thunder Bay–Superior North.

Speaker, Ontarians are facing a housing affordability crisis, and our government is taking bold steps to cut red tape, speed up construction of new homes. Bill 17 proposes practical reforms to streamline planning, simplify development charges and modernize some very outdated processes. So I ask the opposition if they support eliminating unnecessary delays that make it harder and more expensive to build homes for people of Ontario.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I thank the member from Burlington for the question.

I think it always depends on the definition of “unnecessary.” Obviously, if it is truly unnecessary, yes, let's speed things up. Again, we've heard from the member from Nickel Belt how things can be dragged on for no apparent reason whatsoever. But I think it's also important that the standard is not brought down to the lowest common denominator, which is always a risk.

So, yes, we want to see housing built faster, but I'd also like to see rent control and the end of renovations.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I appreciate the comments from my two colleagues.

My colleague from Ottawa West–Nepean talked about situations where the place where people were living had cockroaches, was not sanitary.

When the government talks about red tape, do you think that keeping apartments safe, keeping them clean, making sure that people don't get evicted so that a minor renovation needs to take place, but what they really want to do is jack the rent—do you consider those red tape?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thanks to my colleague from Nickel Belt for the question.

I never consider measures that are protecting the health and safety of individuals in Ontario to be red tape, and unfortunately, we see all too often that this government does and that they are very happy to remove measures that actually protect people.

We see right now that there actually is a standard in the Residential Tenancies Act that says that people should have access to pest-free homes. What I find very often is that my constituents are living in homes that do have pests, that have maintenance issues, and yet the landlord is having their above-guideline rent application approved while not addressing any of those things.

The government has actually passed legislation—we've all passed legislation—in this House that would allow for a greater crackdown on landlords who are not

respecting the Residential Tenancies Act, and yet the government won't even implement the measures that they've passed. We see time and time again that they're just not prepared to take steps to protect people's health and safety, particularly if they're renters in the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I've taken a look at the NDP's so-called housing plan, and it proposes to build 250,000 so-called affordable homes, and at \$500,000 per unit, that's \$125 billion. Now, \$125 billion happens to be approximately 60% of the entire provincial budget. It probably exceeds every provincial budget in the entire Confederation. Clearly, it's unrealistic.

So \$125 billion is unachievable. In view of the fact that it's unachievable, when is the NDP going to come up with a new housing plan?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thanks to the member for Essex for that interesting question. I haven't seen so much use of air quotes since the government announced its housing targets.

The member apparently doesn't understand what it involves to build housing when you don't have a profit motive. When we actually invest in building not-for-profit community co-operative housing, when people pay rent, that money goes (1) into the maintenance of those buildings, but (2) it goes back into building more affordable housing.

We are actually providing seed funding that would address building housing to actually provide people with affordable homes, unlike the government, which has never seen a taxpayer dollar that they didn't want to give to private profit, and particularly to developers.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to my colleague to my left and my colleague from Thunder Bay–Superior North. I was thinking about my colleague from Thunder Bay–Superior North when she was talking about building homes that are accessible just from the beginning.

Years before I got into mining, I worked in construction and helped build houses. I always found it really interesting that our standards were different depending on the type of house we're building, that we could actually build housing where the receptacles and plugs were at hip level, and then that would mean that those houses would be good basically from cradle to grave. As you aged and you had less mobility, you'd be able to reach them. If you needed wider hallways, instead of having to bring in someone to rebuild them, you could just have this as a standard.

I've been thinking about this for a long time. I think you bring a really excellent point. Why don't we just do it? It would make life a lot easier. It would open up all future housing to people of all ages and abilities. I don't know what the backstop is that prevents this from happening.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you very much to the member from Sudbury for the question. I don't know also why not, but honestly, I think that people just don't think

through what it means to have a disability and how easy it is to actually build so that anybody can use the house and use the house well.

There was a group here this morning talking about, really, struggles with group homes for people with disabilities and how they would like to be able to keep people at home, live within their own communities and not have to be put into an institution. Well, imagine our homes if the doors were wide enough, if you could actually take your wheelchair into the bathroom, if you could reach a receptacle without having to get down on the ground.

I think of that for my mom. I think of that for myself, actually, now. I'm getting a bit stiff, and I would prefer to have electricity at waist height as well.

I think it's a mindset that we need to actually turn our attention to, and we could do it. We could do it easily, and I think we should. So let's make that commitment.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

Ms. Natalie Pierre: I guess my question is for either of the members of the opposition. Under the current rules, developers are often forced to conduct study after study after study, many of which duplicate each other and add no real value, just in order to get shovels in the ground and move projects forward. This bill, Bill 17, would put an end to these endless demands, introduce more consistency and bring predictability back to the planning process.

Will the opposition support removing these costly bureaucratic hoops and allow developers the option to have consistent planning standards across the province of Ontario?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: As my colleague has already said, we don't support reports for reports' sake, but what we also don't support is removing reports that are valuable and important to protect health and safety.

An example of that, which is not about housing but is about something that is currently before this House, is that this government promised an environmental assessment for the Dresden landfill and is now saying they're not going to do the assessment for the Dresden landfill because we need landfill space. Well, I don't think that's any consolation to all the people who are living there, who have to drink the groundwater that could now be contaminated from the Dresden landfill.

There's a reason why we do assessments, and it's to make sure that we're actually protecting the health and safety of the people who will live in that housing or the people who are living in the neighbourhood where that housing is going up. So we don't support removing reports when those reports are actually important to protect health and safety.

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What we do support when we are talking about reports that are being done is what my colleague from Nickel Belt has spoken about, and that's speeding up the timeline on the government side. The government shouldn't receive a report and then sit for nine months before getting back to the developer about whether or not they can proceed.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Further debate?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Another year, another piece of planning and housing legislation from this PC government. It's kind of like Christmas, but you don't necessarily get all the presents you were hoping for.

Now, there are some good elements in here. I'm all for cutting red tape, reducing taxes and fees, and streamlining the development process here in Ontario. I think these are important things, and this bill does move it in that direction. But frankly, it's not enough. The problem is not going to get better in the short term. Under this legislation, it will make it a little easier to do the things I mentioned, but only—only—once market conditions change. Simply put, I believe this bill is barely going to get shovels in the ground now, today, in 2025, without maybe some substantial help from the federal government—again, hoping for Christmas, I guess—or from mayors like Steven Del Duca in Vaughan, who did take action.

Today is an opportunity for the government to be bold at the start of their mandate, and I believe that they do know what the solutions are. They've had report after report, including their own Housing Affordability Task Force report, telling the government what is needed.

I know the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is serious, and I know he wants to tackle all the challenges our province is facing. He and I have had good conversations about that, and I sincerely do appreciate the approach he's taking to his role. This bill is one step forward, and I will say now I am intending to vote for it on second reading, but I believe we need to be doing more.

The quotes that I saw in the release when this bill was announced—and afterward—were the kinds of quotes that I've been seeing at least for the last seven years and, to be honest, even longer than that. Some of the people behind the announcement could have been there, I think, 10 years ago. It feels like I'm in the movie *Groundhog Day*; it really does. It feels like I'm in the movie *Groundhog Day*. Is it going to change? I'm not too sure.

I'm tired of hearing the talking on this issue because—and I'll let the House know—I've been working on the issue for the past 10 years, advocating and trying to make it easier to build homes so that people like my friends—people I grew up with—can afford one, much like the young people in Ajax today who are wondering how they're going to be able to afford a home of their own.

My work on this issue, I will say, was a bit ahead of the curve. The member from Beaches–East York—or beautiful Beaches–East York, as she would say—worked on this issue with me when I was a staffer at city hall in Toronto working to get laneway housing approved. It was an initiative that she led at the time, alongside my boss, who was Deputy Mayor Ana Bailão. It took us about two and a half years to get laneway housing approved, and it seemed like a simple change to get done. But the reality then, and it still feels like sometimes now: There was so much institutional and political opposition to it. There were people on both the right and the left who were opposed to it, so we had to go out and do our own public

consultations and build the support needed to pass it one day at a time, one member of council at a time.

We managed to do it, and I'm glad now it's easier at municipal councils across this province to do that work. It's easier here in this Legislature, I think, to do that work as well, to come forward with measures that will make it easier and faster to build the housing that we desperately need in this province.

So why aren't homes being built any more? Primarily, it's market conditions. Due to the rapid increase in home prices, there just aren't affordable homes for people anymore. The math doesn't add up for developers. The numbers on new development—it just doesn't pencil anymore. Materials are up. Labour is up. Land values are up. And taxes and fees are up, up, and away.

One of the biggest factors in this is the high taxes and new fees on homes: about \$170,000—could be a bit more; could be a bit less. I know the government understands this and has acknowledged that it's not going to be able to meet its housing targets of 1.5 million homes. One of the main reasons why is the high taxes and fees that we see on new development, high taxes and fees that we've been seeing for the last seven years.

So, this bill won't necessarily, I think, make an immediate or meaningful impact on the prices of new homes right here today in Ontario, again, unless, as I said, the federal government rides in on a golden horse or municipalities do it on their own.

Why aren't homes affordable anymore? Well, wages aren't increasing, frankly, at the same level as prices. It's estimated that even if current home prices stay the same, it would probably take about 50 years for wages to catch up to that level. That's tough. So maybe if you're having a baby today, you'll be able to buy a home at the ripe old age of 50 years old.

This isn't what I want to see for my nieces and nephews, and especially for those in my community in Ajax and people across the province who don't have access to the bank of mom and dad. Not all of us are as privileged or fortunate to be able to have access to the bank of mom and dad who can help with that down payment.

When I turned 18 years old, I purchased a condo with my mom so that she could own something for the very first time. That was in 2008 and the price of that condo then, one bedroom and den, was about \$132,000. That's only 17 years ago. Today, the same price of that unit is approximately \$450,000 or so, about 350% higher. So, if we went up by inflation from 2008 to now, the same cost of that home would be about \$190,000. That just shows how much the increase in home prices has happened over the last 17 years. Prices, really, are out of line with wages.

So when we look at the bill, there's a lot of talk today from the member from Beaches–East York about the Toronto Green Standard. Scrapping rules like that, again, is not going to get a single shovel in the ground today. It might help in five years, maybe, but the reality is that people are not building today.

I do agree with some of the members on the other side who say we need a province-wide set of environmental

standards. I know this work was happening about two Ministers of Housing ago; it hasn't happened since. It needs to be restarted and completed but without putting current standards in limbo as well. I think we need to be responsible when we're looking at changes when it comes to planning and development to provide predictability and certainty to folks, and that includes municipalities.

Boosting investments into housing infrastructure by allocating about \$400 million to the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund through the budget and the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Fund is good news. It's not enough but I do think it is good news.

The town of Ajax has been one of Ontario's leaders in trying to increase housing supply, expand the tax base, revitalize the downtown area, and create a future-oriented community. Ajax is taking up that challenge with purpose, but earlier this year it didn't receive the funding it needed to unlock that development downtown, funding that it was encouraged to apply for. So, the \$20 million that the town of Ajax didn't receive in light of their efforts to increase housing supply and revitalize the downtown meant that future development is stalled. Ajax wasn't rewarded for being a leader. There will be another chance, I'm sure.

I encourage this government to reconsider the next time the town of Ajax submits its application to extend Hunt Street and build the infrastructure needed in the downtown area because Ajax has been doing what the province has asked of it. Not approving that funding again will send a negative message to other municipalities who are thinking about how they can try and meet the ambitious goals—and they are ambitious goals that the province is setting for them—and I do think many municipalities are trying to work in good faith to meet those housing targets.

I know the new Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing understands this and recognizes the hard work that Ajax is doing to try and help families attain the dream of home ownership. I appreciate that, and I know the minister, again, is sincere in his desire to make a positive impact on building homes. So, it is my hope the next time that funding application is submitted, that funding is approved without delay.

Now, in the region of Durham, the number of individuals experiencing homelessness increased from about 209 in 2021 to 787 by the end of December 2024, and it's continuing to rise. It is going up and up still. I'm talking about this today because I believe we do need to have mechanisms in place to help prevent more people from going into homelessness due to the redevelopment of existing market rentals that are being rented at affordable rates. I believe we need more housing supply across the market; I'm one of the first to be able to say that. But we also shouldn't be putting people out on the street in precarious or desperate situations and saying, "Too bad, so sad." Not everyone is as fortunate as all of us sitting here in this chamber.

2300

In Ajax, there are some low-rise apartment buildings called the Red Bricks. They were built when the town was formed and they provide affordable market-rate housing.

It is market housing, but it is affordable. They're at risk of redevelopment with no mechanisms to ensure that they can have a right to return at similar rents, the tenants there. I know the province has previously consulted on regulations to set a province-wide standard for this issue, but nothing has happened. So I'm asking the government to consider measures that will not make the current housing crisis worse by putting people out on the streets.

On schools, great: Schools and child cares would be allowed in residential areas. Not a bold move, but it is a good move. Now, the Durham District School Board is experiencing tremendous growth, going from 70,000 students in 2019 to about 80,000 students in 2024. That's been driven by new residential development and urban renewal projects. Schools in many areas are bursting at the seams, with some schools literally just not able to have any more portables on site, including the school in my riding. Simply put, the pace of new school construction isn't keeping up. We need to see this government do a better job at planning for new schools and building them better to serve communities.

The government has an opportunity, though, to go one step further as part of the committee process for this bill by exempting new schools from site plan approval, like they're doing with colleges and universities for student housing. I think that would be a very positive step for our school boards—our growing school boards in many areas of this province—to be able to have that ability as well, much like colleges and universities also have that ability.

One of the few day-one policy changes that I think this government does have in the bill is that they'll allow municipalities to meet federal demands for development charge freezes and reductions without needing to go through a complicated background process. So I think that is good news. It helps get the province, frankly, out of the way, which is a good thing when the federal government wants to use their federal spending power—and hopefully, I say, riding on a horse and continue their work that they were doing in the previous Parliament, I know—to get costly fees and regulations out of the way with or without provinces.

Now, on development charges, this is a bill that, well, it doesn't really have any backing through the budget around making municipalities whole when it comes to development charges. It's hoping that municipalities are going to reduce development charges, and some are doing that, which I think in this current context is a good thing. But not covering growth for municipalities by the province, with the exception of a comparatively, maybe, small amount, as I mentioned, of new funding for housing infrastructure.

So I know the decision doesn't rest with the minister, because there's those dollars and cents that are attached to it, but it really would be, I think, a serious step forward if this government puts money towards making municipalities whole for reducing DCs and mandating that as such.

Deferring development charges in the bill—I think that's a really good step. I think it makes a lot of sense. But the reality for a developer as well is they've still got

to build those development charges into their assumptions when they're planning to build that new housing. So while they don't need that money right away, they are going to need that money, and they've got to build it into the assumption. Well, right now, people aren't buying homes because they're too expensive.

I agree with members opposite when we say we've got to get red tape out of the way for the development process. Let's continue to do that. I think it makes a lot of sense that we see harmonization and streamlining across municipalities and at the municipal level. I know some municipalities were talking about, "Oh, it's quicker for us to be able to process planning applications." Part of the reason that right now it's quicker for some of these municipalities to do it is the level of planning applications is much lower than what it used to be. So that is part of the reason why it is taking some municipalities less. We've still got to look at this and do more in the area.

I agree with the minister when we talk about how we've got to restore the dream of home ownership. For me, my belief, and I think for a lot of us in here, home ownership is a pathway to build equity, to financial security in some ways, and to help people get ahead, not behind. But you've still got to be able to get your foot in the door in the first place.

Here's some thoughts on what I think the government could do on the taxes and fees front that will make this a reality:

- eliminate development charges on new development for a time period of three years and make developments whole during that time to ensure that we do have more housing supply;

- eliminate the land transfer tax on new homes. That home hasn't been transferred before, but we tax it as such? It doesn't make sense to me; and

- take the HST off the sale of new homes.

The reality here is that you can only collect those taxes and fees if homes are being built, and frankly, right now, they're not. In the last quarter, in the GTHA, there were only 533 new condos sold. Out of all types of homes, it isn't that much better. We're seeing lows that we haven't seen in 20, 30, 40 years. The market has literally cratered, so the target of 1.5 billion homes is going to be a lot more than just a day late and a dollar short.

So what's the impact of this, then, on new home construction as well? Well, it's the construction worker who is now out of a job. I know the Premier talks about building a tunnel, so maybe someday there's going to be some work on that tunnel, but guess what? It isn't happening soon, and most likely than not, it's not happening ever.

When I was talking to a smaller home builder the other week, what he told me is that of his 12 construction workers that he has on payroll, he had to lay off nine of them. He only kept his three main workers so that he doesn't have to risk losing them in the future. That's the state of the labour market right now in some areas of this province for some builders. It is not good; it is bad. That's why this bill needs to do more to get shovels in the ground

now to build homes, not later—not in two, three, four, five years, but now.

In speaking to somebody that works at a skilled trades training centre—do you know what she’s worried about? She’s worried about the apprentices, the new workers who may not continue their training or change sectors if more work dries up, because they haven’t gone through the shocks in the market that maybe some people 30 years ago have gone through, who have maybe saved for a rainy day.

Those are real issues in the construction and skilled trade sectors that they’re facing right now, but this bill doesn’t get shovels in the ground tomorrow. If the government wants to restore the dream of home ownership, it can do it. It can do it by cutting the taxes and fees on new homes, like I’ve suggested, and making municipalities whole. It can also make targeted investments and focus on entry-level, affordable-ownership homes, working with the non-profit sector: things like one, two, three-bedroom units in no-frills units; buildings that cost less to build, that don’t have expensive and fancy amenities like a pool.

There are builders that are doing this now: builders like Options for Homes, builders like Habitat for Humanity. They’re doing really great work. Our non-profit sector is very entrepreneurial. They want to be able to do more, and with a little bit of a nudge, with a little bit of a help and setting the conditions to do that, they can do that. Moving forward, it can help encourage a new form.

The government, as well, can help encourage a new form of home ownership development. We don’t really do this here; it does happen in other jurisdictions. It’s not something where I’m saying the province can do this overnight, but it is something that I think all of us in this chamber need to be thinking about: one where units are purchased after construction, not before, so that end users are able to buy that unit and be able to move into it right away. Because guess what? When you’re waiting three or four years for that building to get constructed, you don’t know exactly when it’s going to happen. You don’t know exactly if that building is even going to go forward, especially right now in these market conditions. It’s a long-term goal, but I do think it is something worth looking at.

Speaker, while this bill is not nearly enough, I do think it moves the needle in the right direction, and I hope the government side will listen to what we as Ontario Liberals are saying and are proposing to help solve the housing crisis. I’ve seen so much of the same, working on this issue for the last 10 years, and it’s not just this government; it is the previous government as well. What has happened on housing is something where I think, in some ways, all of us collectively have a lot of blame at our feet. We have an opportunity today, at the start of a mandate of a new government, to take bold steps—truly bold steps—to try and fix that, and not just move it in the right direction, but get shovels in the ground tomorrow.

So my message is, we need to do more. We need to do it now, because guess what? My generation—and I worry even more about future generations—can’t wait any longer. They’re not going to be able to get ahead. We do

need to restore the dream of home ownership in this province, because I think, for so many, it has fallen out of favour.

2310

I recall a member on the other side, just earlier in this debate, asking folks to have faith, to stay. Well, there’s a lot more that needs to happen in order for folks to have faith and stay. They need to be able to afford a home.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to say thank you to the member from Ajax for his remarks.

I was previously a municipal councillor. There was a set of properties that were ripe for development when I was elected in 2014, and had been for some time. They’re still not built upon.

This is a struggle I go through every day—to realize, why is it that housing can’t be provided to the young people of our community and abroad? I’m sure the issues that we have are no different than other municipalities.

It shouldn’t take a decade to turn a housing application into a home, but with many, many layers of outdated approvals, overlapping policies and competing interests, that’s often what happens. Certainly, it’s happening in my community. Our legislation streamlines the system.

So I wanted to check with the member opposite whether he’s with us in saying 10 years is too long to build a house, and is he up for bringing that number down?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I appreciate the question from the member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

I couldn’t agree more; 10 years is way too long for anything to get built on that site—especially sites that have been approved for development. So, yes, I’m all with the member opposite on reducing taxes, reducing fees. Well, we’ll see on the other side if they’re for fully reducing the taxes and fees. But to streamlining it—absolutely. To cutting red tape—110%. It should not take this long, full stop, whatsoever. That may have been a situation as well, where somebody enterprising went and rezoned the land, maybe wanted to sit on it and sell it. I don’t know that specific site, so that could be a situation as well; I hope it wasn’t, but that very well could be. So I’m with you on that.

I will be supporting this bill on second reading. As we go to the committee process, hopefully there’ll be an opportunity to make additional amendments and changes to this bill to make it better, so that every young person in this province has an opportunity to own a home.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Questions?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you to the member for Ajax for your remarks on this bill.

Part of this legislation actually prohibits municipalities from requiring building standards that are not in the provincial building code, which is, I think, an okay measure as long as we are harmonizing to the highest standard and not to the lowest standard.

I know this government has already voted against the Protecting Human Rights in an Emergency Act, which I

tabled in the last Parliament. It would have matched the rest of the province to Toronto's building standard, which requires multi-unit buildings above four stories to have a backup generator, allowing seniors, people with disabilities, families with young children to be able to safely leave their home in the case of a power outage or to be able to live without that power for a period of time because they would still have access to water and light.

So I'm wondering, does the member have any thoughts on what standard we should be harmonizing to if we're not going to allow municipalities to have their own requirements outside of the building code?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I think it really is important that we have a province-wide set of standards as it deals with the environment when it comes to buildings. I think that's really important. What exactly should that standard be? I think that's worth a conversation about what that looks like, because what Toronto developed might not work in Sudbury, and that might not work in a rural community. When we look at the Toronto Green Standard, that's talking about, primarily, high-rise buildings; I know it conforms to others as well. So I think that's worth a conversation. I think that's what this government should be doing. I know it was talked about two ministers ago. Nothing has happened since. So my message here is, they shouldn't be putting that in place right now until there is a province-wide standard that hopefully meets what Toronto has, but also is flexible enough in some ways to account for maybe some of the regional differences.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question?

MPP Stephanie Smyth: To my colleague from Ajax, you spoke just a few minutes ago about how the government stopped pretending it's going to hit its own targets, how there's no relief. You mentioned about Ajax, your own home riding, the disappointments there, your experience at Toronto city hall and what it took to get laneway housing years later.

I guess the question is, how do you get this burst in housing supply? Can it happen in time? What is going to move that dial?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Simple enough: Cut the taxes and fees of new development. Do it today. Make municipalities whole. When we look at the cost of a new home, about \$170,000 worth are the taxes and fees on a new home. When we look at things like the HST, for example, or even the land transfer tax, if new homes aren't being bought there's no revenue to be collected on those areas anyways. I think it would be actually a very prudent move for the construction and skilled trades sector, for our development sector to get development moving, to do it today by taking those unnecessary taxes and fees off. That's one way, today, that this government can do it all across the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question? I recognize the member for Perth-Wellington.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you, Speaker. You don't have House duty all day tomorrow now. Thank you to the member for Ajax for his remarks this evening and almost

tomorrow. I know the members on this side of the House, we worked hard in the last Parliament to remove development charges on non-profit housing, on affordable housing. We've also reduced them on multi-apartment units as well—all that good work.

I bring this up because he was talking about his time at the city of Toronto—very good to hear that he was working in the city of Toronto for the deputy mayor. Development charges in the last 10 years in the city of Toronto for a two-bedroom apartment have increased by 360%. Development charges for a single-family home in the city of Toronto have increased by 600%. Can the member opposite please enlighten us if he's actually going to work to cut development charges in this place?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I appreciate the question from the member from Perth-Wellington. If we look at development charges and how it's kind of escalated out of control, you almost were getting into a race between municipalities of who can have the highest development charges. This was under the thinking that growth should pay for growth. The member from Guelph earlier spoke about a time in this province where the province was actually funding that infrastructure and doing a much better job, I would say, at planning for communities. So that's where I think we do need to go back to.

Frankly, the level of development charges in the city of Toronto is too high. Development charges in a lot of communities in this province, frankly, are way too high. They need to be removed, they need to come down, and we need to seriously rethink the model in which we deal with planning and development in this province. I'll tell you this: It's also inexcusable for a new school to get built in a community 15 years, 20 years later. I think we've got to look at a lot of it.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Question?

MPP Jamie West: I know I don't have a lot of time. I thank my friend from Ajax for his debate. He talked a lot about the trades and I've been thinking recently about the fact that there are a lot of new apprentices who can't find people to be their journeyperson and are idling, and the fact that in Ontario we have some of the highest rental prices and housing prices in Canada.

I'm wondering, to the member of Ajax, are you concerned that some of our talented workforce that we've got to replace in the trades will choose to leave Ontario because we're not competitive when it comes to the price of housing—they're building houses they can't afford to move into—and choose to go to other provinces who've actually got a handle on the housing prices?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I thank the member from Sudbury for that question. I agree completely, and it's something that I'm very, very concerned about. If we're going to be seeing people in the construction skilled trades leave the province, we're not going to have those folks who are going to build the fantasy tunnel under the 401, for example. They're just not going to be there. They're not going to be there to be able to build the homes that we

need. They should be able to afford the homes that they're building—110%.

By removing the taxes and fees on new development, that's absolutely one way we should be doing that. We should be doing a lot more affordable ownership housing in this province. I didn't speak about other areas, of course. I mean, we should be looking at other—affordable rental as well. I think those are things that we really should be doing so that construction worker, that person, that apprentice that is entering what their now chosen pathway is—as encouraged by the government. This government is trying to encourage the skilled trades, and I think all of us in this House want to see more people into the skilled trades, but they also got to be able to afford the places that they're buying—110%. We can't afford to have those folks move to other provinces where it might be more affordable and the wages are going to be the same, maybe a bit lower, maybe a little bit higher. We can't afford to do

that. We've got to do a lot more now to prevent that from happening.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Pursuant to standing order 50(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there have been six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned, unless the government House leader directs the debate to continue.

Mr. Steve Clark: Please adjourn the debate, Speaker.
Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): Orders of the day?

Mr. Steve Clark: No further business.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): There being no further business, this House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow, Tuesday, May 26, 2025.
The House adjourned at 2321.

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