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of Ontario



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 28 November 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 28 novembre 2024

The House met at 0900.

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

Prières.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
AND SAFETY ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 SUR LA GESTION
DES RESSOURCES ET LA SÉCURITÉ

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 27, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 228, An Act to enact the Geologic Carbon Storage Act, 2024 and to amend various Acts with respect to wildfires, resource safety and surveyors / Projet de loi 228, Loi édictant la Loi de 2024 sur le stockage géologique de carbone et modifiant diverses lois concernant les incendies de végétation, la sécurité des ressources et les arpenteurs-géomètres.

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: Today, I rise to speak on a piece of legislation that addresses some of the most pressing challenges of our time while creating transformative opportunities for Ontario's communities, including my constituents of Mississauga–Malton.

As always, before I start giving my remarks, I want to start by saying thank you to supreme God for giving me the ability to stand here and give my remarks. Today is a very special day—a special day because it tells me nothing in this world is immortal. Five years back, today, I lost my father, a young man of 79—left us in less than 10 minutes and I spoke to him just before he left us. That tells us we should be thankful to God for giving us an opportunity of what we enjoy today and are able to serve the communities. It's a blessing. Thank you to the residents of Mississauga–Malton for giving me the opportunity.

Bill 228, the Resource Management and Safety Act, embodies our government's unwavering commitment to fostering a safer, more resilient and economically vibrant Ontario. This act is not just another legislative proposal, it is a proactive and comprehensive response to issues affecting our environment, economy and public safety.

Let's talk about, first of all, our natural resources. Ontario is home to an impressive 174 million acres of

forest. You know what that equals to—it's great news—each family in Ontario, if we all take this forest and divide it among each other, each family will get 31 acres of land. That's how much vast resources we have in our Ontario, and we can't thank God enough for giving us this. This vast expanse of natural beauty represents approximately 20% of Canada's forest land, underscoring our province's critical role in global environmental health and sustainability.

As we speak, our province stands as a global leader in the mining industry, as well, with some of the world's largest mining companies operating right here in Ontario. These operations account for over 40% of Canada's gold production, one third of its nickel production and one quarter of its copper production. The economic contributions of Ontario's mining sector is remarkable. Mineral production directly supports 31,000 jobs in our province and creates an additional 47,000 indirect jobs in mineral processing, mining supply and related services. These numbers reflect the natural resources empowering Ontario's economy, creating opportunity for workers and sustaining the communities that depend on these industries.

Through this legislation, we are making and taking bold steps—thanks to the Minister of Natural Resources for his advocacy, for his hard work, along with the PA—to tackle something which is very important to our government: climate challenges, supporting essential industries, modernizing critical frameworks and ensuring that Ontario remains at the forefront of both innovation and environmental stewardship. This is a bill that reflects our values: protecting our environment, supporting our workers, empowering businesses and fostering a sustainable future. The word “sustainable” is extremely important for us.

Let me begin by discussing one of the most urgent aspects of the legislation, which is wildland fire management. We all know the escalating threat of wildfires, with climate change fuelling increasingly severe and frequent wildland fires. As the minister said in his remarks, Ontario is not immune to their devastating effects. During the 2024 season, over 480 fires burned nearly 90,000 hectares of forest. These events highlight the growing need of robust wildfire prevention. And by the way, this year is not one of the bad years, which in fact tells us things can change and we need to be prepared.

Ontario's forests not only clean our air, regulate our climate and support our biodiversity, they also provide us with the resources essential to industries like forestry, tourism and recreation, serving the communities like Mississauga–Malton. This legislation proposes renaming the Forest Fires Prevention Act to the Wildland Fire Man-

agement Act, and introduces crucial updates that will enhance prevention, mitigation and response efforts. By requiring municipalities and industries to implement robust wildland fire management plans, this will strengthen Ontario's capacity to safeguard communities, infrastructure and the economy from the growing risks associated with the wildfires.

The amendments also include stricter enforcement measures, ensuring compliance with fire prevention laws. These measures not only help reduce human-caused wildfires, but also promote shared responsibility between government, industries and local communities.

Another groundbreaking element of Bill 228 is the introduction of Geologic Carbon Storage Act, which aims to support Ontario's ambitious climate goals while securing jobs in key industries. I actually got my education, my undergrad degree, in chemical engineering. One of the key areas which I worked on was environmental stewardship. I do remember every time we talked about the new technology, you will instantly see somebody coming up and challenging it, which is normal. No new technology has ever not been challenged, but that doesn't mean that the technology is not good or it's not going to help. This technology, for example, is over 45 years old. It's just not something which is new, which just came yesterday and the government decided to invest into it. By taking on an understanding, the government started, they initiated, this process of consultation in 2022, almost two years back. Thanks to the minister, the peers and the whole team's advocacy, we see it's coming to light where we can start making sure it benefits us.

But you know what? I want to talk a little bit about the economic partnership. I talked about Ontario, with the resources we have. Then we have our neighbour the United States. Ontario and the United States represent one of the strongest and most mutually beneficial relationships in the world today. I believe there is even greater potential to unlock. Every day, for example, nine million Americans go to work to create goods and services that are sold here in Canada, and this underscores the deep economic integration that binds two nations together.

As we see, I always talk about how not even two fingers are alike. It's the same as leadership: No two leaders are alike. But thankfully, we have a leader in the province of Ontario wherein—leadership is not just about holding a title, it is about making tough decisions, facing challenges head-on and working tirelessly to serve the people who trust you. It is a great honour to stand here to talk about our leader, Premier Doug Ford.

0910

As we know, true leadership is measured by action, especially in times of uncertainty, and Premier Ford has exemplified this time and time again. Today as we talk about the uncertainty, we know there is an uncertainty because of the new regime across the border. But Ontario has always played a vital role in this partnership. We have the critical minerals and energy resources that the US needs to fuel its growing economy, particularly as both nations transition to a greener future. These resources are

essential for manufacturing, clean energy, supply chains and economic benefits on both sides. Considering the new regime in the neighbourhood and the uncertainty that we're looking at and talking about, there is no better leader than Premier Ford to collaborate with our neighbours. As we always say, we are better together.

While under his leadership we have seen over 850,000 new jobs, \$44 billion in new investment, reduction in unnecessary red tape and \$1.5 billion in investment in the Skills Development Fund. Along with what we saw, the greatest test of leadership came in the COVID-19 pandemic, a crisis that shook not only our province but the entire world. During those uncertain times, Premier Ford proved to be a steady and compassionate leader.

Why are we talking about this, Mr. Speaker? We're talking about this because this bill is another bold step in the right direction. Under his leadership, we've seen revenue grow significantly from \$154 billion to reaching \$206 billion as the government is working to pave for a province that not only thrives today but also for generations to come.

As industries across Ontario strive to make emissions reduction targets, this act enables the safe, permanent storage of carbon dioxide in underground formations such as depleted oil and gas reservoirs, and it is again talking about the sustainability. We are able to help two places with one action.

The benefit is simple. The environmental implications of these measures are profound. It has the potential to reduce carbon emissions by 11% to 15%. All the time we talk about this, the members opposite say, "We want to help the environment." Here is a great example. This government is bringing a bill to invest into technology that will help the environment. And what are we doing? We are making sure it will be helping us to remove almost close to two million cars from roads annually. These restrictions are essential as we work towards achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

As I always say, Mr. Speaker, anything that we do is not going to happen by itself. We'll have to invest into it, we'll have to make sure we put in our effort. That's exactly what we're doing here. By adopting the carbon storage technology, we can reduce the carbon footprint, lower the operational costs and increase our competitiveness on a global stage. Why is this important? When we're going to have competitiveness, the people who are thinking of coming and moving their businesses, their investments, their families look at Ontario as a leader in that field. And we are not just trying to help the environment with this technology, it is actually going to create close to between 2,000 and 4,000 jobs in construction, technology, infrastructure development as the carbon facilities are developed across the province.

Let's talk about another benefit this bill is bringing. As we talked about over 800,000 people coming in, we know that people need to live—they need a roof. So infrastructure is the backbone of a growing Ontario and we know that land surveying is its foundation. The Surveyors Act was last updated in 1987. I was in grade 10, I think,

then. Since then, it no longer meets the demand of our rapidly expanding infrastructure, so Bill 228 proposes amendments that address the critical shortage of skilled land surveyors.

Madam Speaker, it's kind of saying, "You want to build, but you don't have a tool. And if you don't have a tool, you cannot build." It's always important to make sure, if you want to plan something, you should have the tools to achieve that. And that is why Bill 228 is proposing amendments that address the critical shortage of skilled land surveyors, an essential profession for the development of homes, schools, transportation networks and other vital infrastructure.

Streamlining the licensing process and incorporating modern technologies will ensure that vital infrastructure projects can proceed without delays. These measures are crucial for ensuring the projects in Mississauga–Malton, like new housing developments, transit improvements and community facilities, can move forward smoothly and efficiently.

Another issue this bill is going to be talking about is addressing hazardous wells while enhancing public safety. If you really look at this bill, this bill is investing to make sure that our environment is kept well, our economy is doing better and we're taking care of the safety of the residents of Ontario.

Over the years, tens of thousands of wells have been drilled, many of which are no longer active or have been improperly maintained. The member from Windsor talked about Wheatley: These wells can pose serious safety risks. Again, if you're not going to do anything, nothing is going to happen—and actually, something adverse can happen at the same time.

This is why Bill 228 empowers the Ministry of Natural Resources to take swift action in cases where operators fail to comply with safety standards, particularly in instances of bankruptcy or non-compliance. While many of these hazardous wells are concentrated in southwestern Ontario, that doesn't mean they're the only ones that are going to be impacted. It's kind of saying, "If you get a fire in your neighbour's home, your house is safe." No, your house is not safe as well. The impact of a leak or a failure extends beyond regional borders.

Ensuring that the ministry can respond quickly and effectively will help protect water supplies and public health across the entire province. Though the issue of hazardous wells may seem geographically distant from Mississauga–Malton, the protection of our water and our natural resources affects all of us. Proactively addressing these hazards is essential to maintaining a safe and healthy environment for Ontario's residents, including those in our urban communities.

And that's not the only thing we're doing. Through this bill, we're making sure that we're advancing the forestry and aggregate industries. We're making sure we are supporting building a stronger Ontario.

So what is this bill about? This bill is a bold and visionary piece of legislation. It creates tangible pathways

for prosperity by addressing key environmental challenges, while driving economic growth.

From construction jobs linked to carbon storage facilities, to opportunities in land surveying and manufacturing, this bill supports a diverse range of industries that are essential to Ontario's future. By improving wildfire management, reducing emissions and creating a safer and more sustainable environment, we are directly benefiting communities like mine, Mississauga–Malton. Modernizing the outdated framework accelerates infrastructure projects, ensuring that our region can meet the growing demand for housing, transportation and public services.

Whenever we talk about, "What do we do here," everything we do here, one way or the other, comes from the suggestions made by the people of Ontario, because those are the people we are here to serve. This is the government that listens and acts. I'll give you a small example—I'm saying this to all my colleagues and everyone who's watching here. Soon we're going to go into a budget consultation. That is a perfect time for anyone who has a great idea, with the cost and benefit, of how we can improve our Ontario, how we can serve our Ontario better, how we can give back to our Ontario, how we can make our Ontario bigger and better and prosperous.

0920

I highly encourage all members to reach out to your stakeholders. And to everyone who's watching, reach out to your MPP's office, and if you have a great idea, bring them forward. Through budget consultation—it's not going to go into a hole. It's actually going to be looked at, cost and benefit, and who knows next? Your idea, your suggestion could become and create benefit for everyone in Ontario.

So, Speaker, this bill represents a forward-thinking approach to building a stronger, more resilient Ontario, one that invests in its people, its industries and its future. It's more than just a collection of updates—it's a vision of Ontario's future. It protects our natural resources, bolsters our economy and safeguards our environment for generations to come. This is a key step towards building a stronger, most sustainable and more prosperous Ontario that benefits every community, thankfully including mine, of Mississauga–Malton.

For Ontarians, this bill represents progress, safety and hope, so I urge all the members of this House to support this vital piece of legislation, ensuring that Ontario remains a global leader in innovation, sustainability and economic opportunity, especially at a time when uncertainty is the only certain thing, as we look forward to working with our US neighbour's new regime.

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

Ms. Bhutila Karpoche: I want to thank the government member for his presentation on this bill. I have concerns around schedule 2 of this piece of legislation. It's a significant piece of policy, schedule 2, and effectively sets up a new industry. I think that this schedule alone needs extensive public consultation and study.

So my question to the member is, will the government be rushing through this bill, like they have all of the bills this session, or will they do the due diligence that's required, the extensive public consultation that this bill needs and make sure that we are getting it right?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the member for that question. I think as we're talking about the Geologic Carbon Storage Act, the technology—yes, absolutely, I agree with you. Anything that we need, we need to have consultation. And I just want to assure the member, consultation actually started in 2022. We've done the consultation.

And it's not just the consultation we've done; this technology is 45 years old. Yes, I understand—and change is never easy. When there is a change, there is—I won't call it opposition, but I'll call it that we are worried about the change. This Geologic Carbon Storage Act has already been the technology used for over 45 years, and this is the technology that's actually going to save and make sure that we become an even more environmentally friendly province in the world. So I hope you will embrace this and will vote in support of this bill.

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

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you to my colleague for their remarks this morning.

My question is around amendments to the Surveyors Act. Speaker, the government is working hard to build the economy of today and tomorrow. We have a strong growth agenda, so Ontario is investing historic billions in infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, public transit, roads and bridges, and the government aims to build some 1.5 million homes by 2031. We've assigned the province's 50 largest municipalities housing targets to help us meet this goal.

Ontario's professional land surveyors are essential to getting that job done. Can the member please tell us more about the amendments in the Surveyors Act that are proposed in this bill that would help increase the supply of surveyor services?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to my good friend from Burlington for that question and thank you for your advocacy for your residents as well.

It's all about leadership, as I said earlier. We have a government in Ontario whose action is to create economic growth and prosperity in Ontario. That new demand speaks to our forward progress. We're meeting this new demand head-on by proposing changes that, if passed, would attract more surveyors to support Ontario's growth, and it's simple.

Madam Speaker, we know there is a need, and when there is demand, we need the supply to fulfill that demand, and if you're not able to fulfill the demand, we will not be having surveyors. If we do not have surveyors, we will not be able to build those homes. If you want to build homes for the people of Ontario we need to take action, and one of the actions we are taking is making amendments to the Surveyors Act.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: As we are discussing the Resource Management and Safety Act, some interesting new technologies and interesting conversations around carbon dioxide, carbon storage, underground voids—but this government is the ramming this through without community consultation.

I'm interested most in the language in the bill about adequate consultation with First Nations. Rather than saying "adequate consultation," it should say "free, prior and informed consent with First Nations" as we're talking about a very significant environmental initiative.

I guess my question is, with the ramming through without community consultation, what assurances do we have that this government has indeed—as it is supposed to—conducted free, prior and informed consent with First Nations? Why are they cheaping out and calling it "adequate" because that isn't adequate?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the member for that question that has two parts to it. The first question is the concern over carbon storage technology. I just want to start with that and I'll answer the second one as well—time permitting.

Carbon storage technology has been in use for over 50 years and around 300 million tonnes of carbon dioxide have already been successfully captured globally and injected underground. According to the panel on climate change, there is no credible path to net zero if we do not use this technology. That was the first part of it, and I will encourage every member to read through the technology and get familiarized with it.

On the second part about the approval, the ministry says they would only be approving permits for carbon storage projects once the necessary consultation and assessment are completed, ensuring that the interest of the local communities, agriculture and environment are fully considered.

This is the government who listens to the people of Ontario, works with the people of Ontario and delivers to the people of Ontario.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to thank the member from Mississauga–Malton for his presentation. Yes, we have a lot to be grateful for, and what I heard him speak about was sustainability. Why are we talking about sustainability and the environment? We're trying to keep people healthy. In that spirit, if we're trying to keep people healthy, how is it that 2.5 million Ontarians don't have a family doctor and 28,000 of those people live in his riding and three million people are at risk of losing their family doctor?

I don't understand why there's not the same sense of urgency that this government has for things like booze and bike lanes and the speed that we're doing this bill right now. Would the member not agree that it would make things more sustainable if everybody had a family doctor?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the member for that question. I think you're absolutely right. We need to have

prosperous Ontarians. Everybody should be healthier. Everyone should be happy in Ontario. That is why we have a government who is progressing through economic prosperity, making sure we're bringing investments from the world in this uncertain time when we have a new regime, we are the only ones who have a leader who's going to stand up, take bold action, work collaboratively and will make Ontario even stronger, and we'll be proud of it.

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: So carbon capture—there's been tens of billions of dollars spent. It only has sequestered 0.1% of carbon, and that's just from the processing—nothing from the emissions of the actual oil and gas that gets burned when you sell the product.

There's a thing called a "just transition." You talk a lot about labour. Just transition is a concept that people can have good-paying industry jobs in the renewable energy sector.

For some reason, we want to spend money and create jobs in an industry where there is no data to support successful outcomes. I don't see consultation with environmental groups. This is an environmental project. I don't see support from them.

So can you explain to me what a just transition is, if you know what it is, and how we could maybe consider moving jobs into the renewable energy sector, which would reduce the actual product of petroleum products and then we don't have those emissions? They've been proven to work.

Mr. Deepak Anand: As I started my conversation, I said that I actually—

Interruption.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Can we recess for five minutes?

The House recessed from 0932 to 0938.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the member for Mississauga–Malton. I think you had a few seconds left on the clock.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I have very few seconds left so I want to take an opportunity again to thank the minister and the PA for the incredible work. And I want to say thank you to all the stakeholders who participated in this bill. It's because of your suggestions, it's because of your hard work and effort we are able to make our Ontario bigger, better, stronger and prosperous.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to speak in this House on behalf of the residents of Timiskaming–Cochrane—and most of the time on behalf of my party.

Today, we're talking about An Act to enact the Geologic Carbon Storage Act, 2024 and to amend various Acts with respect to wildfires, resource safety and surveyors. The majority of this act is about carbon storage. Basically, the government is trying to promote a whole new industry in Ontario, and whether it's actually going to

work or not, I'm not the judge of that. If you're going to leave that up to me to be the judge, we've got some severe problems. But I do hope that the government actually listens to people who actually do know what the best way to capture carbon is, what the best way is to decarbonize our society. I really hope that the government does take the time to do that. Listening to people from all sides has not been their forte, I've got to say, especially in the last little while where they don't even do committee. That hasn't been their forte so, quite frankly, I don't hold out a lot of hope.

In the majority of my time, I'm going to talk about something that's very, very close to our hearts in Timiskaming–Cochrane, and that's the threat of wildfire. It is very close to our hearts. Before I get too far into the emotional part—it is truly emotional for people in Timiskaming–Cochrane—I'd like to quote, if I can, something from a cartoon series. My latest quotes come from the Wizard of Id from 1972. If you're familiar with the Wizard of Id—and if you're not, there's a wizard and tyrannical king, and he's got a knight. Anyway, there are all the parts. The king sends the knight, Sir Rodney, out into the forest to spy on the enemy, and they disguise Sir Rodney as a tree. He has got branches, he has got a bird's nest on his head, and they send him out to spy on the enemy. Rodney comes back the next day and he is completely beat up. He's in rough shape, incredibly rough shape. The king says, "Rodney, did the enemy discover you?" Rodney said, "No, sire. I was on a smoke break and some crazy bear in a ranger hat beat me up with a shovel."

Laughter.

Mr. John Vanthof: At least somebody was paying attention.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: We'll clap for you.

Applause.

Mr. John Vanthof: Okay. Now that I've actually woken you up—hopefully—we're going to talk about the bill.

One of the things the bill has is, in section 14, it says that every municipality must have a wildland fire plan. That's good. When you first look at it, what could be wrong with that? In itself, there's nothing wrong with it. But I live in place where, since I've been an MPP, we've had two major forest fires—we've had many more, but two that have directly threatened towns. When I first got elected, Kirkland Lake was directly threatened by a forest fire. We saw the flames. You could see the flames from the edge of town. If you think of Fort Mac, it was like that. Emergency Measures Ontario was there—they did a fantastic job. We met every morning. Until you have seen that and felt that, this seems, quite frankly, a bit performative.

I was a municipal councillor for years. We are also supposed to have an asset management plan—great idea. We all made one. We spent lots of money. Now you actually have to hire a third party to do your asset management plan, to cost even more money, and you know what? The province doesn't pay attention to any of them—any of them. In many of my municipalities, we can't afford to fix bridges, culverts, roads. They're all listed in the asset

management plan, but what good is the plan? No one listens to it.

So now we're going to have a wildland fire plan. Great. So small municipalities that have large areas—my part of the world; large geographical areas—have to come up with a wildland fire plan. Who is going to pay for it? In the last three years, I believe we have something else that the government wants to—something about wildfires; they put a million bucks into it. So now they're going to prescribe that everyone has to have a plan. If you don't have a plan, it sucks to be you. But the people who actually have to deal with this stuff, who know what it's like to deal with wildfires, won't have the resources to—they'll spend more time trying to come up with the plan than they will when a wildfire actually hits.

You want to know who I would call—and I don't often call? If there is a wildfire in our area, I'd call up Terry Fiset and the Elk Lake Volunteer Fire Department. They know what you need to do to protect yourself from wildfire—and sometimes you can't. Sometimes it just grows too quick. I am kind of sure that Terry Fiset is going to be the last one who's going to sign up to draft a fire plan.

That's part of what the problem is. Often in northern Ontario, you say all the right things and you put no money behind it and no common sense. I hate to use a word like this because the Tories kind of—you know, the Common Sense Revolution. But actually, we do need a common-sense revolution—a real one, not one about firing people. Actually, we need to look at this and say, "Okay, great; it's great." Would I vote against having a wildlife fire plan? Of course not, but if we're going to do it, let's make sure that the government actually puts—I'm a farmer—some horsepower behind it.

We changed the Police Services Act for police services boards. We haven't even gotten that off the ground in northern Ontario. We haven't even gotten that off the ground. Did you know this government is now talking about how we're going to have enhanced 911 in the province? Did you know that in many of the places that I represent, places where people live, we don't have any 911? Forget about enhanced 911, there is no 911. So where I live, in my home, there is 911. I have a little fishing cabin, right? But there are people with full-time houses on that same lake—no 911.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: What happens if you dial 911?

Mr. John Vanthof: Nothing. When you dial 911, nothing happens. That's what happens.

So I get people who come and use my camp. I try to get people who I work with because until you have been there, you don't really understand northern Ontario, right? So people come, and then I have a nice thing on my fridge—we do have electricity in my camp—and if you have an emergency, you call—I don't know, it's a 1-800 number. We haven't even got that—and I don't live in Tuktoyaktuk. I live six hours north of here. It's not the end of the world. I'm a farmer. I grow things, the food that people eat.

But I have seen when the sky turns black. It's a beautiful sunny day; the sky turns black from smoke; you

can't breathe. And that fire was in Temagami and that was maybe half an hour away from my house. But the sky over my house was black—and you wait for the call. Again, I am not criticizing Emergency Management Ontario. I have never seen people who knew their stuff like Emergency Management Ontario—ever, ever, ever.

But a municipal fire plan—we'll take Temagami, for example. The municipality of Temagami is maybe 1,000 people—I'm sure I'll get a call from the mayor if I'm wrong—but 1,000 people in the wintertime, maybe under 1,000, and probably 10,000 in the summertime. It is a beautiful, beautiful area. But it's big. It's not like five miles—I'm still an Imperial guy. It's not five kilometres by five kilometres; it's hundreds of square kilometres. Do you know how much it's going to take to make a municipal fire plan for the municipality of Temagami? Really?

0950

So it sounds just great, but you know what? In northern Ontario we've heard this song and dance before. The community safety plan—great. And if you've got a reasonably sized community, great. But if you've got a community with way more square miles than you have people, it's kind of tough. Is it doable? Yes, if you have the resources. If you don't put the resources behind it, it actually makes it worse, because people just scoff, and the people—like Terry Fiset, like the people at Elk Lake Fire Department—who actually know their stuff shake their head.

Actually, this is a controversial subject, but the training for firefighters—and it's a kind of example, where volunteer firefighters have to have specific training. Who doesn't want better-trained firefighters? Everybody. And volunteer firefighters do a lot of training. But when you make it mandatory that they have to have X, Y and Z, and they already work 40 or 50 hours a week at their regular job, and they already give up—they just go, "You know what? I think I'm going to take up curling." I'm not being facetious. Some of our best firefighters, volunteer firefighters, have left the profession. It's not a profession; it's their calling, right?

Something that other people don't know—and I bet you not very many people in this House know this. The Trans-Canada Highway, when it goes through my riding, when it goes through much of northern Ontario, if you have an accident on the Trans-Canada Highway—and I hope it never happens to anyone here. But if you have an accident on the Trans-Canada Highway and you or someone you love needs to be extricated with the jaws of life, you know who does that? Volunteer firefighters.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I did not know that.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, a lot of people don't know that. So do they need to be trained? Yes. Do they have the training for those jaws of life? Yes, they wouldn't do it if they didn't. But do they have the training to run a pumper truck for something else? Maybe not. So then they can't be a volunteer firefighter. What happens then? You don't have somebody for the jaws of life.

It's that kind of stuff. This government, they claim that they don't like red tape and they don't—and I'm actually

talking about removing red tape. I'm talking about making regulations that work.

So setting up that every municipality has to have a wildland fire plan? Great. Make sure it works. Make sure that you're not putting undue responsibility on municipalities that in the end won't have the resources to fight the fires by themselves anyway. Because, believe me, when I was in Kirkland Lake and when you see the flames at the edge of town, you know this isn't—the local fire department is not going to be able to stop this one. What happened in Kirkland Lake is the wind turned. They did all kinds of things to mitigate, to try and stop it, but at the end of the day that's what happened. So we need to make sure that we actually have the capacity to actually fight fire, save lives at a provincial level and at a local level. But make sure if we're going to say something like a wildland fire plan for municipalities, that we actually do more than just this.

I don't want to be completely critical of the government. I'm not. I don't think I've been that critical at all yet. So, section 11 gives the minister the power to declare a wildland fire, that any time of year to be fire season. Actually, that's good. It's not often the government actually admits that climate change is happening.

This is an admission because we know it used to be, in my part of the world, that April or May wasn't fire season because there was lots of snow in the bush. That's not always the case anymore. It used to be October, November or December, you don't have to worry about fire season because that's not—right? The people will tell me, “Yes, but climate change isn't a thing”—no, they won't say that because they know my position on climate change. But it's not that this has never happened before.

Another thing I have never talked about in the House: I think the day is October 4, 1922. Even then they had fire seasons, the province had, and they had fire crews locally. The start of October was going to be the end of fire season, and they pulled everybody out. On October 4, 1922, in Timiskaming, they had a raging wildfire, and many people died. The town of Haileybury burned down, largely. The town of Charlton burned down. Other parts of the region were burned. I just thought about talking about this now. I don't have the exact numbers in front of me. But where I farmed, actually, the land in Timiskaming was discovered—or helped the farmers a lot when all the trees were burned off.

Actually, farmers caused that fire because, in 1922, the way to clear land is they pushed scrub together—it was really dry that fall and they used that opportunity. But that was farmers over 10, 15 or 20 miles, and those fires became one. They just roared through our valley. It happened in 1916, the Porcupine fire, and 1922 was us.

But those types of fires are still possible, maybe in different places. We need to make sure that we actually have the capability to—I don't even know, in many cases, to fight the fire, but to save as many people, or to save people. I'm not sure that having every municipality have a wildland fire plan is going to be as constructive as they think it is.

That's what the people of Timiskaming–Cochrane—I'm their spokesman and that's what I am saying. If we're actually going to do this, make sure that you actually work with the people locally who have dealt with this, who know how to fight fires, and not just say, “Oh, yes, we in Toronto know this is how this is done and thou shalt do this,” because that's not going to help anyone.

I really thank you for the opportunity. There are other things about the bill I would like to talk about but I'm running out of time.

I measure people by their sense of humour, and everybody who laughed at my Wizard of Id joke gets a check mark in my book, including you, Speaker.

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

Questions?

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member for his remarks. I'll confess—and with the colour of my hair you can tell I'm not a young fellow—I didn't know who the minister of Id is, or whatever.

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Ms. Sandy Shaw: Wizard.

Mr. John Vanthof: You're missing something. You've got to read up.

Mr. Rick Byers: Yes, okay. I'll look forward to learning.

I was interested in the member's comments on wildfires and understand that we've all seen dramatically more evidence of it in recent years. I think that what I like about this bill is that there's, if passed, a plan in place to develop remedies and an action plan to combat them, including on municipalities.

I'm curious: With this new, important change, isn't that something that the member could support with this bill?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thanks very much for that question; I appreciate it. I've got a Wizard of Id book in my desk. I'm happy to lend it out.

I said that there was a good step. There are good steps in this bill, but on wildfire, it's basically a plan to make a plan. Actually, it's legislation to make someone else make a plan. I'm not saying that's a bad thing; I just want to make sure they actually have the resources to make a realistic, workable plan because that has not been the case in the past when governments say, “Thou shall do this in northern Ontario.” It just doesn't work.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you again to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane. Not only do you make us laugh, but you teach us things we didn't know, so thank you for that.

I want to talk a little bit about air quality. Now the government has clearly indicated that climate change is fuelling these unprecedented forest fire events, that it's going to be a year-long event. I think when you talk about seeing the smoke and the black smoke, what we need to know is how toxic that smoke is. That smoke contains ozone, methane, sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide. It also contains fine particulate matter. You can't see or smell

that, but it goes deep into people's lungs. There's no acceptable, safe level of exposure to fine particulate matter.

Every province in Canada except Ontario, basically, and the—Canada has updated the air quality index to include reference to small particulate matter. Do you think that that would be important information the government should update, the air quality index, to incorporate air quality index plus, which will track this fine particulate matter?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you very much for that question. It's a very good question.

I'm not actually qualified to answer it, but I can tell you my experience. When the sky turns black and I'm still miles from the fire, you can't breathe that air. So the people who are actually fighting the fires, they need maximum protection.

If maximum protection means upgrading the standard for particulates and—we're not reinventing the wheel; we're just following other jurisdictions who have actually taken that step. It's kind of surprising that they're not. It's kind of surprising that we've had to fight the government to actually pay wildland firefighters enough. That's kind of surprising because they go through hell.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I really appreciate the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane's joke to start off his debate. It certainly woke us up.

I know the member wanted to talk about carbon capture and storage. We ran out of time. I want to draw on his expertise as a farmer.

We know that some of the best ways to store carbon free of charge is wetlands, peatlands and farmlands, especially no-till agriculture. I'm proud to say our farm was one of the first to actually engage in no-till agriculture.

Does the member want to comment on, when we pave over 319 acres of farmland each and every day, how much that negatively affects nature's ability to be store carbon?

Mr. John Vanthof: I would like to thank the member for that question. We do lose—those are the OFA's numbers, brought through from the census—319 or 320 acres a day of farmland.

Farmland is a carbon sink. It's a natural carbon sink. You don't need to change the world to do it right. You can actually use nature to help fix the climate.

Perhaps we should focus a bit more on that. I can't agree with the member on everything. Where I live, we practise minimum till because true no-till—our season isn't quite long enough yet, so we need the earth to be dark in the spring to collect the sun. It actually makes a little bit of difference. So we practise minimum till and not no-till.

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

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: I want to thank the wizard of Queen's Park for his speech. He had some great comments about municipalities. I remember growing up, firefighters—there were a lot more crews. We know this year we were 71 crews short. To fight forest fires, you need boots on the ground, a lot of boots on the ground. These wildland

fire plans will have to recognize that to be able to do that, we all maybe need to recognize that we need more wildfire firefighters. That means more boots. Because like you, I've got communities surrounded by forests. I'm from northern Ontario. In fact, my riding has a big forest industry component. It's an industry that is a major industry. So I want to hear from you: How do we fix this? Because we need more firefighters and they have to be full-time and not seasonal.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you for that question from my colleague. He brings up a point that I hadn't really thought of. Well, there's lots of things I don't really think of yet.

So you make your wildland fire plan in your municipality, but part of that plan is going to be: If we get hit by a big one, we need to be able to call up Emergency Management Ontario, call up the MNR and we need to be assured that the resources are there, because otherwise, the fire plan is worthless. It's worthless. You can cut your weeds down and you can do this and that. But if a big one hits, let's not kid ourselves, your municipal fire plan is not going to stop what I saw in Kirkland Lake and what I saw in Temagami. It's not.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I did enjoy the member from Timiskaming's presentation. I stayed here just to listen to you, and I liked the reference to the Wizard of Id.

So you talked about making a plan to make a plan, or having somebody else make that plan that you're planning to make. Anyway, I don't want to get confused.

But what I didn't see in that plan, and you did talk about it, were the pressures on volunteer firefighters, but we also know we have wildland firefighters. We've been talking about extension of presumptive diseases—a legislation to those wildland firefighters. Do you think there would have been an opportunity to do that now as well?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you to my colleague. Yes, this would have been a great time to actually make the rules so that wildland firefighters are protected under the same rules, under the same regulations, as other firefighters. If you've seen wildland fires, they are just as dangerous to the human health of anyone fighting them than any other, or perhaps more. I don't claim to be an expert on this, but having seen those conditions, they are fighting in hell. I'm not trying to raise or lower the bar, but they are.

I just need to make an apology for one second. I didn't know I was supposed to speak this morning until very late last night. I don't mind that, but I would have had much better numbers for what happened for the great Timiskaming fire. We have a museum in our area dedicated to it. I've been to lots of their events. It shaped our whole area. I would have had the exact numbers, how many people died, how many—I just don't want to minimize what happened, right? I really appreciate the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): We move on to further debate.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's always an honour to rise to speak in this House, today on Bill 228. I'm going to focus my remarks on schedule 1 and schedule 2.

Starting with schedule 1, when it comes to forest fires, it is refreshing to see in section 11 of this schedule that the minister will give him the power to expand wildfire season from April to October to year-round, which to me is finally this government admitting that climate change is real and that we need to act on it. Unfortunately, the government's actions undermine that.

1010

If you look at federal reporting data, 60% of the increase in climate pollution in Canada happened in the province of Ontario according to their latest report. We know that their ramping up of fossil gas plants has meant that our grid is now 10% dirtier than it used to be when they took office. Under their current plan, we'll see a 700% increase in climate pollution in Ontario's electricity sector, undermining half of what the province achieved with the coal phase-out.

I wish their climate action would reflect their climate emission, especially when we recognize that a couple of years ago, when we had such a horrible forest fire season, in just four days, toxic air pollution from forest fires in northern Ontario and Quebec cost our health care system \$1.2 billion.

But here's the rub, Speaker: How do you declare a year-round fire season when wildland firefighters are part-time workers? They're seasonally employed. How do we make sure we're prepared when, in 2005, there were 214 wildland firefighting crews and this year there were 143? In my conversations with wildland firefighters, their crew numbers are down 33% because they're losing members because they're not being classified as firefighters, giving them the respect, the pay and the benefits they deserve. So the government's actions need to keep up with what they're actually proposing in this bill.

I do want to talk briefly about the plan to have municipalities have wildfire plans. In 2022, when the Auditor General did a damning report on the government's mismanagement of wildland firefighters, they noted that in Ontario, there was one FireSmart community in the entire province. In British Columbia, there are 150 because they adequately finance the ability of municipalities to have plans and to be FireSmart. So if the government is not going to back this up with financial resources, then it's not going to work.

I want to move to schedule 2 of the bill, which is the schedule to open things up to carbon capture and storage. To me, the government is opening the province up to a fiscal disaster. It's not going to work. A recent study in the US shows that 80% of the carbon capture and storage projects simply did not work at all. And despite, over the last decade, tens of billions of dollars being spent on carbon capture and storage projects, only 0.1% of the emissions that could be captured and stored were actually captured and stored. So I don't understand why the government, unless they're in the pockets of big oil and gas and they want to give big oil and gas an excuse to keep

polluting, is opening us up to technology that simply doesn't work when we have technology that actually does work.

Hon. Mike Harris: Like what?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Like nature. Nature stores massive amounts of carbon, particularly in our wetlands, in our peatlands, in our farmlands. We have huge opportunities for Ontario to store carbon.

Let's just put some numbers on the table here, Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll remind members question period hasn't started yet. The member for Guelph has the floor.

Hon. Graham McGregor: I was quiet, Speaker. I didn't say nothing.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Okay. I won't say who was not speaking nothing.

Start the clock. I apologize to the member for Guelph.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: No problem, Speaker. The truth hurts sometimes.

Our soils are massive carbon sinks that store carbon for decades—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I have to interrupt the member because it is now 10:15. I must now ask for members' statements.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

BIRTHDAYS

Mr. Dave Smith: Today is my last scheduled member's statement before we rise for Christmas. Although it may seem a bit premature, I do have a couple things I'd like to talk about. I want to talk about some birthdays of friends and family that happen around Christmas.

I'll start with my son Jacob. Jake's birthday is December 18, just a week before Christmas. The house is always decorated for Christmas, there are Christmas presents under the tree, and when he was younger, growing up, we actually had to move his birthday to January for him so that people would come to the birthday party, because quite frankly, it was too close to Christmas.

Next, we have my father, Ron Smith. Dad's birthday is December 21, only four days before Christmas, and as a kid, I never truly understood how he could have his birthday so close to Christmas; why I had to buy two presents in the month of December for him; and why didn't I get to open up my Christmas presents on the 21st, because he was opening presents on the 21st, and it was Christmas—that's how a kid thought. Dad, I'm sorry that you got rooked all those years about your birthday.

Finally, my executive assistant, Sally. If there was anyone who gets the short end of the birthday stick, it's Sally. Her birthday is on December 25, and she could never have

a birthday party on her actual birthday, because all of her friends were busy celebrating Christmas.

It's a bit early, but happy birthday to Jake, Sally, and my father, because you can't celebrate your birthday that close to Christmas.

CTV LIONS CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS TELETHON

MPP Jamie West: I'm excited to share with you that the annual CTV Lions Children's Christmas Telethon will be returning for its 76th anniversary on Saturday, December 7. This is one of Sudbury's warmest holiday traditions. It's a live nine-hour televised event where local celebrities, musicians, singers and artists join with community, and they raise funds for Christmas gifts so that children in need can experience the magic of the holidays.

Since 1949, the children's Christmas telethon has brought Christmas joy to countless children across northern Ontario. For example, in 2022 alone, more than \$320,000 was raised, and over 18,000 toys were distributed. The true magic of Christmas is that giving means giving. I've volunteered for this many times, and I can't tell you the number of donors who have told me, "I'm calling you today because if it wasn't for this telethon, I wouldn't have had a Christmas growing up."

This year, the CTV Lions Children's Christmas Telethon starts on December 7th at 2 p.m. until 11 p.m. Sudburians can watch it in person at Place des Arts du Grand Sudbury, or you can watch on CTV or online, or a variety of other ways, and people do watch in a variety of ways. Last year, the CTV Lions Children's Christmas Telethon reached viewers in 18 countries. We had donations coming in from as far away as the United Kingdom, Australia, Italy and Barbados.

For nearly 40 years, Lion Sam Khoury has been the face of this telethon. Sam is the long-time chairperson of the Minnow Lake Lions Club, and when I asked what keeps him engaged with the CTV Lions Children's Christmas Telethon, Sam said the answer is simple: "It's the joy of helping others."

Thank you to the CTV Lions Children's Christmas Telethon for spreading the holiday spirit to children in Sudbury and beyond.

ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF CERTIFIED ENGINEERING TECHNICIANS AND TECHNOLOGISTS

Ms. Patrice Barnes: This week, we recognize national engineering technologies week, otherwise known as NEAT, a time to celebrate the incredible contributions of the Ontario Association of Certified Engineering Technicians and Technologists, or OACETT.

OACETT-certified professionals are an integral part of Ontario's skilled force, with over 21,000 certified engineering technologists and certified engineering technicians working across various sectors in our economy.

We have 175 members who live in my riding of Ajax that belong to the Durham chapter. Their members work for advanced manufacturing companies in Ajax, including Safran, Autodyne Machinery Inc. and E.I. Williams Industries. These highly skilled individuals play essential roles in fields such as advanced technology, robotics, design, project management and infrastructure maintenance, as well as being small business owners and entrepreneurs.

Their expertise helps drive Ontario's economy forward. OACETT has been forward-thinking in their recognition of internationally educated professionals, which has helped hundreds of skilled workers secure certifications needed to continue their careers in Ontario, fulfilling vital roles while supporting their families.

Thank you to all members of OACETT, especially Cheryl Farrow and David Terlizzi—I think they're here today—for your ongoing contributions.

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COST OF LIVING

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I rise today to talk about the crushing cost-of-living crisis. People are struggling and their dreams are becoming further and further out of reach, yet this government is dropping millions and millions into ads which tell us to imagine a place—I agree, you'd have to imagine Ontario as a place people could actually afford.

It's also jarring to see the government spending hundreds of millions on luxury Austrian spas, carving up the greenbelt and farmland, filling the pockets of their insiders and then having the audacity to tell people everything is just fine.

Conservatives know life is getting harder and more expensive, and that's why they all gave themselves raises. It's no wonder the RCMP is investigating corruption. Under this government, you are not getting what you paid for.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member to be judicious with his choice of words.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Taxes are going up 30% in London because of Premier Ford. I was proud to call for a new deal for municipalities so that the province actually paid its own bills and didn't dump a 30% increase onto Londoners. I was also proud to introduce Homes Ontario, the biggest housing program in this province's history. I was also proud to vote so that everyone would have a family doctor. But what did the Conservatives say to a new deal, building more homes and ensuring everyone had a family doctor? They said no.

To everyone who is frustrated, to everyone who is angry, to everyone who feels left behind, it's not your fault. It's not your fault you feel this way. You've done everything right, and the government has done scarcely little to support you. You deserve a wage that pays the bills; a home you can afford; to retire with safety, security and dignity; a world-class education; and health care from caring people when and where you need it.

This is not a dream, not a place you have to close your eyes to imagine. This is Ontario with an NDP government—a government that listens and puts you first.

BEST OF THE BAY AWARDS

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: I rise today to highlight the Best of the Bay awards put on by the Bay of Quinte Regional Marketing Board. I'd like to give a shout-out to Dug, Anna, Jen, Trevor and Jack for all the great work that they do to promote our area.

The Best of the Bay awards honour the businesses, events, locations and services that make our community the vibrant, thriving area that we all enjoy. So, without further ado, here are some of the incredible winners this year, as nominated and voted by the community.

For food and drink, the best coffee shop is the Grind and Vine. The Local Social House was named best patio. Best chicken wings went to Slapshot Bar and Grill. The best Caribbean food went to Caribbean Jerk Spot. Best restaurant overall went to Tomasso's Italian Grille in Trenton.

For shop and service: best home decor, Wish Home Interiors; best adventure business, DedEye Axe Throwing; Feminink was named best tattoo shop; Dahlia May Flower Farm was the best flower shop; and the best bike shop went to Doug's Bicycle Sales and Service.

For the category of regionscape: the best beach was Sandbanks, the best corn maze went to Cricklewood Farm and the best farm stand went to Nansan Farms again this year.

Our best historic site was Glanmore National Historical Site, and for the best golf course, Black Bear Ridge.

Speaker, these are just a few of the must-visit Best of the Bay businesses and locations in our area. If you live in the Bay of Quinte or are planning a trip, please check out bayofquinte.ca for the full list of winners and to plan your next adventure.

Once again, congratulations to all the winners and thank you for everything that you're doing to make our area so special.

JOSEPH BRANT HOSPITAL

Ms. Natalie Pierre: This past Monday, I was honoured to attend a monumental announcement at Joseph Brant Hospital in my riding of Burlington. It was a privilege to stand alongside Premier Ford, Minister Jones and Associate Minister Tibollo to announce a new mental health and addictions unit at Joseph Brant Hospital.

The new unit will include a state-of-the-art adult inpatient and outpatient space, improved adult psychiatric intensive care space and enhanced child and youth programming. This project will make a tangible difference in the lives of patients and families in my community, ensuring that individuals and families receive the care and support they need close to home. It means early interventions, timely achievements and best-in-class mental health and addictions care that allows people to heal, thrive and

lead fulfilling lives. Our hospital will be better equipped to deliver high-quality, patient-centred mental health care in a safe and comfortable setting.

As someone deeply committed to increasing mental health supports, I'm incredibly proud to be part of a government that prioritizes the health and well-being of our residents through initiatives like this.

COST OF LIVING

Ms. Doly Begum: Speaker, Ontario is in the midst of an unprecedented affordability crisis. People are struggling—to find decent jobs, to make ends meet. No matter how hard you try, it's just not enough.

Students share heartbreaking stories of skipping meals or cutting back on healthy groceries just to afford rent. Even after graduation, many cannot find jobs in their field or that pay enough.

Seniors are struggling to afford basic necessities, with some forced to keep working because their income is just above the cut-off for Ontario programs like the seniors' dental plan.

I have met skilled immigrants who came to Canada with dreams of a better future, who are ready to contribute to this economy, yet they're stuck in survival mode because they cannot find adequate employment. Some of these folks are turning to gig work, desperate for income, only to earn as little as \$7 an hour.

Speaker, these are real people who are hurting. Ontario is hurting.

We need a government that truly cares—a government that will truly listen and create real opportunities for meaningful employment so everyone can live with dignity.

BEVERAGE ALCOHOL SALES

Mr. Michael Mantha: Speaker, last summer, the Premier announced he was going to spend \$225 million to end Ontario's contract with the Beer Store a year early. At the time, we were told that this quarter of a million dollars was going to ensure that Beer Stores in communities across Ontario would stay open and workers would be protected.

Dennis Barbeiro, a resident of Chapleau, informed me that the Beer Store in their community is scheduled to close. Customers are being told that when cases of certain products run out, they will not be restocked.

A resident wrote to my office stating that now, at the same corner store, that same case of beer cost them 40% more than at the Beer Store.

Across Algoma-Manitoulin, people are gearing up for the Premier's new alcohol policy to be a disaster. In communities with a Beer Store like Wawa, Little Current, Espanola and Elliot Lake, there is concern that soon those locations will be shuttered and customers will be forced to pay more at another location. Where those stores do end up closing, residents may lose access to the container return program and have nowhere to take their empties.

The Premier billed this massive taxpayer-funded pre-election project as a cost-saving measure for Ontarians. In the north, we know that we aren't included in that promise. Like so many other policies under this government, northerners will end up paying more for less under this Premier.

CANADIAN COLLEGE OF HEALTHCARE AND PHARMACEUTICS

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Speaker, today I rise to highlight an inspiring initiative in our community that is making a tangible difference in the lives of Black youth and young professionals.

Last Sunday, I visited the Canadian College of Healthcare and Pharmaceutics, located in Etobicoke–Lakeshore, one of over 30 organizations across Ontario supported by our government's \$16.5-million investment in the Black youth action plan's economic empowerment stream. The college received \$600,000 in funding to provide essential upskilling and career placements for Black youth in fields such as medical diagnostics, clinical research and business analytics in the health care sector.

During my visit, I witnessed first-hand their commitment towards equipping nurses and paramedics with the tools and confidence needed to launch meaningful careers in an industry that is so vital to our province. They go above and beyond by offering classes on weekends, giving students the flexibility to study when they have to work on the weekdays. Additionally, they travel to recreational centres to host training sessions around the province, making their programs more accessible to all.

This investment is about more than skills training, it's about breaking down barriers and empowering the next generation of Black leaders.

Speaker, I want to thank the Canadian College of Healthcare and Pharmaceutics for their extraordinary work and for hosting me last weekend.

Together, we are creating career pathways to success while strengthening our health care system and our economy.

1030

MISSISSAUGA BOARD OF TRADE

Mr. Deepak Anand: Speaker, recently I had the opportunity to visit organizations like Objex Unlimited, Genpact and First Choice Beverage from Mississauga–Malton. What's common in these organizations? These companies represent the innovation and the entrepreneurship that define Mississauga's job-creator community, and these organizations are members of the Mississauga Board of Trade, a cornerstone of support to the residents and business community in Mississauga.

Since its establishment in 1961, MBOT proudly represents over 800 members, including several Fortune 500 companies. As one of Canada's most influential chambers of commerce, MBOT's mission is to connect, champion and advance job creators to shine through their commit-

ment to advocacy and diverse programming. These initiatives include professional development, opportunities for networking and support for businesses of all sizes.

I would like to acknowledge the exceptional leadership of Trevor, MBOT's president and CEO, and Brett McDermott, the director of government relations and stakeholder relationships. Brett's effort has been instrumental in helping me engage with local businesses in Mississauga–Malton during the summer, strengthening connections and fostering growth.

MBOT's advocacy extends beyond its members, addressing critical issues like economic development and fostering Ontario's life sciences strategy. I commend MBOT for its unwavering dedication to economic prosperity and invaluable contributions to Ontario. Keep doing great work.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

M. Guy Bourgouin: J'aimerais vous présenter Linda Godin, directrice, stratège et relations gouvernementales; et Michelle Séguin, directrice générale de l'AFO. Bienvenue dans votre Chambre.

M. Stéphane Sarrazin: J'aimerais aussi souhaiter la bienvenue à M^{me} Michelle Séguin, la directrice générale du TFO qui est ici avec nous, et sa collègue, Linda Godin.

Je voulais juste prendre quelques instants pour dire que M^{me} Séguin prendra sa retraite à la fin de son mandat en février, puis j'aimerais la remercier pour le travail incroyable qu'elle a fait auprès de la communauté franco-ontarienne.

Merci pour votre beau travail, madame Séguin.

Mr. David Smith: It is with great pride that I introduce an outstanding young leader from my riding of Scarborough Centre, Dawson Kwan. Dawson, a bright and dedicated student from Buchanan Public School, was selected to serve as a legislative page here this session in the Ontario Legislature. Today is a significant day for Dawson, taking on the prestigious role of page captain, a recognition of high excellency, leadership and commitment.

In addition, I'd like to also acknowledge his proud parents, Kaileigh Kwan and Dave Kwan, who join us today to celebrate. Welcome to your House, and I expect to see you at lunch.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Good morning, colleagues. I am very pleased to rise to introduce into this House friends of the Legislature. They are the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association. Joining us this morning is Sandev Purewal, who is the president; Mary-Anne Strong, president-elect; Jay Ralston, vice-president; John Karapita, CEO; and Matt Di Maio, director of public affairs.

Ms. Jess Dixon: It gives me great pleasure to welcome students from Jacob Hespeler high school to the House today, accompanied by their dedicated teachers Kelly Main, Dave Lambert, Ethan Gill, Ashley Pederson and Tom O'Connor. Guys, just remember what I said about question period.

MPP Jill Andrew: I am very proud to welcome Roni Framovitch, one of our community members in St. Paul's and an avid tenants' advocate. Welcome to your House, Roni.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I'd like to welcome some very dear friends from Sport Aurora here: John Reich, Stephen Forsey, Alan Dean, Lisa Perron, Wallace Pidgeon, Ron Kellman, Laurie Mueller, Aurora councillor, Ron Weese and former mayor of Aurora, Geoffrey Dawe. Welcome to Queen's Park, my friends. Thank you so much for everything you do. I look forward to meeting with you after question period.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It gives me great pleasure to welcome students and educators from école secondaire Monseigneur-Bruyère. Welcome to Queen's Park. I hope you enjoy your visit.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: I just want to take a minute to welcome Pickering High School here from my riding—I know it says "Pickering," but it really belongs in Ajax—and their teacher, Matthew Thomas.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I had a very informative meeting this morning with the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association. I'd like to welcome Sandev Purewal, president; Mary-Anne Strong, president-elect; Jay Ralston, vice-president; and Matt Di Maio, director of public affairs. Welcome to the Legislature.

Hon. Stephen Crawford: Good morning. I'd like to welcome to the Legislature, Ben-Schoeman Geldenhuys from Oakville. Welcome to Queen's Park.

MPP Jill Andrew: I'd also like to welcome all of the wonderful students from Fairbank Public School—also from St. Paul's, our community—alongside their caring adults: Cynthia Kaarto, who is revolutionizing music education at Fairbank and, I'd argue, across the province; Idelta Pimentel; and David Rogers. Welcome to your House.

The students are going to be performing today—actually, at 12:15—a whole ton of holiday carols. I welcome any MPP who is interested to come and check out our wonderful vocalists.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): With the agreement of the House, I'd like to continue with introduction of visitors.

Ms. Doly Begum: It is an honour to welcome everyone who joined this morning at our press conference. I'd like to welcome: Darrell Boissoneau, Anishinaabe elder and knowledge keeper from Ketegaunseebee, Garden River First Nation; Cassandra Spade, a human rights activist and third-year law student from Mishkeegogamang First Nation; as well as Dr. Jerry Fontaine, Ojibway-Anishinabe, better known as just a guy from Sagkeeng First Nation.

With Nishnawbe Aski Nation, we also have Deputy Grand Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum and we have Ryann Okeese, Anishinaabe from Eabametoong First Nation and a NAN staff member.

I also want to acknowledge Angus Chapman and John Cutfeet, who are here today helping with interpretation and translation—a historic day—and Erika Lougheed, who works with us for outreach.

Meegwetch to everyone for your support today.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Algoma–Manitoulin has informed me he has a point of order he'd like to raise.

Mr. Michael Mantha: On a point of order: I seek unanimous consent that, notwithstanding standing order 100(a)(iv), an additional five minutes be allotted to the member for Algoma–Manitoulin to speak during private members' public business today, Bill 221, in the name of the member for Kiiwetinoong.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Mantha is seeking the unanimous consent of the House that, notwithstanding standing order 100(a)(iv), an additional five minutes be allotted to the member for Algoma–Manitoulin to speak during private members' public business today, Bill 221, in the name of the member for Kiiwetinoong. Agreed? I heard a no.

And the member for Algoma–Manitoulin has a second point of order he'd like to raise.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I rise again on a point of order. I seek unanimous consent that, notwithstanding standing order 100(a)(iv), five minutes be allotted to the independent members as a group to speak during private members' public business today on Bill 221, in the name of the member for Kiiwetinoong.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Mantha is seeking the unanimous consent of the House that, notwithstanding standing order 100(a)(iv), five minutes be allotted to the independent members as a group to speak during private members' public business today on Bill 221, in the name of the member for Kiiwetinoong. Agreed? I heard a no.

1040

QUESTION PERIOD

UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Premier. This week, we learned that Sheridan College will have to cut almost a third of their programs because of chronic underfunding from this provincial government. Forty programs at Sheridan will stop new enrolment immediately. They'll have to lay off 30% of their workers just to keep the lights on. This is going to have a huge impact on communities like Brampton and Mississauga Oakville, but really, all across the province.

Why is it that when it comes to the Premier's vanity projects, the sky is the limit, but when it comes to our students and future workforce, the government is willing to let them fall through the cracks?

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

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Funding for the post-secondary sector is the highest it has ever been. Earlier this year, we invested \$1.3 billion into the sector, and that's on top of our \$5 billion we give the sector annually.

Understanding that there are less international students, there will be a rebalancing. Unfortunately, the federal

government did their unilateral decision and pulled back on the international students.

We've been hearing crystal clear from industry that they are concerned, but we will stand by our post-secondary institutions and ensure that we have the best world-class post-secondary, as we have for decades. All across Canada, post-secondary institutions are rebalancing their workforce because of the federal government's decision.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: It's amazing how it's always somebody else's fault with this government, right? Always.

It's not just Sheridan College. Algonquin, Fleming, Mohawk and St. Lawrence colleges are facing layoffs and program cuts. Ontario is in last place in the entire country when it comes to funding for colleges and universities—last place in the entire country, all because of this government. Last month, Seneca announced it was going to close its Markham campus at the end of the fall term.

Is the Premier concerned at all about the impact that this government's short-sighted decisions are going to have on Ontario's future workforce and our economy?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I want to clarify the Leader of the Opposition's comments. We're actually second across Canada when it comes to overall funding for the post-secondary sector. Facts hurt, I know; I understand that.

Speaker, we will continually meet with all of our post-secondary institutions to ensure that we do have the world-class institutions that we know and we understand that we have. We are currently going through strategic mandate agreements that will bring us forward for the next four years and we are meeting with all of our institutions to truly understand their financial stability.

The unilateral decision by the federal government, which is propped up by your federal counterparts—the NDP could have really spoken up and actually done something about it, but they sit back and prop up that government because it's better for them. Unfortunately, the Leader of the Opposition doesn't understand that we are second in Canada when it comes to overall funding for our post-secondary institutions.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll remind the members to make their comments through the Chair, not directly across the floor.

Final supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: That's some creative math, right, because Ontario is last in per-student funding. They know perfectly well that that's the case. Ten Ontario universities are facing massive layoffs and cuts for student programming in the next year. Instead of bolstering our world-class institutions, the government has doubled down this year and slashed funding for post-secondary by \$425 million.

We are going to be facing the consequences of this, not just for years but for generations to come. We are still facing the consequences of failed short-term decisions by Liberal governments in health care and education. Now our workforce is in jeopardy because this government is satisfied with being in last place every time.

Why has this Premier given up on Ontario's future workforce again?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Only the opposition would look at a \$1.3-billion investment and say that we slashed funding. Over the next three years, that \$1.3 billion is going to ensure that we get through the uncertainty that the federal government has created upon the post-secondary sector right across Canada. We're not the only jurisdiction that is rebalancing their workforce. It's just like in business: If there are less customers, there's less staffing that's needed for that.

It's unfortunate that our federal government did not consult with the provinces or with the stakeholders, including all of our world-class post-secondary institutions. Industry has been clear: Our short-sighted federal government is creating chaos when it's not needed.

HOUSING

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaking of being in last place, let's talk about Ontario's housing starts, shall we? The lowest since 1955. While the Premier should have been focused on building homes and getting us out of this housing crisis, all we see are distractions, schemes, scandals and RCMP criminal investigations. Housing starts are down almost 20% this year just compared to last year. The government is missing on every single housing target that they set, but it's Ontarians that are left paying the price: higher rents, skyrocketing home prices.

Does the Premier really think that he can distract people from his total failure on housing?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: As I said yesterday, we're at some of the highest levels in recorded history in the province when it comes to purpose-built rentals. That's because of the hard work of this government to remove obstacles.

But I will acknowledge, as the Leader of the Opposition has said, we are seeing some really big challenges when it comes to the single-family, detached segment of the market. Those are at lower levels than I would like to see them at, but at the same time, the Leader of the Opposition has stood in the way of every single policy that would expand or make it easier to build single-family homes. So I find it kind of ironic that now she's standing in this place encouraging us to get more single-family, detached homes built. I welcome her and her party to being on the same page that we are. We know that interest rates have an impact on that.

Let me say this to the Leader of the Opposition: I will gladly be bringing forward some additional measures to build more single-family, detached homes in the province of Ontario. I look forward to her support of those measures, and I welcome that support.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, of course we don't support their policies; they're terrible and they're not working.

That's why we absolutely have to tackle gridlock to strengthen our economy.

Speaker, projects like the 413 will contribute \$350 million to Ontario's GDP and support over 3,500 jobs every year during construction. The Ontario Line will generate more than \$11 billion in economic benefits and support 4,700 good-paying jobs every year during construction. Once complete, that Ontario Line will bring nearly 50,000 jobs within a 45-minute commute to Toronto.

As I've said before and have said many times, we are the only party with a plan to tackle gridlock, to create jobs and to keep our economy moving, and we will get it done.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Hamilton, like all of Ontario, is struggling with the housing crisis. Sadly, I must share with this House that 80-year-old seniors in Hamilton are facing eviction from their homes with N13s. They're shocked and in extreme distress. It's understandable.

This is especially cruel with Christmas just weeks away, but it actually gets worse. The very same landlord who is renovicting these seniors has a YouTube channel with tips on how to renovict people who have been long-term tenants.

Interjections.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Really. Do I need to say that again? A YouTube channel with a how-to tutorial, not a social media influencer on how to cook a meal or how to dress but how to renovict people from their homes.

Does the Premier agree that when "how to renovict people" is trending on YouTube, it's time that your government drastically update rental laws to protect seniors in places like Hamilton and across Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And to respond, the Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: As the member knows, there are rules and forums that these things can be challenged. There are significant penalties—significant penalties—for individuals who inappropriately take advantage of tenants. You'll notice in the red tape bill, Mr. Speaker, continuous change to landlord and tenant rules, how it functions to make it more efficient and make it responsive to people's needs.

We'll continue to work with the members opposite on any areas that need work, and we'll continue to make sure that places are kept up to standard, which is part of what renovations are about. But we will continue to let the independent tribunal board do its job.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Mr. Speaker, I have to say, that's cold comfort to these seniors. We know there's 53,000 backlog cases at that landlord and tenant tribunal. That's not going to help these seniors before Christmas.

I spoke with some of these seniors, and some of them have been living in these apartments for close to 50 years, and they believed, as we all would, that if they paid their

rent on time, they would have a home for the remainder of their lives. But they were wrong.

This government is failing on their basic responsibilities. Renters in this province are clearly not protected. These Hamilton seniors could end up on the street. We've seen it happen before; we're going to see it again. We introduced our Homes Ontario legislation to address the housing crisis in Ontario, but the government voted it down. This government doesn't even have a concept of a plan. So evidently, evicting 80-year-olds has now become a business in Ontario.

Will the Premier repeal laws that allows seniors on fixed incomes to be cruelly removed from their homes?

Interjections.

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

The Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: I want to correct the record for the member opposite, because we don't all know there's 53,000 cases. There are in fact 44,000 cases as of today—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: So much better, so much better.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Interjections.

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

The Attorney General has the floor.

Hon. Doug Downey: I know the concept is hard for some of the members, but there will never be zero cases because there are always some cases in the system.

That means that the backlog is down over 30% from the beginning of this year. We have doubled the number of adjudicators; we have invested a total of \$53 million in the Landlord and Tenant Board over the last three years, and the members opposite voted against it at every turn. They get up one day and say that places need to be repaired, and they get up the next day and say we don't want them repaired because people are in them. It's very difficult to get a straight answer from the members opposite of what they would actually like us to do with the Landlord and Tenant Board.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is for the Associate Minister of Auto Theft and Bail Reform. The federal government's failure to restrict bail access and get tough on crime is making Ontario communities less safe. Cars are stolen from driveways. Families lose their sense of safety. Even worse, serious crimes are being committed by people out on bail. Time and time again, the same offenders are back in court. This isn't right. People need to know that all levels of government are doing everything they can to keep them safe.

Can the associate minister please share what our government is doing to fight auto theft and keep repeat offenders off our streets?

Hon. Graham McGregor: I want to thank the member for the question. I had the pleasure of being with the police chief for the Durham Regional Police Service, and message

one that we heard from them was thank you for the hard work of our PC members for fighting for investments that are helping them keep that community safe.

Violent crime and crime is up across Ontario. One crime that is down in Durham region is auto theft: down 8%, if you listen to the chief's words, because of this government's investments to the Preventing Auto Thefts Grant, Project ATTIRE, giving police the tools they need to do their job and keep cars in driveways where they belong.

In order to address the repeat offenders, we've invested in hiring more judges, crown prosecutors and support staff to tackle the backlog of criminal cases across Ontario. But despite these efforts that we put forward, one of the messages that we hear from police and from neighbourhoods, from community—a message we continue to deliver—is that the federal Criminal Code is way too lenient and the rights of suspected criminals nowhere near where it needs to be to stand up for victims and hard-working Ontario taxpayers.

That's why we've called on the Liberal government to implement mandatory minimum sentences, restore judicial discretion to impose tough penalties and tighten bail conditions for those committing serious crimes—

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Unlike the Liberal members in this House, our government is prioritizing public safety in Ontario and holding the federal government accountable. Thieves are getting bolder and more dangerous in their operations. They're not just stealing cars, they're using stolen vehicle identification numbers, or VINs, to commit more serious crimes. This makes it harder for police to track stolen vehicles and makes our communities feel less safe.

Speaker, Ontarians want to see action. They want to know that something is being done to address these crimes, before they happen. Can the associate minister please explain what steps our government is taking to crack down on VIN fraud and hold these criminals accountable.

1110

Hon. Graham McGregor: I appreciate the question. We know auto theft is a lucrative trade for organized crime. The proceeds from auto theft are used to fund gun smuggling, human trafficking, drug trafficking, making communities unsafe all across Canada. The reason organized crime is engaged in this is because it's lucrative for them. The more of these cars that we find, the more thefts we stop, the less lucrative it will be for organized crime and the more we'll see crime go down.

We know the majority of vehicles are shipped overseas, but that means there are a minority that are staying here domestically. One of the ways that they do is that through VIN fraud. We have put a bill before the House—

Interjection.

Hon. Graham McGregor: —that I hope the member for Oshawa votes for, since she's heckling me on the answer. I hope she votes for that measure, because that, if

passed, will bring penalties ranging from \$50,000 to \$75,000 for the first conviction of VIN fraud and \$75,000 to \$100,000 for subsequent convictions, with the possibility of up to six months in jail.

Speaker, members like to talk a big game. We have a bill before the House. Let's see them put their money where their mouth is. Stand up for your constituents.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm standing up for my constituents every day, thank you very much. I'll remind the members to make their comments through the Chair.

The next question.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Premier. Premier, I recently met with the Thames Valley Family Health Team. They highlighted that primary care health care staff across Ontario are still being paid at or below 2017 salary rates, and frequently cite that this is the main reason for leaving. This is impacting patient care and increasing reliance on emergency services.

Will the Premier commit to funding Ontario family health teams with the wages they deserve to ensure timely, high-quality primary health care for all?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Essex and the parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Of course, every agency negotiates its own separate contracts. But on the subject of primary care, we're pleased that approximately 90% of all people in the province of Ontario are connected to a primary care provider.

As we all know, part of the vital delivery of primary care involves nurse practitioner-led clinics. Those nurse practitioner-led clinics are obviously staffed by nurse practitioners, who are delivering great client-focused care in a team-based setting. That is a great way to deliver primary care.

This government is committed to continuing delivering primary care in a client-focused setting, in a team-based setting. In fact, we're expanding that type of primary care in the province of Ontario, and as we continue to do that we've engaged Jane Philpott, a recognized expert in the field, to assist us in continuing.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Given that over 129,000 Londoners are currently without a family doctor, we need action now. Primary health care teams tell us that Ontario needs to invest at least \$430 million over five years to ensure there are enough fully staffed primary care health teams to connect people to primary care.

Will the Premier guarantee that the upcoming budget will include the necessary investments to address the wage gap and fully staff primary health care teams today?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: In fact, Speaker, we continue to fund primary care health teams across the province of Ontario. One of the finest examples of that is the Thames Valley Family Health Team, which recently received

funding to expand its services. They are going to add an additional 7,875 patients to their roster. That's an additional 7,875 people in the London area that will now have a rostered family health provider, a primary care provider.

That is part of this government's plan to expand primary care and make sure that as many people as possible receive that care, ideally client-based care and team-based care, which is providing better primary care for people across the province of Ontario, including in the city of London.

HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: When the Queensway Carleton Hospital was built 50 years ago, it served a population of 100,000. It now serves five times that: 500,000 people. Last month, the Queensway had the third-longest ER wait times in the province.

Also, surrounding communities like Almonte, Arnprior and Carleton Place have all experienced regular ER closures. Delayed ER access can be deadly.

I've knocked on thousands of doors in my riding. The people of Kanata–Carleton know that their health care access has seriously deteriorated in the last six years. They're waiting in ERs. They're waiting in hallways. They're waiting for specialists, scans and surgeries.

Speaker, quality health care is the people of Ontario's number one priority. Why is the Premier keeping them waiting?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Essex and parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Speaker, I'm pleased to see that the Liberals are finally recognizing the grave error they made when they slashed health care funding. According to the former Liberal Minister of Health, they slashed health care funding to balance the budget. We certainly aren't going to repeat that Liberal mistake.

We are actually increasing health care funding in the province of Ontario. When this government took office in 2018, the health care budget was \$60 billion; it is now \$85 billion, for an increase of \$25 billion. That is a 41% increase.

That increase assists us in building new hospitals that are being built across the province of Ontario. My favourite example is the one being built in the greater Essex region—which hospital was actually originally proposed by a Liberal government. They reneged on that promise, but then the new Premier of Ontario fulfilled that promise, fulfilling a promise by an original government to actually build a regional hospital in the greater Essex region.

We're building new hospitals—of course, that's my favourite example, but there are other examples—across the province of Ontario, and we, of course, are funding that through our expansion of the funding of the public health care system.

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

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Speaker, the people of Kanata–Carleton have told me that they're struggling to access health care. The data clearly shows that over 11,000 people in my riding alone don't have a family doctor.

In six and a half years, this government hasn't improved health care; they've only made it worse. Emergency room wait times are up. Hallway medicine is up. The number of health care professionals leaving their profession is up.

The underfunding and privatization efforts of this government have made Ontario's health care system unappealing to the health care workforce. When there are more than 5,000 fully trained doctors not practising in Ontario, you have to ask why. A further 2,300 doctors are expected to retire in the next five years. Action on health care must be a priority.

Why do beer, booze, bike lanes and LCBO bags get instant action, but health care is allowed to worsen year after year?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Once again, I'm glad that the Liberals are finally recognizing the mistakes that they made by decreasing the number of doctors who were being trained in Ontario. We, of course, are reversing that failed policy. We are increasing the number of doctors being trained in Ontario.

In addition to that, we are actually adding new medical schools—a new medical school at York University, and another new medical school—so that we can train more doctors in the province of Ontario.

We're training more nurses. In fact, since taking office in 2018, we have added approximately 100,000 registered nurses to the province of Ontario, and of course we're succeeding in that. As we speak right now, there are approximately 30,000 nursing students in our colleges and universities ready to enter the system as a result of this government.

LABOUR LEGISLATION

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: My question is for the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

Workers are the foundation of Ontario's economic success. They build our homes, maintain our infrastructure and care for our communities. But for too long, they've faced barriers that have stopped them from reaching their full potential.

Since our government was elected in 2018, we've taken action to grow Ontario's workforce, keep costs down for workers and businesses and support the well-being of workers and their families. However, we know that more can be done to support workers and bring even more people into the trades.

1120

Yesterday, the minister introduced our government's sixth Working for Workers act. Speaker, can the minister explain how this new legislation would support workers, reduce barriers to the skilled trades and build a stronger economy for everyone?

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you to the member for that question. It has been a delight getting to know her out in her riding with operating engineers and inspiring the next generation of young men and women into the trades, along with the member for Oakville. It has been a team effort here on this of this House, and it culminated in Working for Workers, our sixth bill.

I want to highlight two things that we're doing to put more money back into the pockets of workers. We've waived the exam fee—and I want to correct my record from previous days: It's actually accumulative savings, for apprentices, of \$570, an accumulative saving of over \$19 million for apprentices.

So we're doing two things that the previous Liberal government never did: We're actually building transit, we're not studying it—we're actually trying to get shovels in the grounds.

Interjections.

Hon. David Piccini: They laugh because all their friends get rich with the studies.

But we're going to get workers working in Ontario, we're going to save them money and we're going to end Bonnie Crombie's tax on the trades.

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

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Every worker across Ontario deserves to know that they are safe and supported when they step into their jobs each day. Families rely on the knowledge that their loved ones can access help if they face illness or injury.

Firefighters, in particular, put their health and safety on the line to protect others; they face unique dangers, from fighting fires to handling dangerous materials—their work puts them at risk. These risks can lead to serious long-term health issues like cancer. These brave women and men dedicate their lives to keeping us safe. They deserve strong protections and meaningful support when they need it most.

Speaker, can the minister please explain how our government's proposed reforms will enhance safety and support for workers, especially for firefighters?

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, I want to recognize everybody in this Legislature who has contributed to some meaningful legislation for firefighters, for wildland firefighters. They deserve our support. They deserve support knowing that—because they're four times more likely to contract an occupational exposure disease like cancer, they deserve to know that they and their families will be supported.

That's what we're doing by lowering the required duration of kidney cancer diagnoses' years of service from 20 to 10—the lowest threshold in Canada—and removing the age cap for colorectal cancer diagnoses. But we're not stopping there: For episodic illnesses, nobody wears a sign on their shirt that says, "I'm suffering with MS or Crohn's and colitis." We're making sure that we're aligning with the feds' EI benefits and proposing 27-week critical illness leave protections to ensure that their jobs are protected as they're battling these illnesses.

TENANT PROTECTION

MPP Jill Andrew: Corporate landlords file almost 90% of above-guideline rent increases while only 0.5% of AGI applications are filed by individuals, yet this government continues to ignore the crisis caused by corporate landlords racing to maximize their profits at the expense of tenants.

My community members at 40 Delisle, represented today by Roni, told me that they were left in overheated, uncooled units during summer renovations. Imagine being treated like that and then getting slapped with an AGI. Imagine being a senior on a fixed income, maybe with a toilet that doesn't work, being slapped with an AGI.

Speaker, I've asked this government for years to ban abusive AGIs. Will this government ban abusive above-guideline rent increases today?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for a second opportunity to talk about the Landlord and Tenant Board and the independent work that it does. When a landlord wants to propose an above-guideline increase, they have to file an application and they go through a process, so they can be turned down. Absolutely, they can be turned down. That is effectively what the member is asking for, that they be banned, that they be stopped, that they not be allowed.

There are rules and there are reasons why above-guideline increases can be granted, Mr. Speaker. But we'll leave that to the independent Landlord and Tenant Board to make those determinations, as they have for years.

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

MPP Jill Andrew: It's not independent; it's yours.

Back to the government: Premier—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members are reminded to make their comments through the Chair.

MPP Jill Andrew: Speaker, I must emphasize that these aren't mom-and-pop operations screwing tenants over. In reality, corporate landlords are eating up more and more of the purpose-built rental housing stock. And because this government is failing at their own housing targets and are failing to create real, affordable homes, refusing to bring back rent control and end vacancy decontrol, corporate landlords decide Ontario's rental prices. They are propped up by this government, and they get to use the AGI loophole. It's the gift that keeps on giving from this Conservative government to predatory landlords.

Again, my question: We are in an affordability crisis, Speaker. We're in a housing crisis. When will this government ban AGIs, legislate rent control and end vacancy decontrol? When will they stand up for tenants in St. Paul's and across our province of Ontario? Today's the—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. I caution the member on her choice of words.

The Attorney General can reply.

Hon. Doug Downey: As I was saying, the independent Landlord and Tenant board—which is truly independent, the adjudicators make decisions with the evidence put in front of them.

It's suggested that it's my Landlord and Tenant Board, Mr. Speaker. It's the people of Ontario's Landlord and Tenant Board and it's independent.

It does fantastic work, and I look forward to seeing more progress as we reduce the backlog. We're down over 30% already, Mr. Speaker, and more progress to come.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Vincent Ke: My question is for the Solicitor General. Speaker, the people of Ontario are profoundly troubled by the escalating crime rates. Just last week, our communities were shaken when a stolen BMW was recklessly driven and collided with a TTC vehicle, leaving several innocent people injured. This incident underlines the urgent need for decisive action to ensure the safety and well-being of our residents.

Speaker, protecting Ontarians is not just about addressing individual acts of crime but ensuring that our communities remain places where everyone can live, work and travel without fear.

Speaker, can the Solicitor General tell this House what actions this government will take to address this surge in crime and restore safety and confidence in our communities?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I appreciate the question because our inherent right to live safely in our own homes and communities belongs to everyone equally.

Mr. Speaker, let me highlight what our government under Premier Ford has done: \$51 million to fight auto theft and fight it hard, \$112 million to get those violent and repeat offenders off our streets, \$130 million to get new state-of-the-art helicopters for the greater Toronto area police services—Toronto and Ottawa.

Mr. Speaker, we brought in a new piece of legislation that the opposition couldn't—the Community Safety and Policing Act earlier this year, that sets a new standard of public safety. Mr. Speaker, we've reimaged the Ontario Police College, doubled what spaces were there when the opposition were in power. Now, 2,080 new people in Ontario will graduate annually to keep us safe.

Mr. Speaker, We are treating public safety across our province with priority morning, noon and night.

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

Mr. Vincent Ke: Car theft and carjackings continue to plague Ontarians, but this is only a part of the larger issue of the rise of violent crimes, including gun violence. According to the Toronto Police Service Public Safety Data Portal, there has been an increase in gun-related theft this year compared to the same period in 2023. Most of these illegal guns are coming in through our borders.

1130

Stolen vehicles ending up overseas and firearms often linked to violent crimes are being smuggled across our

borders by organized crime groups. Speaker, can the Solicitor General tell this House what specific measures the Ontario government is taking with the federal government to secure our borders and therefore our communities?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Yesterday, the Premier and myself met with US representatives from the Drug Enforcement Administration, joined by the OPP and CBSA. We discussed the urgency of the federal government taking measures at the border to stop illegal guns from coming in, to stop—

Interruption.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the LPS to remove the protesters from the gallery.

Interruption.

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Mr. Speaker, we spoke at the meeting yesterday to discuss the urgent need of the federal government taking action immediately to improve inspections at the borders and to have proper resources there, not just because President Trump thinks it's necessary but because we all know it's necessary.

Ontarians and Canadians are looking to Premier Ford for leadership. He will lead because the federal government won't.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. Matthew Rae: My question is for the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. Every Ontarian deserves to have access to the services and resources they need to manage their mental health and live fulfilling lives.

Under the previous Liberal government, our health care system was strained and neglected when it came to meeting the rising needs for mental health care in Ontario. In contrast, our government is making sure Ontarians have the resources they need to make a meaningful difference in their lives.

We've heard about the new initiatives like the treatment beds and HART hubs. Can the associate minister please tell us how these programs are making a difference for Ontarians struggling with addictions and mental health in Ontario?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you to the member from Perth–Wellington for this very important question.

He is right that addiction is a disease. When someone has a disease, our job is to get them better. We do that by providing evidence-based treatment and recovery services and by promoting healthy and appropriate behaviour. Since we published the Roadmap to Wellness, we've funded over 500 new treatment beds in communities across the province, and beds opened through the Addictions Recovery Fund have already seen over 10,000 unique visits. Mr. Speaker, that's over 10,000 Ontarians getting their lives back through treatment and recovery.

We aren't done. Through the HART hubs, the program is going to open 19 new, best-in-class treatment facilities

to help even more people get the treatment they need and deserve.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to the associate minister for that answer.

We need to ensure that our kids know how to ask for help when they need it, to show them that help is available when they need it, and that is why it's critical that young people have access to programs like youth wellness hubs such as the Grove Hubs in Wellington county in my riding.

They want to know more how these programs will help their children. Can the associate minister please tell us how these investments are preventing addiction and improving mental health for young people in Ontario?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you again for that important question.

We know that in most cases of addiction, the substance use is masking an underlying, concurrent mental health issue. We also know that most mental health challenges that present in adulthood could have been recognized and prevented during adolescence. That's why we focused on making upstream investments into child and youth mental health services, so that our next generation knows how to ask for and get help if they need it.

We've added mental health education to school curricula, we've funded programs like One Stop Talk and Step-Up Step-Down and, most importantly, we funded 32 new youth wellness hubs across the province that provide crucial early intervention and help young people access simple, judgment-free mental health supports that will let them live happier and healthier lives.

HIGHWAY TOLLS

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the Premier. I am proud that, after years of advocating for my bill to remove tolls from the 412 and 418, we were finally able to make that happen, but we can't stop there. The region of Durham and I have called for the removal of tolls from the provincially owned portion of the 407. The government says that they are "in conversation with the 407" to remove the tolls and consider a buy-back. However, the owners of the 407 say the government has "not engaged in any discussions with us regarding a potential sale of the 407 ETR."

So what is the truth? Has this government started discussions with the 407 to eliminate tolls?

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

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Let's just make it clear: When the NDP and that member from Durham had the opportunity to vote to remove the tolls off the 412 and 418, what did she do? What did the NDP do? What did the Liberals do? They voted against them, Mr. Speaker. That's a shame.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Government side, come to order.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: That's not the only thing they voted against. When it comes to removing the \$120 sticker validation fee off of vehicles, cars or trucks, what did that member do? What did the NDP and Liberals do? They voted against it. When it came to removing 10 cents a litre off of our gas tax and cutting that and removing that to put more money into the pockets of hard-working people in this province, what did the NDP do? What did the Liberals do? They voted against that.

Everything we do is to support the hard-working families in the province, especially in Durham region, which I would hope that that member would support to remove the tolls off of.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I appreciate the minister's willing to say the words "407"—this is a new day in this House.

The government is trying to sell the story that they are looking into buying back the 407, yet there is no evidence that they're doing any such thing. I would like to remind the Premier and this minister that Ontario owns the 407 east portion, the only provincial highway to have tolls. If the government were serious about removing tolls on Ontario's highways, they would remove the tolls on the provincial portion of Highway 407.

People in Durham region will be travelling for the holiday season and those families are going to start the new year with big 407 bills. Will the Premier support the people of Durham region today and remove the unfair tolls from the 407 east?

Interjections.

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

The Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: When those families are travelling on the 412 and 418, they'll know one thing, that it was this government that stood up for the residents of Durham and voted to remove the tolls off that portion. The people of Durham, I sure hope they know that that member over there couldn't stand up and support this government and our position to remove those tolls.

In fact, when we introduced the Get It Done Act, we put forward legislative provisions to deny any other government that would ever want to put a toll on a highway the right to do so. What did the NDP and Liberals do? They voted against it, Mr. Speaker. All they want to do is vote to increase taxes on consumers and drivers across this province. Everything that we have done, especially in Durham region, the removal of tolls off the 412 and 418, I'm sure my colleagues will—

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

The next question.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Jess Dixon: My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism. Small businesses are the

backbone of our economy in Ontario, driving growth, creating jobs and strengthening communities. As many in this chamber know, starting a business isn't easy, especially for racialized and Indigenous entrepreneurs, who may face extra barriers. We know with the right support, entrepreneurs can create many opportunities and build wealth in their community and we must continue to provide the entrepreneurs with the resources they need for success.

Can the minister please tell us what our government is doing to support racialized and Indigenous entrepreneurs to succeed?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant and member for Markham–Thornhill.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to my colleague from Kitchener South–Hespeler for that very important question. I agree, we have to equip the next generation of entrepreneurs with the tools and resources and capital they need to transform their passion into successful and competitive businesses. We have a lot of young people here. We have to give them hope and aspirations for their future in this wonderful province.

That's why, this year, we are investing \$5 million in the Racialized and Indigenous Supports for Entrepreneurs Grant Program, called RAISE, for 2024-25, to provide free access to business coaching, training and grants for more than 400 Indigenous, Black and other racialized entrepreneurs. Our government has doubled its investment in RAISE since it was created in 2021 to better support diverse communities and organizers doing great work in the province.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): A number of members have informed me they have a point of order they wish to raise.

We'll start with the government House leader, under standing order 59.

Mr. Steve Clark: Under standing order 59:

On Monday, December 2, during afternoon routine proceedings, a government bill will be introduced. In the afternoon, there will be third reading of Bill 214, the Affordable Energy Act and second reading of Bill 229, Working for Workers Six Act.

On Tuesday, December 3, both in the morning and in the afternoon, it will be second reading of a government bill to be introduced. At 6 p.m., private member's notice of motion number 145, in the name of the member for Kitchener South–Hespeler.

On Wednesday, December 4, in the morning, there will be second reading of a government bill to be introduced. During afternoon routine proceedings, a government bill will be introduced. Later on that afternoon, for second reading, it will be Bill 228, the Resource Management and Safety Act. In the evening, at 6 p.m., it will be private member's notice of motion number 149, in the name of the member for Toronto–St. Paul's.

On Thursday, December 5, both in the morning and in the afternoon, there will be second reading of a government bill to be introduced. At 6 p.m., on Thursday, December 5, there will be a private member's bill in the name of the member for Humber River–Black Creek.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next I'm going to recognize the member for Don Valley West on a point of order.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I wanted to give a special shout-out to page captain Juliet van Wyk, who's done a great job today. Juliet is from Don Valley West. She also had her mom here, Elise Rochefort; her dad, Leo van Wyk, who was a page back in 1991; as well as her grandmother Shona Rochefort and grandfather Terry Rochefort. Thank you so much for being here today.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston.

Mr. John Jordan: I want to take the opportunity to introduce my sister and brother-in-law, Anne Marie and Guy Simard. Welcome to Queen's Park.

AMERICAN THANKSGIVING

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister for Emergency Preparedness and Response.

Hon. Trevor Jones: I'd like to take a moment to wish our American family, friends and neighbours a very happy Thanksgiving today. Go Lions!

DEFERRED VOTES

TIME ALLOCATION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have a deferred vote on government order number 110, relating to allocation of time on Bill 223, An Act to enact two Acts and to amend various Acts with respect to public safety and the justice system, and Bill 227, An Act to amend various Acts.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1144 to 1149.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Members, please take your seats.

Mr. Jones has moved government order 110 relating to allocation of time on Bill 223, An Act to enact two Acts and to amend various Acts with respect to public safety and the justice system, and Bill 227, An Act to amend various Acts.

All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Allsopp, Tyler
Anand, Deepak
Babikian, Aris

Hamid, Zee
Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Mike

Pinsonneault, Steve
Pirie, George
Quinn, Nolan

Bailey, Robert	Hogarth, Christine	Rae, Matthew
Barnes, Patrice	Jones, Trevor	Riddell, Brian
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Jordan, John	Sabawy, Sheref
Bresee, Ric	Kanapathi, Logan	Sandhu, Amarjot
Byers, Rick	Ke, Vincent	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Calandra, Paul	Kerzner, Michael S.	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Leardi, Anthony	Saunderson, Brian
Cho, Stan	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, Dave
Clark, Steve	Lumsden, Neil	Smith, David
Coe, Lorne	Martin, Robin	Smith, Graydon
Crawford, Stephen	McCarthy, Todd J.	Smith, Laura
Dixon, Jess	McGregor, Graham	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Dowie, Andrew	Mulrone, Caroline	Tibollo, Michael A.
Downey, Doug	Oosterhoff, Sam	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Fedeli, Victor	Pang, Billy	Wai, Daisy
Flack, Rob	Parsa, Michael	Williams, Charmaine A.
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Piccini, David	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Pierre, Natalie	

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Andrew, Jill	French, Jennifer K.	Rakocevic, Tom
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gates, Wayne	Schreiner, Mike
Begum, Doly	Harden, Joel	Shamji, Adil
Bell, Jessica	Jama, Sarah	Shaw, Sandy
Bourgouin, Guy	Karpoche, Bhutla	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Bowman, Stephanie	Kernaghan, Terence	Stiles, Marit
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Mamakwa, Sol	Tabuns, Peter
Burch, Jeff	Mantha, Michael	Vanthof, John
Clancy, Aislinn	McCrimmon, Karen	Vaugeois, Lise
Fife, Catherine	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	West, Jamie
Fraser, John	Pasma, Chandra	Wong-Tam, Kristyn

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 61; the nays are 33.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1153 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

MPP Jamie West: I would like to introduce Noah Freedman from the wildland firefighters, OPSEU, who has come to watch the debate with us today.

Welcome to Queen's Park.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated November 28, 2024, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursu-

ant to standing order 110(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Matthew Rae: I beg leave to present the First Report on Regulations 2024 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Mr. Rae presents the report.

Does the member wish to make a statement?

Mr. Matthew Rae: I would like to thank all the members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for their work on this report. I would also like to thank our great research officer and great Clerk of the Committee for their assistance.

Report presented.

PETITIONS

YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM FUNDING

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It's my great honour to present the following petition on behalf of workers at Craigwood youth services. The petition is entitled "Pay Craigwood Youth Services Employees Fairly."

Craigwood youth services individuals are working with some of the same clientele we see in Ontario's jails that are operated by the province. This outside agency is paid completely unfairly as it compares to those working within the provincially designated ones. This petition also mentions a report from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services that recommended bringing these two systems into one to harmonize these two systems. And yet, that report was tabled in 2016 and has yet to be acted upon.

Therefore, this petition calls upon the government to pay the dedicated and caring staff in the youth justice system fairly.

Pay the people at Craigwood youth services what they deserve.

I fully support this petition. I will affix my signature and deliver it to page Autumn for the Clerks.

SÉCURITÉ ROUTIÈRE

M. Guy Bourgouin: J'ai une pétition intitulée « Ap-puyez la Loi de Chad ».

La Loi de Chad, ni plus ni moins, c'est qu'en Ontario, les deux lignes solides deviennent la loi. Vous le savez, en Ontario, ce n'est pas illégal. Il n'est pas illégal de dépasser s'il y a les deux lignes solides. Cette manoeuvre peut être trouvée dangereuse, même mortelle dans des situations, les face-à-face.

Ce projet de loi a été appuyé par les municipalités, la police provinciale et aussi multiples compagnies de camionnage.

Les soussignés demandent au gouvernement de supporter la Loi de Chad et de la mettre en force immédiatement.

Je supporte pleinement cette pétition et je soussigne la pétition pour l'amener à la table des greffiers. Je vais la donner à William pour qu'il l'amène.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I have a petition that's particularly relevant to my riding of Essex. It's a petition about highways.

To summarize: It talks about population growth. It also talks about congestion on highways. It talks about the expansion of our road network and how it's important to have transportation efficiency. It also talks about reducing commuting times and the importance of economic growth.

It calls upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to prioritize the planning and construction of new highways. It's relevant to my riding because of the expansion of Highway 3 from two lanes to four lanes, which assists us in Essex county, providing us with a great opportunity to get our goods to market and also increasing commuter safety.

I certainly support this petition, Speaker. I'm signing it and I'm giving it to page Kamila, who will bring it diligently to the Clerks' table. Thank you very much.

LABOUR LEGISLATION

MPP Jamie West: This petition is entitled "Pass Anti-Scab Labour Legislation."

Basically what it talks about—when we used to have anti-scab legislation back in the previous NDP government, people were allowed to withdraw their labour. You couldn't bring other workers into place. Having that removed with the Conservative government under Mike Harris, it now prolongs labour disputes and it removes that ability of the workers to apply economic pressure.

This has been demonstrated in other provinces where it actually exists: When you have strong and fair anti-scab legislation, you have shorter labour disputes and safer workplaces. Like I said, they have this, for example, in British Columbia and in Quebec.

The people who have signed the petition have petitioned the assembly to prohibit employers from using replacement labour and to include significant financial penalties for employers who defy the anti-scab legislation, among other things.

As well, they want them to pass anti-scab labour legislation like the bill that I had entered, Bill 90, Anti-Scab Labour Act.

We're debating a labour bill today. I intentionally didn't read the last page, because I'm sure it is adopting the anti-labour legislation so we can pass it all together.

I support this petition. I'll sign it and give it to Ahilan for the table.

HOUSING

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: The petition I have to read is entitled—and it's something that I think we should all agree with—"Everyone Deserves a Home."

This petition points out how Conservative and Liberal governments have allowed rent prices to skyrocket and how home ownership is out of reach for so many while affordable housing is not being built and assisted living wait-lists are on the rise.

People are spending more than a third of their income on rent, and actually even 20% of renters are spending well over half of their income on rent.

The wait-list for affordable housing is 185,000 families. I know in my community, there are 7,000 people waiting for affordable housing. But this petition also points out how 35% of people waiting across Ontario are seniors—seniors waiting for a place that they can afford. That's jarring and shocking.

This petition calls for a re-establishment of the rent control that Premier Ford cancelled on new units and to make sure that people can actually have a safe place to call home.

This is a petition I fully support. I hope the government will as well. I'll affix my signature and deliver it with page Dawson to the Clerks.

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'm pleased to read in a petition to end the free ride for fossil fuels. This petition notes that many provinces around the country allow their municipalities to charge utilities, like gas companies, for the use of public land. It also notes that, here in Ontario, telecommunications companies can be charged for the use of municipal land, but not fossil fuel giants like Enbridge.

The petition asks the Legislative Assembly to change the Municipal Act and the Toronto act to allow municipalities to charge gas utilities like Enbridge for the use of public land so they have revenue to pay for things like affordable housing and other public services.

I support this petition, will sign it and ask page Charlotte to bring it to the table.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: Speaker, I truly appreciate you recognizing me.

This is a petition from the people of Ontario who are concerned about the environment, and they want to support economic prosperity. They're talking about making sure that the development of critical minerals is essential for economic growth. They're saying that through this—I have a stakeholder, like Eric Jain, for an example. People of Ontario are saying we need to invest in technologies such as electrical vehicles, renewable energy systems. That's why they're urging this govern-

ment to keep investing in critical minerals, because it is going to create jobs, it is going to bring prosperity and it's going to make sure this will help us to build Ontario being the leader in sustainable resource management and bringing a lot of investment to Ontario.

I truly support this petition, Madam Speaker. I'd like to give it to page Donnique from Whitby.

1310

HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Mr. John Vanthof: I have a petition here signed by hundreds of the good people of Iroquois Falls. The basic issue is, under a former Conservative government, many provincial highways were downloaded to municipalities. In this case, it's now called Municipal Road; it was Highway 67.

The municipalities can't afford to keep up roads that are a provincial responsibility. As a result, the municipalities have to make a decision to allow the roads to go back to gravel or keep them at an unsustainable level or not service actual streets and sewers etc. in their own municipality.

They are petitioning the Legislature to encourage the government to re-upload those highways.

I fully agree with this petition and will send it with page Laura.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I have a petition here titled "To Raise Social Assistance Rates."

Speaker, we know that social assistance rates are well below the poverty line. There has been a very, very small increase to the Ontario Disability Support Program, and Ontario Works rates have been frozen for decades. The amount received is not sufficient to cover even housing—forget food and other essentials like medicines.

There has been a letter that was submitted to the government, signed by 230 organizations from across Ontario, urging the government to immediately double social assistance rates.

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

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: The petition I have to read is entitled "Health Care: Not for Sale."

This petition points out and references how Premier Ford and Health Minister Jones said they were planning to privatize parts of health care, and it points out that privatization will take nurses, doctors and PSWs from our public hospitals and will actually make the health care crisis worse and that privatization will always end up with people receiving a bill.

This petition calls upon the government to do the right thing: to recruit, retain and return nurses, doctors, PSWs and make sure they have better working conditions. It also asks to license tens of thousands of internationally ac-

credited nurses and other health care professionals. It also talks about employer sick days and making education and training free or low-cost for nurses, doctors and other health care professionals.

It's a petition I fully support. It's something to help address our health care crisis, and I hope that the government will support this and see it into law. I'll deliver this with page Ekam to the Clerks.

TAXATION

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I have another petition which is particularly relevant to my riding of Essex. It's a petition regarding the oppressive Liberal federal carbon tax and how it has a disproportionately damaging effect on rural ridings, such as my riding of Essex. It talks about how heating in rural ridings is frequently dependent on various types of heating fuels, some of which are massively, massively punished through the federal Liberal carbon tax. Furthermore, to summarize, it talks about how these energy sources shouldn't be penalized, but rather they should not be penalized so as to avoid causing financial strain on rural communities, such as my community.

Finally, it calls upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to put pressure on the federal government to address the unique challenges that are faced by rural communities, such as my communities in Essex county.

I certainly support this petition. I will sign it and have this very diligent page, Elyse, bring it to the Clerk at the Clerks' table.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: This petition here is titled "Make Registered Psychotherapy Services Tax-Free."

Can you believe it, Speaker? A core mental health service such as psychotherapy is taxed. We have so many services that are provided by mental health care providers that are exempted, but psychotherapists are still required to charge HST. Mental health is health care; it should not be taxed. Psychotherapy is an important mental health service, especially as an early intervention. Psychotherapists do not want to charge their patients, their clients, the HST.

So this petition is calling upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass the bill that is before the House titled Making Psychotherapy Services Tax-Free, 2023.

I support this petition on behalf of the many psychotherapists who work and live in Parkdale-High Park, and I present it to the table.

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: The petition I have now is entitled "Protect our Greenbelt."

The greenbelt is a vital part of our ecosystem, and yet, we've seen a blatant act where the government was carving it up to benefit a select few at the expense of many.

This petition calls upon listening to the Auditor General's report, and it also indicates that the government should make sure that they're not standing in the way of the Integrity Commissioner's investigation. I suppose we could update this petition to say the RCMP investigation.

I fully support this petition, will affix my signature and deliver it with page William to the Clerks.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: This petition is called "Demand Real Rent Control."

The average rent in Ontario has increased by over 50% in the last 10 years. In Toronto, the average monthly rent for a one bedroom is now over \$2,000. Ontarians are paying a greater and greater percent of their paycheque for rent, for housing costs. No wonder we have hard-working people who work full-time jobs lining up at food banks because housing, rent is eating up all of their paycheque.

This petition is calling on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to ensure:

—that rent control operates between tenancies so that the new tenant pays the same rent as the former tenant;

—that the allowable rent increase is calculated by the government, based on annual inflation;

—that there is a public rent registry so tenants can find out how much rents are going for;

—access to legal aid for tenants who want to contest an illegal rent hike, especially an abusive, above-guideline increase; and

—of course, stronger enforcement and tougher penalties for landlords who don't do maintenance in homes and who are always breaking the law.

I fully support this petition, will affix my signature to it and give it to page Ahilan to bring it to the table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SAFER STREETS, STRONGER COMMUNITIES ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 VISANT À ACCROÎTRE LA SÉCURITÉ DANS LES RUES ET À RENFORCER LES COLLECTIVITÉS

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 20, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 223, An Act to enact two Acts and to amend various Acts with respect to public safety and the justice system / Projet de loi 223, Loi édictant deux lois et modifiant diverses lois relatives à la sécurité publique et au système judiciaire.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to the order of the House passed earlier today, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Kerzner has moved second reading of Bill 223, an act to enact two acts and to amend various acts.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until the next instance of deferred votes.

Second reading vote deferred.

CUTTING RED TAPE, BUILDING ONTARIO ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 VISANT À RÉDUIRE LES FORMALITÉS ADMINISTRATIVES ET À FAVORISER L'ESSOR DE L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 25, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 227, An Act to amend various Acts / Projet de loi 227, Loi modifiant diverses lois.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to the order of the House passed earlier today, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Harris has moved second reading of Bill 227, An Act to amend various Acts.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until the next instance of deferred votes.

Second reading vote deferred.

WORKING FOR WORKERS SIX ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 VISANT À ŒUVRER POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS, SIX

Mr. Piccini moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 229, An Act to enact the Skilled Trades Week Act, 2024 and to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters / Projet de loi 229, Loi édictant la Loi de 2024 sur la Semaine des métiers spécialisés et modifiant diverses lois relatives à l'emploi et au travail ainsi qu'à d'autres questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development has moved second reading of Bill 229. You may now lead off debate.

1320

Hon. David Piccini: It's always an honour to rise in this place to serve the good people of Northumberland–Peterborough South. It's an honour representing them, and I want to thank them for giving me this privilege.

It's an honour to rise to debate Bill 229, the Working for Workers Six Act, 2024. Madam Speaker, I'll be dividing my time in half with my parliamentary assistant, the member for Ajax. I want to acknowledge her support, her

friendship, her advice and the hard work she's doing at the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. She's been an incredible advocate for workers across the province, and I value her.

Speaker, I also want to give a special shout-out to the team watching, who've been working around the clock, many a late night, on this bill: Chief Mathew Clancy, the policy team, under Kyle Fritz's leadership; our comms team, under Zoë Knowles's leadership; our ops team, under Juliana Wilson's leadership; and our stakeholder team, under Josh Manangan's leadership. That is the team, and everybody in that office have worked around the clock. They were here yesterday, and I just want to thank them for all that they do. I'm incredibly proud of them and blessed to be working with them.

I also want to extend a thank you to the team at the ministry under Deputy Minister Greg Meredith's leadership, the entire team that has worked very hard on this bill. They make a real impact every day on the lives of everyday Ontarians, and I want to thank the team at the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, all the public servants there, for the work they do every day, and all of them our agencies as well.

I want to also recognize partners. I said yesterday at bill intro, when we announced this bill, that this is the articulation of so many groups of people: partners like the Ontario Road Builders' Association and the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association. I see we have the wildland firefighters represented here today, and I want to thank them for the work they do, and the Fire Fighters Association of Ontario and Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs. Our union partners—too many to recognize them all, but I thank the team at the provincial building trades, and I thank the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario for the work they do; the Canadian Cancer Society; Newcomer Women's Services; agencies like the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board; and Skilled Trades Ontario.

I also want to acknowledge people and mention their names here in this House:

—Lavanya, who was targeted by a fraudulent immigration consultant who scammed her out of \$10,000. We heard her story in Brampton;

—Zane, Baden and Scottie Colt—we're affectionately calling this bill Scottie's Act—a family through surrogacy who deserve the same job-protected leave as any other family;

—people like Nadia, who shared her story of surviving cancer and the importance of job security, or Natasha, who's had to jerry-rig her PPE to fit properly and who stands as a mentor and an example for young women entering the skilled trades;

—the firefighters who run headfirst into danger to protect our community and who, as a result, are four times more likely to die from cancer; and

—people like Julie, who shared her story yesterday. She spoke to working roadside.

These are everyday heroes who work to build a stronger Ontario, workers who didn't have enough work to do

under the previous government because they weren't building the infrastructure this province so desperately needs, but workers who also deserve the respect of a government that takes measures to protect them at their places of work. We heard Julie's story yesterday, and no worker should have to go through what she went through.

I also, finally, want to thank Premier Ford. He has given us the opportunity to bring forward these bills multiple times a year—three now since I've had the privilege of becoming minister. We're moving quickly. He recognizes that it's a constant, iterative process. There's a reason we've had bipartisan consensus around this, because multiple times a year we're going back and if we missed something or didn't address it, we're tweaking it and we're fixing it in future Working for Workers bills. But that's only because of his leadership, and I want to thank the Premier for that. He knows, and our government knows, that by putting workers first, we can bring the Ontario dream within the reach of more people and ensure this great province we call home remains the best place to live, work and raise a family.

I've long said that an economy that doesn't work for workers doesn't work at all. This proposal will be our sixth Working for Workers bill. It builds on the strong success of our five previous Working for Workers bills. This larger Working for Workers Six package contains new proposed legislation, regulatory amendments and other actions that would help people find good jobs, increase worker protections, support newcomers and keep more money in peoples' wallets.

The four main themes of this bill are:

—supporting the health and well-being of workers and their families;

—keeping costs down for workers and businesses—something we all hear at the doors and in the ridings from the constituents we serve;

—honouring workers; and

—growing Ontario's workforce.

By continuing to put workers first, we can create opportunity and good-paying jobs, and we can ensure Ontario remains the best place to live, work and raise a family.

Speaker, I want to start off our remarks today talking a bit about steps we're taking to support families and workers in the workplace. At the heart of this bill isn't just policy; it's people, families and the dignity that they deserve. Everyone here knows the joy brought to our lives of children—whether you have one, whether you have a friend who has children, family members who have children—and how precious that time with family is. I think nobody knows better than every member of this House the importance of family. Why? Because so many of us come from far distances and are away from them for so long.

No one should have to choose between being a worker or being a parent. That's why we're proposing a new 16-week job-protected leave for adoptive and surrogacy parents under the Employment Standards Act. This new leave would align with upcoming federal employment insurance benefits for adoptive and surrogacy parents. It

would allow families to focus on welcoming a child into their care without the added worry of losing their job.

We heard from the Colts. We heard from their story. They've been such strong advocates. To the team at Conceivable Dreams, thank you for your advocacy.

But it's not just prospective and new parents we're supporting in this bill. We're also standing up for the health and well-being of hard-working Ontarians by proposing a new long-term illness leave for employees unable to work due to a serious medical condition. We want to make sure that employees with a serious medical condition have the time away from work they need to get treatment and recover. This new 26-week job-protected unpaid leave would align with the length of the 26-week federal EI sickness benefits, including the one-week EI waiting period.

People should be able to focus on their health when they're ill and not worrying about their jobs. This is about preserving the dignity of people during their most vulnerable time.

We heard from people who say, "We don't walk around with a sticky taped to us, or a sign saying, 'I'm battling cancer.' 'I'm living with multiple sclerosis.' 'I'm living a life today with Crohn's and ulcerative colitis.'" This is something people deal with in silence often, and they need to know that during these at times episodic flare-ups, or at times when they're undergoing intensive chemotherapy, for example, their job is protected.

We've read stories. I read a recent report in the CBC about a worker who died battling cancer, not taking that time off because of the need to work. We're ensuring their jobs are protected so that they don't have to worry about their job when they need to be worrying about the most important thing: their health.

1330

So this is an important bill, and I want to thank the many organizations who've shared stories, a couple of the speakers I mentioned over the course of this week who we've profiled and championed their voices—because it's not about politicians, it's about hearing their voices. These are the real people whose lives are being affected in a positive way and who've been articulating to us the need to do this, so I want to thank them.

I also want to talk about supporting families, not just, of course, in the home, but supporting families at work, particularly women in the workplace. Careers in the skilled trades are needed in the province of Ontario. We've got the largest low-carbon public transit project right now, the Ontario Line. We're moving tunnel—tunneling. We've got Highway 413, the Bradford Bypass, the Bruce Power refurbishment, the Darlington refurb. You heard from the Minister of Energy this week: the largest energy procurement identifying three OPG sites for new energy, one of which is in my home community, the municipality of Port Hope. This presents a remarkable opportunity for thousands upon thousands of high-paying, good jobs in our community to ensure Ontario continues to be a leader in energy production—low-carbon, net-zero energy production.

To do all of this, we'd be foolish to do it leaving 50% of our workforce behind: women. That's why we've taken steps in the construction space to ensure properly fitting PPE for women. Now we're taking steps to expand that across all work sites.

Speaker, I've been shaped by the stories I've heard from the young women at Humber College. They all said that, when out in job placements, they've encountered it. The Canadian Standards Association did a survey that found that 50% of women have said they've reported not using properly fitting PPE. That's why we're taking these steps: for a power line technician who's using gloves two sizes too big, and for women on the job site. I think to stories we've heard from so many women in the trades, maybe perhaps being the first woman on that particular job site, working extra hard, but having to work even harder because the coveralls are two sizes too big. So this common-sense change is an important step.

I recognize that has to go with the new enforcement officers we've brought in line at the ministry. We take an education-first approach, and I want to thank the industry associations and many employers who've already taken the steps. I think to EllisDon, when I was on their job site in Mississauga—very much leading the way. So it's that constant relationship between employers, government and labour all together; the three-legged stool that I've often talked about. We're working together to ensure that women are safe on the job site.

In 2023, as I mentioned, we explicitly required that in construction, and now we're expanding that. This would support the health and safety of all workers, but especially women who've been disproportionately impacted by workplace hazards if they have PPE that just doesn't fit correctly.

As a part of the broader Working for Workers Six package, we're following up on our promise of cleaner washrooms in all workplaces by proposing a new regulation to set out specific requirements for washroom-cleaning records. Those standards that we require on Bay Street—putting those same standards on Main Street. This is a first-in-Canada measure to cover what should be posted and where it must be posted, helping ensure basic health, safety and dignity in the workplace.

I've had a lot of conversations with our labour partners since we last debated this. I affectionately poked fun at my opposition friend and critic about some of the remarks made there, and I've spoken with a lot of labour unions and visited a number of sites. As I mentioned, we're working together, and I've always welcomed his constructive criticism to bring a higher standard onto the workplace. And that's what we're doing. That's at the heart of these Working for Workers bills. It starts with those robust standards, and then working with employers, like through the \$400 million we're unlocking through the WSIB to help smaller employers elevate health and sanitary standards on a job site. That's a big, big announcement that the Premier and I made at the Ontario chamber.

We're listening. We're making sure changes to ensure all workers' needs are reflected in workplace and safety laws and welcoming more women into the trades. And it's working. The statistics from Skilled Trades Ontario: We've seen a 30% increase in women registration in apprentices in 2023. Statistically, that is an important stat, because more women are getting exposed. It's in part due to the effort that this government has placed on the trades. It's in part due to putting more money back in workers' pockets, ending the stigma. It's in part due to the Level Up! career fairs that we've expanded across Ontario. We're the first government to do that.

And I just had a great lunch with Ian Howcroft from Skills Ontario. He's doing great work.

Guess who has backed those new mobile trucks that are going into northern and rural communities? There's going to be four on the roads now.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: And LaSalle.

Hon. David Piccini: And LaSalle—you know what? We don't forget the good people of LaSalle. We don't forget the good people in Cobourg, or Hiawatha First Nation in my own community.

It's this government, through the leadership of Premier Ford, that's helped those new trade tech trucks that are in every corner of Ontario. We could have seen that in the last 15 years. We didn't. We are, under this Premier.

Speaker, I want to move on to talk about front-line heroes, another group of people we continue to support through our Working for Workers legislation, especially firefighters, wildland firefighters, fire investigators, volunteer firefighters—those who put it all on the line every day, who risk their lives when they go to work.

Of course, we've seen incredible investments through Minister Kerzner's ministry into health and safety, into new equipment. I think to the diesel extraction now happening in rural communities where it hadn't before and work Minister Graydon Smith is doing up in the north with wildland firefighters, giving them actual equipment to fight fires and making investments after neglect from previous governments.

I visited, actually, with Graydon, and I've been up—I know the Premier has too—and we've met a number of front-line workers who have written to us and spoken about feeling heard and listened to and feeling we're making the investments to support them in fighting fires. This government recognizes the risk of our municipal wildland volunteer firefighters every day.

I recently had a chance to appreciate the good firefighters in Cobourg. We have a remarkable partnership between volunteer firefighters and full-time firefighters in my community and the volunteer firefighters, like Ric Ash, who has come down to this place when we took moves on primary-site skin cancer. It's stories like Ric's that keep me motivated in this place and to serve my community.

We're proposing legislative changes to expand support for firefighters, fire investigators, wildland firefighters and wildfire investigators with occupational cancers. These changes would improve presumptive Workplace Safety

and Insurance Board coverage for primary-site colorectal cancer and primary-site skin cancer. We're proposing to reduce the required duration of service before diagnosis from 20 to 10 years, the lowest duration of service in Canada, and removing the age requirement for a diagnosis of colorectal cancer before the age of 62—getting rid of that.

But what does that all mean? That means that these firefighters know that when they're battling their health—like I talked about with the 27-week illness, Speaker—when they're battling a disease or a health scare as a result of an occupational exposure—we know firefighters are four times more likely to be diagnosed with cancer—that they're not worrying about whether their families will be supported. This has very real consequences.

I remember my first day on the job—I've often spoken about the call I had with Alisen Bowman about her husband, Craig. That will forever change my life, and we've been friends ever since. I was just down in Welland, actually, to see those firefighters the other day. They invited me down, and I value that ongoing relationship. Actually, I saw the great garden that they have, and I look forward to going back in the spring and summer, when they grow the tomatoes and we can make some pasta sauce. But we spoke about Craig—Opie—a hero. And we spoke about his bravery. In his last few breaths in hospice, he wanted to make sure his family was supported. That's what was going through his mind. That is what we are articulating through these Working for Workers bills: sending a clear message that, yes, your families will be supported.

1340

But not just that. We're investing in prevention: this \$400 million through WSIB to invest in prevention, health and safety; the work that I mentioned Minister Kerzner is doing to improve safety. The diesel exposure: That's going down in rural communities like mine, thanks to investments from this government.

These proposals respond to the needs and requests of the firefighting community. Of course, we're going to continue to work with them and work with members opposite, who were talking to me just before I stood up in this place—from the north, wildland firefighters. I'm from rural Ontario, where we have great volunteer firefighters, and I recognize, through trips I've made to the north, that we have remarkable wildland firefighters as well, who deserve the dignity of being reflected in these bills, and they are.

I want to thank everybody in this place. At its core, we're here to do the job, to serve our constituents. They've done theirs. Members here are doing theirs. A big shout-out to my colleague Kevin Holland—I can think of no greater champion. Of course, he is a firefighter, as well, and I want to thank him. As I acknowledge all members in this place, I want to acknowledge his leadership.

I know the member for Ajax will speak more about some other actions we're taking to protect worker health and safety across the province. There's so much in this bill; she's going to speak to some of that.

But I want to move on to talking about keeping costs down for workers and businesses. Under Premier Ford's leadership, we've been working hard to keep costs down for families and businesses and put more money back into people's pockets. Under the Working for Workers Six package, we're cutting costs by removing the \$150 exam fee. We're putting over \$500 back in the pockets of skilled tradesmen and women, back in the pockets of apprentices, saving into the tens of millions for apprentices and journeypersons. This is going to have a real-life impact.

There is no silver bullet, but one of the reasons we had stigmas, one of the reasons we saw fewer young boys and girls going into the trades, was that they didn't have the exposure in high school. We're addressing that with the previous Working for Workers bill, with the focused apprenticeship in the skilled trades. We're addressing it by mandatory tech classes. We're addressing it by having Skills Ontario come out with their Trades and Tech Truck to rural communities like mine, to inspire youth and parents like Allie, who told me after her shift at McDonalds, she went out with her daughter, whom I met the other day. They marched with me in the Orono Christmas parade and loved the experience at our Level Up! skilled trades fair. These are the stories. This is what we're doing to inspire the next generation. There is no one silver bullet, but every single one of those measures, this government has done.

We could have seen that—and I think we should have, in fairness—in previous years, but we know that the direction of this province was a very different direction. It was a direction of a service economy. Why and how do we know that? Because it's written in the records of the forum of Ministers of Labour by the previous Liberal government. Why and how do we know it? Because 300,000 manufacturing jobs left Ontario. How do we know it? Because Bloomberg and other reports said we would get zero dollars of automotive manufacturing investments in Ontario. Well, fast forward to today: Thanks to people like MPP Leardi and MPP Dowie, we've got \$14 million in payroll—I'm starting to talk with my hands, I'm getting so passionate; Anthony Leardi knows about that—\$14 million in payroll every week to workers that the previous government turned their back on.

But we're not stopping there: St. Thomas, the refurb, new nuclear, new wind, new solar, new hydroelectric. People have to get that done—the Ontario Line. We're keeping costs down. Previous government Liberals taxed the trades, and we know they would continue to do that if ever given the chance. We've removed those fees. We made it easier to get into the trades.

Today is our last day of Level Up!—6,000 in a day in Mississauga, just to give you an example. But all of those investments don't just happen. They happen because you create a competitive climate. Premier Ford and I announced lowering the payroll tax to add to a reduction in class A and B electricity rates. That is creating a competitive economy, putting \$2 billion back into safe employers in the province of Ontario through our surplus distribution. For a small construction business with 50 employees, that's \$46,000. Or for a smaller business, we're seeing into

the thousands of dollars—for that little pizzeria that I like to go and visit with my wife often. It's savings back into that safe employer's pockets. And we announced unlocking \$400 million to support employers to continue to take steps to support a safe workplace.

So, as you create the climate to bring investment, bring the multi-billion-dollar investments we've seen—again, almost \$50 billion in automotive investments. That's unheard of—to the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, who has been working so hard promoting Ontario.

Lowering taxes: We've said we will never raise a tax. We haven't; we never will. We know that's not a commitment we've heard other parties make because they taxed Ontarians to death when they had the chance. It takes a stranglehold and it's slow, but it's steady and it drives businesses out.

I remember Kraft. I remember General Electric in communities like mine.

By lowering electricity rates, by working with safe employers, by investing in workers, in better skills—what does a plant manager at Jebco say with those electricity savings? They're investing it back in their workforce because we believe in Ontario's small employers. We believe in the might of the Ontario worker. And we know that, through supporting them with better skills training and development like our \$1.4-billion Skills Development Fund, we know we're going to create a better-trained workforce.

As economies change, as technology disrupts, we will have one consistent thing as everything else changes around us. That's the Ontario worker, knowing that they're supported by this government; knowing that we're investing in their skills training; knowing that more women are entering the trades thanks to this government, more under-represented groups; knowing that that gentleman I met who said he was from my community—and it wasn't until 10 minutes in that I realized he was in the corrections facility in Lindsay but now is working in the trades thanks to 2nd Chance and investments our government is making. What's the net benefit of all of that? Better training, better jobs with bigger paycheques, more people paying taxes, and our GDP and productivity improving.

You know, Speaker, I've spoken at length about immigration and I'm not going to spend the last two minutes I have here talking about that, but I know my colleague the member for Ajax will no doubt touch on it. We're a great province and we've seen what happens when the same group of people and their ideological thinking that drove those jobs out of Ontario—they migrated. They didn't just get the message from the Ontario voter and proudly move into the private sector. Why? Because they don't have that experience. They migrated up to Ottawa and now they're running our country.

We've seen a carbon tax that raises the cost on everything. Our agriculture minister spoke about studies that have shown that it increases tangibly the cost of food, and

the cost of food has far outpaced that of the cost of food to our neighbours to the south.

But under this Premier, we're saying we can do better by the Ontario worker, that all of this ideological thinking does nothing to benefit that worker. At the end of the day, they want to know that there's a government that's going to work hard to create the conditions so that they can go to work, that's going to work hard so that when they come back from work at the end of the day and hug their family, they've been protected on the job site. We've introduced some of the toughest penalties on bad actors who have broken that societal contract to look after their workers.

1350

We're investing in workers' skills training and development like no government has before. Our Skills Development Fund—mark my words: I suspect future governments will see that value, and already have and will work with Ontario rather than the cuts to our labour market transfer agreement that we've seen from this federal government. I'm confident that through our Skills Development Fund, our new round, which I am reviewing right now, that we'll continue to support better training, employer-driven training, because it's that relationship between employers, government and labour.

That is why we have been in union training halls, non-union sites in Leeds-Grenville. The common theme I hear from all of them is that they have never seen a government that has taken such an active interest, that has kept such an open door with them to improve the lot of workers.

An Ontario that doesn't work for workers doesn't work at all. Our best days are yet to come. We're going to continue working with employers, working with workers, working with government alike to improve Ontario. Our best days are yet to come, and under this Premier's leadership, we're just getting started. Thank you, Speaker.

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

Ms. Patrice Barnes: I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill 229, the Working for Workers Six Act, 2024, alongside the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. I've had the honour of working with him and have seen the dedication and excitement, really, around putting in supports that support workers.

I also want to thank the amazing team at the Ministry of Labour that has spent numerous hours working on this bill, consulting with our stakeholders, doing outreach, changing things that need to be changed, and, again, really being responsive to what our stakeholders have put forward.

Of course, I'd like to thank the Premier for his leadership and support for our government's actions and trail-blazing legislation for Ontario workers.

Together, we have shown what it truly means to work for workers, ensuring the Ontario dream remains within the reach of more people.

The minister just covered some important proposals we're making to protect and support workers and their families, including newcomers, women and front-line heroes, as well as to keep costs down for workers and

businesses. I'll now expand a bit more on some of the things that are in this bill. I'm again just honoured to be able to support our Ontario workforce.

I'd like to talk about what we're doing with improvements for safety for workers across Ontario. We know that the majority of employers in Ontario are following the law to keep workers safe. However, there are still bad actors—and we see it sometimes in the news—who gamble with lives to save a dollar. That's unacceptable, and this government won't stand for it.

To crack down on employers who repeatedly violate the Occupational Health and Safety Act, we're proposing a minimum \$500,000 fee under the act for corporations found guilty of repeat offences occurring within a two-year period where the offences result in death or a serious injury to one or more workers. That is half a million reasons to take work safety more seriously. We mean it when we say we have no tolerance for bad actors who cut corners on safety.

We're also proposing, to improve safety for workers through OHSA, changes that expand and clarify the powers of the Chief Prevention Officer. If passed, this would help to strengthen and standardize training. The changes would include an increased oversight for safety training, the ability to formally receive advice from section 21 committees and the ability to collect and access occupational health and safety data to measure outcomes and inform future prevention strategies. The Chief Prevention Officer has a valuable role to play in improving workplace safety, and this role could even be more effective, given the right tools.

To protect roadside workers, we're proposing to amend the Highway Traffic Act to expand the current requirement for drivers to slow down and move over when passing emergency vehicles to work-related vehicles at a roadside with flashing amber lights activated, except when the vehicle is within a construction zone with a reduced posted speed limit.

I know that we have all seen it and we understand it. We've seen it on our highways, and we have done that with our police officers when there's an emergency vehicle on the side of the road. By the act, we should change lanes, and so we are doing that as well for when there's a work vehicle that is on the side of the road. We know people get distracted, and oftentimes we have injuries because, while you're rubbernecking, you drive right into that vehicle, causing an accident.

To complement these legislative and regulatory changes, Ontario's Chief Prevention Officer is also developing an action plan for and with the auto sector to address the growing use of lithium-ion batteries and inform future prevention strategies. We are working with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board to unlock \$400 million to invest in health and safety programs for injured workers and employers.

We recognize that the EV sector is a driving force within our workplace that is actually hiring workers right now—and the technologies and emerging technology—but we have seen and have experienced some of the

challenges that are associated with lithium batteries. We want to make sure that employers and manufacturers that are working on these batteries to put in the EV vehicles of the future are also making sure that they put in place the proper safety standards for workers.

We also continue to advocate and put in place to unlock the \$400 million to invest in health and safety programs. These will be developed by WSIB and focus on mental health, preventive care and chronic injury care and recovery, helping to ensure injured workers have the supports they need to return to work safely and quickly. This includes expanding the WSIB mental health care programming for injured workers to partner with 11 public hospitals and their network of community-based service providers across Ontario. We're working to ensure workers have the care they need, when they need it and where they need it.

In addition to that, we are honouring workers by adding—we are talking about how we can plan to improve safety and well-being through these proposals, but we're also building a stronger Ontario where workers are the backbone of our province. They're everyday heroes building roofs over our heads, keeping our province running, putting food on our tables and caring for the youngest, oldest and most vulnerable members of our communities.

Skilled trades workers, in particular, play an important role in building Ontario. They will help build the infrastructure that communities and municipalities need to grow and prosper and help us to deliver on this government's ambitious capital plan to create the highways, transit, broadband and other infrastructure needed for at least 1.5 million new homes by 2031.

That is why we're bringing forward amendments to proclaim the first week of November as Skilled Trades Week. We think this is an important piece. By establishing trades week, we are recognizing the invaluable contribution and sacrifices of workers who have made and built Ontario. This is including the golden generation of skilled trades workers who built this province into what it is today, as well as giving the skilled trades workers of today and the future the acknowledgment they deserve.

As we continue to do that, we recognize that there is a silver tsunami coming, as the minister says, and so we need to continue to grow Ontario's workforce. To help us to continue to build Ontario, we need to continue to grow that workforce. This means getting more people into rewarding, well-paying careers in the skilled trades, expanding immigration pathways for people that can help fill labour gaps in in-demand sectors and helping skilled newcomers become registered in their profession quickly so they can start living the Ontario dream.

To help grow the skilled trades, we're proposing regulatory changes to create alternative criteria for individuals who cannot meet the current academic standards to register as an apprentice for their chosen trade. This would give more potential apprentices another pathway to start a rewarding career in the trades, and it builds on the enabling

legislation passed under the Working for Workers Five Act, 2024.

We're bringing forward an order in council proclaiming April 2 as the in-force day for provisions under the Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act that transfer responsibility for certain functions under the act from the minister to Skilled Trades Ontario. This will enable Skilled Trades Ontario to fulfill its mandate to promote careers in the trades, make it easier for skilled trade workers to access services and address employers' needs.

Now, I just want to expand a little bit more on the proposed regulatory change that will see us giving people a different way into the trades. That is what we're talking about. We're talking about opening up skilled trades not just to students who have graduated from high school into college, but to students who might have left high school and not completed college but have become the age of 21 and now they're what would be considered a mature student. They would now have the opportunity to train and become part of our apprenticeship pathway. This is building on the opportunity to grow more skilled trades, giving more people options and giving people the opportunity to become skilled apprentices. There will be a number of criteria that are attached to that—and it would be reaching the age of 21, or they have not received formal education in the past three years. This will help our unions to grow their membership, and, of course, our non-member companies as well. This will enable Skilled Trades Ontario to continue to build on training and to develop pathways by which we can get more apprentices into the skilled trades.

1400

To help skilled newcomers integrate faster into the labour market and help fill openings in regulated professions quicker, we're proposing a regulatory change to reduce decision-making timelines for regulated professions to make registration decisions about internationally trained applicants—condensed in a shorter time frame, from six months to three months. And we're proposing new regulatory requirements related to application documentation flexibility, parallel processing for regulated professions, and assessment of qualifications for regulated professions and third-party assessments. This would cut out the red tape for people who are ready to fill in-demand jobs—reducing barriers, speeding up registration and improving transparency for applicants.

We have talked about this. Many of us have interacted with immigrants. Many of us have been immigrants who have come to this country, who come with skills that we're not able to bring into the job market, just based on, sometimes, the regulatory pieces that need to be done by different associations that would recognize those credentials. So we're saying to these regulatory organizations, "You need to come up with a faster way to certify our new immigrants, to recognize the skills and the talent they bring, to continue to grow our workforce"—and to, of course, not take away the Canadian dream of actually coming to Canada, establishing a life, getting a job, buying a home and living with your family.

To help employers using the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program to recruit international talent, we're proposing changes to enable implementation of a new employer application model that would make the application process faster and more secure, ultimately cutting red tape and reducing burden to reputable employers. We have talked to stakeholders that are employers that sponsor newcomers to Canada to become part of their workforce, and every time they have to do that, they have to start all over again and actually upload all their documentation. They have to start over like they're doing this for the first time. So what this regulation would do is, it would recognize companies that have historical portion of applying to sponsor new immigrants to Canada. That would make it more streamlined and easier for the employer to upload documents, to fill out the company information. They would get a designation as a trusted employer, so having to fill out that information all over again would not be necessary. This, of course, is going to be based on guidelines. These are companies that have to be trusted. These are companies that have to have shown that they are responsible to the new immigrants they bring over, that they are paying their workers on time, making sure that they're giving these workers ample opportunity to succeed.

Finally, we also propose processing changes to help address the shortage of health care workers by expanding immigration pathways for self-employed physicians using OINP. These changes would create improved permanent residence pathways for self-employed doctors under the OINP, including family physicians and community doctors.

Now, we know that there is a shortage, and we want to encourage doctors to come to Canada and to work in Canada. Effectively, this was a thing in the system where you couldn't really apply as a doctor because it was part of the entrepreneurship pathway. So what we're saying to doctors now that want to come to Canada is that you can apply as a physician. You can be self-employed and actually establish a practice in Canada. We know that our health care system needs additional doctors, so that is another opportunity for us to assist doctors to come to Canada.

Let me move on to the other proposals that the minister and I are putting about today: common-sense changes that put workers first and keep the Ontario dream within reach of more people. They build on the progress we have been making for workers since our first Working for Workers bill in 2021.

This government has been making changes to ensure that women are better supported at work since 2023, when we improved job sites for women by requiring a women-specific washroom on larger job sites, working to ensure that there are clean, well-lit and properly enclosed washrooms on all construction sites, and working to ensure that properly fitting personal protective equipment and clothing be available for workers at construction projects for all body types, making construction work safer and more inclusive. We followed up on our last Working for Workers package by adding requirements, which will

come into force January 1, that constructors provide menstrual products on all construction sites. We worked to ensure that clean and sanitary washrooms for workers are in all workplaces, and we modernized the Occupational Health and Safety Act to include virtual harassment in the definition of workplace harassment and workplace sexual harassment.

We have been supporting the health and well-being of front-line heroes over three previous Working for Workers bills since 2023, through continual improvements to presumptive coverage for firefighters. I just want to say, when we went to committee, we had a lot of good discussions with my colleagues from Sudbury around the wildland firefighter coverage, and we recognized that there was a gap there when we talked about the first iteration of the bill. But now, we are actually putting that in, where we're clarifying the calculation of service time requirements for wildland firefighters and wildland fire investigators, to ensure that if a worker is employed as a wildland firefighter for part of a calendar year, that calendar year shall be included as one year of employment. I was very happy with that, and I know the member from Sudbury had some really robust conversation about that in committee. We're just thrilled to correct, again, that oversight that was done, and we'll really be defining that.

We've talked about firefighters and the continual improvements that we've done to presumptive coverage for firefighters. These include expanding presumptive coverage for esophageal cancer and primary-site skin cancer and introducing presumptive coverage for thyroid and pancreatic cancers. In our last package, through the legislative and regulatory changes, we also ensured wildland firefighters and wildland investigators have the same presumptive coverage as their municipal counterparts for certain occupational cancers, heart injuries and PTSD, because, of course, wildland firefighters deserve the same coverage and support for their heroic work to keep us safe.

We also improved employment standard provisions for military reservists in 2022 by expanding the military reservist leave to cover military skills training and reducing the time a reservist needs to be employed before taking leave and, again, in 2023, by expanding the leave to include physical and mental treatment, recovery or rehabilitation related to a military operation or activity, because reservists should be able to focus on their service and recovery without worrying about their work, their jobs.

1410

As we move on, while we've been improving supports for people who have become ill or injured, we've also been working to protect worker safety and prevent those tragedies in the first place. We have been working to address the opioid epidemic's effect on workers, demanding that certain at-risk workplaces have lifesaving naloxone kits on-site and workers trained on how to use them in 2023.

We have demonstrated our seriousness about safety to bad actors in 2022, when we increased the maximum fine

for corporations convicted of Occupational Health and Safety Act violations to \$2 million, emphasizing our dedication to putting worker safety above all else. We have been equally firm in protecting employment standards rights, doubling maximum fines for individuals convicted of violating the Employment Standards Act to \$100,000, the highest in the country, and increasing the penalty that an employment standards officer can issue for certain repeat offenders. We continue to send a strong message to unscrupulous employers.

We've also worked on keeping costs down. We're protecting workers' wallets as well as protecting their jobs. In 2024, we ensured fairness for hospitality sector staff by clarifying and introducing some important employment standards. We have done this by:

- clarifying that employers cannot deduct wages when customers dine and dash, gas and dash, or otherwise leave without paying;

- clarifying that employees must be paid for trial shifts;

- requiring employers to disclose if they have a policy of sharing workers' tips by posting it in the workplace; and

- of course, requiring employers who pay wages and tips using direct deposit to allow their employees to select which account and how they want it deposited.

These are important steps in this sector, as we recognize from our stakeholders that employees within the hospitality sector wanted these continual supports, to make these jobs also successful jobs.

The changes we are proposing in this bill to grow Ontario's workforce build on trailblazing actions already made through previous Working for Workers packages. This government has been working to ensure red tape and unfair practices don't stand in the way of newcomers who aspire to contribute to our communities.

In 2023, we introduced changes, proclaimed yesterday, to prohibit provincially regulated employers from including a requirement for Canadian experience in publicly advertised job postings. This was a natural extension of our 2021 prohibition on Canadian work experience as a requirement for registration across 14 regulated professions and Skilled Trades Ontario, which covers 39 occupations, including 23 compulsory trades.

We've also been addressing barriers internationally trained individuals and other applicants may face when applying for registration in regulated professions. Our most recent bill includes changes to improve transparency and accountability for assessment of qualifications by regulated professionals and third parties, and other changes to remove barriers to foreign credential recognition and to speed up registration for applicants looking to contribute to our community. In our fifth Working for Workers package, we also expanded the occupations eligible for the in-demand skills stream of the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program, to help to fill labour demands and meet the needs of businesses.

We are also talking about recognizing that we have a lot of immigrants within our communities, but knowing that there are so many who have experienced the challenge of being taken advantage of. And so, within this upcoming

bill, we are also going to be tackling that for newcomers, where they have to really put in place regulations around immigration consultants. We know that there is an economy, there is a business that is established, and it's not always with the best of intentions for new immigrants. So we are talking about, and really want to implement, regulations for immigration consultants—mandatory that they need to post their certification; they need to let newcomers know whether or not they're regulated—to cut down on immigration scams. We've seen this as a growing trend within Ontario, and this is something that it is really a heinous crime.

When you find somebody that is new to Canada that is looking for a new opportunity—they come to Canada, they come to Ontario, specifically, and they pay \$5,000, \$6,000 to an immigration consultant. We have heard horror stories of people who have paid and who never got their documentation back, they never heard back from the immigration consultants, or they were given documentation and they think all is well until they get a deportation order. This is devastating for people who have come and sought the opportunity for a better life. Who have probably saved up every penny they have to pay these consultants with the hopes that they'll get to stay in Canada and that somebody is actually looking out for them and helping them to get the proper paperwork to become a worker in Ontario. These are sad stories. These are very sad stories.

I had the opportunity lately to attend the immigrant workers empowering women summit, and the stories there were so empowering. It's run by Svetlana, and she is a powerhouse, to say the least. She came to Canada and she is so thrilled and so empowered about giving back to Canada that she has these seminars for newcomers, especially for women, that empowers them to seek jobs, to ask questions, to create networks—because this is how you give back. She talks about volunteering in Canada; she talks about looking for a job; she talks about supporting each other. It was such an amazing environment. The vibe in that room was great. The women were pumped. I met one young lady who had come to Canada—I think it was three or four years ago—who had just written a book about how to empower a single parent to raise remarkable children while they balance getting settled in Canada and having to work two jobs, having to change your culture, having to grow a new network. She was just so, so thrilled about that and the opportunity to give back.

The further changes in the Working for Workers Five Act, led by the Minister of Education, aim to attract more young people to careers in the skilled trades. And these are also such empowering stories when we talk about our young people. We're seeing that our young people need to grow into and change the stigma around trades. They need to realize that it's a great-paying job. It's a skill that you have for life. But it's not just about changing the minds of students; it's really about changing the minds of parents as well, to change what the thoughts are around the skilled trades and to know that it is definitely a job that—you could probably end up buying your house probably faster than somebody who has gone to university. And so these

are some of the changes that we're making that are including grade 11 and 12 high school students to participate in more apprenticeship learning through co-operative credits while completing high school, as well as a new technological education requirement which exposes Ontario students to at least one technological education course that could guide them to a future career in the skilled trades.

Speaker, as you can see, this new package extends groundbreaking supports and improvements already helping workers across the province. We are supporting the health and well-being of workers and their families, we're keeping costs down for workers and businesses, we're honouring workers and we are growing the Ontario workforce. We're using every tool in our tool box to work harder for workers with each passing year, to both protect workers and keep and attract more workers in Ontario, to ensure our economy remains strong and vibrant.

Speaker, the Working for Workers Six Act is more than just a piece of legislation. It is a promise to every worker in Ontario: Your safety, your well-being and your success matter.

1420

So we are quite proud of this, and we are bringing this to the House.

I call on all members of the House to join me in supporting Bill 229, the Working for Workers Six Act, 2024. As we get into debate, across the aisles, we recognize that this is a bill that does very, very much for our growing economy and for our growing workforce.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): It is now time for questions.

MPP Jamie West: Bill 229 isn't technically called Working for Workers version six. It's called An Act to enact the Skilled Trades Week Act, 2024, and to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters. The nickname, though, for labour bills has been Working for Workers.

You keep saying it's the sixth Working for Workers bill. But you don't include Bill 124, which capped public sector workers at 1%. And you don't include Bill 28, which violated the constitutional rights of people who were EAs in schools, who were using food banks, or for people in the trades at schools who were living with their parents.

I'm just wondering, shouldn't this actually be called Working for Workers version eight?

Hon. David Piccini: I am glad that member is keeping a keen eye on the multiple pieces of legislation we're bringing forward to support workers in Ontario.

Because it's Christmas, I'm going to thank that member for our good conversations—for the entire caucus over there, who never shy away, be it after question period, from coming over to seek clarification, or, unlike their Liberal counterparts, actually bringing forward constructive measures to our bills. I want to thank them for it.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Oh, come on. That's not Christmas.

Hon. David Piccini: Oh, sorry. I didn't see you were here.

So I want to thank him for that. I hope we get to eight, Speaker. And I want to thank him for his support on this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I am going to ask the minister if he could explain what Skilled Trades Week is and why it's so important.

The reason I bring up this question is because in my riding we have a lovely town called LaSalle, Ontario, and on October 29, LaSalle, Ontario, hosted a Level Up! event from Skills Ontario. It was packed. It was hosted at the LaSalle Event Centre, which is located on Front Road, right on the Detroit River.

I'll tell you, Madam Speaker, one of the most common telephone calls I get in my constituency office is from grandmothers wanting to sign up their grandchildren in the skilled trades. They want to find out how to do it. I'm very pleased to take those telephone calls, and I often refer them to LIUNA Local 625.

So my question to the minister is, could he please explain what Skilled Trades Week is and why it's so important?

Hon. David Piccini: I just want to start by acknowledging the member for Scarborough, who has been a champion for young men and women in the trades, and who has done such remarkable advocacy, advocating for Skilled Trades Week. This is a week which, if passed, will remind young men and women that when you have a job in the trades, you have a career for life. Because of MPP Smith's advocacy, I have had the opportunity to get to know a number of organizations working with under-represented groups. He has championed them, and he is championing skilled trades among youth—

Hon. Graham McGregor: How about this guy?

Hon. David Piccini: And in LaSalle—for young boys and girls; for the extension of, I believe it's Highway 11—

Interjections: Three.

Hon. David Piccini: Highways 3 and 10.

These are young boys and girls who will grow up, because of MPP Leardi's leadership, knowing that they've got a meaningful career for life. They'll be exposed to it. They'll create awareness at a younger age, thanks to this—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): A reminder: We refer to the members by their ridings.

I recognize the member for Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Wage theft is a major issue in Ontario. According to the government's own records, workers are owed \$60 million in unpaid wages that the provincial government has failed to collect from employers. Wage theft is a violation of dignity, it is people's hard-earned income being stolen. We need stronger enforcement to ensure that workers get paid for their work.

My question to the Minister of Labour is, will you ensure that Ontario's workers get the wages that they have worked hard to earn, and can he deliver it by Christmas?

Hon. David Piccini: The member is right: any dollar outstanding is a dollar we've got to collect, and that's what

we're working to do. I think the member has to recognize that there are a series of changes. The member would know closely that we worked with steelworkers on this, and we're going to continue working with them to continue to improve this.

It starts with ensuring there are appropriate fines. It's this government that has made those changes. It starts with ensuring not only the appropriate fines, but you're doing proactive visits. It's this government doing that. We have more enforcement officers, again, doing proactive visits—this government is doing that. We'll continue to work. We've cracked down on temporary help agencies.

We're not going to stop there and we're going to continue to work to address—to ensure that these wages are returned where they belong: to the workers who earned it.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Questions?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the minister and the parliamentary assistant for this bill. For someone like myself who comes out of Ford Motor Co., I see the importance of our skilled trades throughout the province of Ontario—our electricians, our pipe fitters, our carpenters. My nephew Anthony just became an electrician, and he's so proud of his new job that he has. He's already thinking about getting married and buying a house.

How can we take away the stigma for our children to get into the skilled trades?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Ajax.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Those are the stories that we hear and those are the stories that we need to continue to tell. I was at the carpenters' union. They had opened their new training centre, and there was a young man there that I met who, within a couple of months, had completed his certification, he had opened his own business and now he was hiring three other carpenters to scale and to grow his business. So I think talking about these stories is so important. I think we have heard that from our government where we're really talking about the importance of skilled trades, the fact that it's a job for life, the fact that it's a great-paying job, the fact that you can actually get into a skilled trade without a large debt.

So this is what we need to continue to talk about, the stories about success, about what that Ontario dream looks like, and maybe we start talking about the students—

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

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I was glad to hear that sexual harassment is included in what you're thinking about in terms of workplace safety, but the reality is that sexual assault, rape cases are not making it to court, so women, in fact, are not being protected. An industrial work site is like any other work site, those risks are there.

My question is, will the members on that side and will the minister please pressure the Attorney General to actually hire the judges who are necessary and the people in courts so that these court cases are actually heard and women don't continue to be victimized?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Back to the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for that question. It is a despicable, heinous act that deserves to be punished and to face the full extent of the law. This Attorney General is addressing backlogs, has brought in more into the judiciary. But judges can only deal with the law that's given to them, so Bill C-75 that weakened the Criminal Code has been incredibly detrimental. We've seen it on the streets of Toronto, we've seen it with heinous crimes, and it's because of the weak-on-crime federal government.

This government is introducing mandatory minimums so that activist judges can't go light on bad-actor employers where workers pass away, and thank you to the steelworkers' union for working with us to implement this measure. We're going to get tough on crime—and that member is right: We're going to make sure that this stuff doesn't happen in this great province of Ontario.

1430

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): That's the time we have for questions.

Moving on to further debate.

MPP Jamie West: Before I forget, I want to mention that I will be sharing my time with the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North.

As I said earlier—we are debating Bill 229—the government frequently likes to call the bill, Working for Workers, with labour bill. The official title, though, is An Act to enact the Skilled Trades Week Act, 2024 and to amend various statutes with respect to employment and other matters.

I asked, just recently, why they wouldn't include Bill 124, which is also a labour bill. Bill 124 was modelled after the Liberal Bill 115. Under Bill 115, what they did is they focused on education workers and capped their wages, violating constitutional rights, at 1%. It cost a fortune in legal bills and backpay as well. Bill 124 basically was a “hold my beer” bill where they got to everyone in the public sector. Many organizations are still suffering from this, because as it was challenged in court—it was lost; it was lost with the Liberals as well. But as they get into collective bargaining, there is no funding for not-for-profits in order to offset what the provincial government had done to them under Bill 124.

Similarly, Bill 28 was also a labour bill. This is the bill—you might remember—where these workers went out in protest. These were workers who are child care workers, cleaners, tradespeople in our schools. I know we talk about how great tradespeople jobs are, but there are actually tradespeople working in schools who make a lot less money, and they do it because they love the kids. I brought forward examples of a cleaner who is going to the food bank with her children—couldn't even afford child care, had to bring her kids with her; couldn't even hide from her kids they were going to the food bank. Also, there were tradespeople who had to move back in with their parents because they couldn't afford rent.

These are bills that, to me, reflect the Conservative government's attitude when it comes to workers. They will talk about workers in the best of times—we're going to be talking about firefighters, and absolutely firefighters are heroes. We all agree with it. We all support it. It was actually a New Democrat who brought forward the first bill for presumptive cancer coverage for firefighters. I want to thank my colleague—I can't use his name so I'm going to look it up—the member from Niagara Centre, who brought it forward. It was adopted by the Conservatives, and we all agree on this—and we really do. But in my heart of hearts, I have a feeling that if firefighters were allowed to strike—they're not—I don't know if you would see a Conservative on a firefighter picket line.

I know you saw New Democrats out with education workers who basically were going to food banks, and then their constitutional rights were violated. For the Conservative government, that was so unpopular—the public had such a backlash—they had to walk it back. New Democrats were there from day one, right away. Education workers, we're standing with them; TVO workers, we were with them; ACTRA workers—who I'll be talking about later—we were with them. We stand with workers in the good times but we're also there to fight for them in the worst of times, to stand up for them in the worst of times.

Interjections.

MPP Jamie West: Thank you.

CUPW, the postal workers, are on strike right now, and you know what their main leverage in that strike is? Anti-scab legislation, because they're federal workers. Federally there's anti-scab legislation. It was forced through by a New Democratic government. There's no way Justin Trudeau would have voted for this if we didn't have that leverage. And then Pierre Poilievre has been walking around talking about how much he loves workers, so he couldn't vote against it. Now postal workers have the strength to stand on the picket line knowing no one is going to cross their line and do the work for them. It forces shorter strikes, shorter lock-outs and more meaningful negotiations.

So absolutely, on this side, we agree with you. Firefighters are amazing and they're heroes and they need that presumptive coverage. We also have tradespeople—my colleague right here is a tradesperson; I was a tradesperson in the past. They're very important, and presumptive coverage is always welcome news. Anything we can do to get more people into the trades is always welcome.

But I do want to talk about the wildland firefighters. Now, Speaker, you may have seen the multitude of notes being passed back and forth from here, because during debate, the PA and the minister were saying that the wildland firefighters are absolutely covered, so we had our researchers look back and forth. I have to say—this is a common complaint that I have—this bill was tabled yesterday. They've been doing press conferences all week and so, as a detective, you can piece out kind of what's in there, but you don't know all the details. But the bill was

tabled yesterday, so we've got to work with the researchers and figure out what we're going to talk about in a relatively short amount of time. Just after petitions, the minister came over and told my colleague, our WSIB critic, that the wildland firefighters are covered, and in debate, the minister and the PA also said that they're covered. We went back and forth to look through this: We couldn't find it in the bill.

Now, it's a frustrating experience, because there was the opportunity in amendments in the previous labour bill to address this. We brought it forward as New Democrats, and we explained how it would address it. We explained that we thought that the ministry probably just made an omission. I didn't think the intent was to exclude them in the previous bill. I'm starting to think maybe it was, honestly, because they voted against those amendments.

I explained during the amendments, during the debate. I said, "I think this was just one of those things where it's out of sight, out of mind, and it's a clerical error. We can fix this with an amendment." The Conservative government voted against it. I can't remember if there were two or three amendments—two, at least—to address this. They voted it down. The opportunity was to bring it back there, and we're being told, "Well, it's going to be in regulations. It's going to be here."

Let me find out what I have here. In the notes that I have, basically—I think this is helpful.

Why should we or wildland firefighters or anyone in Ontario trust the recognition of service to be included in the regs? Why not put it in the bill? Other qualifying periods for other firefighters around presumptive coverage are in the bill.

So I want to have this record. I hope that the minister and the PA are going to address this, but the reality is, if I don't get it on record, many of the bills are being fast-tracked and not going to committee and being time-allocated and rushed through. I think that people like Noah Freedman, who on a regular basis is in the gallery, come out here to talk about how important this was and provide as much information as possible. We need to get this on the record.

For OPSEU, who represents these amazing wildland firefighters, it feels like the government intentionally is excluding wildland firefighters from the inclusion of WSIB presumptive coverage. If you look in the definition, it sounds like they're being excluded. They talk about firefighters and fire investigators, but they don't say "wildland firefighter," and the devil is in the details.

Many of my colleagues on the opposite side are lawyers—and I would assume amazing lawyers, because they're all King's Counsel—so they would know that wording is really, really important. When you change the wording, it makes it very easy for WSIB to say, "No, no, no. Not you." And I'll tell you, WSIB's favourite thing to say is, "No, no, no," on a regular basis.

I want to have this on the record. I'm going to read this statement from my friend Noah Freedman, who has been doing an amazing job, from the Ontario wildland firefight-

ers. He's also incident commander and OPSEU local vice-president.

"On February 26, 2024, Minister Piccini promised to reclassify wildland firefighters, in the Legislature, and provide us with the same presumptive coverage for heart disease, cancer and other chronic illnesses afforded to every other firefighter. Minister Piccini promised us those things almost a year ago today." If you're watching a recording, it's December 2024 today.

"Since then, Working for Workers 4 has received royal assent. Working for Workers 5 has received royal assent. And now, Working for Workers 6 is up for debate. And yet," the Minister of Labour—sorry; I can't say the minister's name in the standing orders, just to explain—"has broken his promise..." I don't know if I can say that. He hasn't fulfilled his promise yet, "treating us like second-class first responders, by intentionally excluding wildland firefighters from inclusion in presumptive coverage, and from being reclassified and recognized as firefighters."

Minister of Labour, "you are right that no matter what is included in this bill, we will never stop doing our job to protect Ontarians, risking our lives and sacrificing our long-term health, battling wildfires on the front lines, but we will also never stop advocating for ourselves, and making sure that" the Minister of Labour, and the Conservative government, "keeps their promise to reclassify wildland firefighters and include us in presumptive coverage."

So I'm very hopeful that this is going to get to amendments, because if we cannot fix this, you can guarantee, Noah, that New Democrats again will bring this forward through amendments and we will force a recorded vote. That's the opportunity for the Conservative government to say, "We're addressing this. We're fixing it. We should be more clear," or to put their money where their mouth is and to say, "Look, what we want to do is just have a photo with you. Can you bring your hard hat, your fire hat? Can you bring your gear with you? Maybe show up in uniform so we can get a photo, because I want to send that out in my newsletter that I met with wildland firefighters and talk about what heroes they are, but I don't want to really give the coverage that they deserve, that the other firefighters would have."

1440

I'm going to go on. I think as well, in a lot of these bills, there's a lot of focus on tradespeople and firefighters. I don't know if maybe the Minister of Labour doesn't know, or if Conservatives don't understand, there are a lot of workers out there who are not firefighters and who are not tradespeople. There's a sprinkling of stuff for other workers; I'm not pretending there's not. I talked about Bill 124. There is a shortage of health care people because of Bill 124. It happened during COVID-19. The nurses primarily and lots of health care workers felt completely disrespected. COVID-19 is still affecting people in the province. We're not having lockdowns like in the past and it's not front and centre like it used to be, but our nurses

are burning out and quitting, retiring early and refusing to come back as retirees to help train new nurses.

Nurses who are graduating: Even though they talk about how many nurses are going to school, I was at a graduation ceremony where I congratulated this young lady for becoming a nurse. She said almost with a laugh, "I'm never working in that field." She had placements as a nurse and she knew, "I'm never doing that, but I've already paid the tuition so I might as well get my degree, but I'm not going to work in that field." That's how toxic and bad it is.

The thing is there is a path to fix this, right? The path is not capping wages and treating nurses like second-class citizens. The path is maybe treating the nurses like you are for nursing staffing agencies.

This Conservative government, they love to blow taxpayer money. They spent \$1 billion on nursing staffing agencies. Now, I'm not putting down all nursing staffing agencies because there are sectors where that's needed—primarily they bring people to remote communities and that sort of thing—but not to the extent that it is right now. I'm being told by health care providers, "I can blow the budget and go into reserves for private staffing agencies, but I cannot hire more of a complement of regular agencies." What happens is that you are paying these private staffing nurses almost twice what a normal nurse would be.

Interjection: Three times.

MPP Jamie West: My colleague says three times.

On top of that, there's a little slice of the cheddar that goes to the company they work for. I have a feeling that that's where the Conservatives—when they talk about working for workers, they're talking about the board of directors, the executives who are making that profit. That's the focus. They give the money and they drain the bank account. That would be fine if it was a private bank account, but it's taxpayer dollars.

When people, or workers, go to hospital and there is a shortage of nurses and a backlog, it is by design. The Conservative government is deliberately underfunding them, shovelling that money into private agencies and workers are paying the price. So when you bring your kid in the middle of the night and you're sitting in the emergency room for hours and hours and hours literally—you're lucky if you're out of there in six hours—it is by design because they're not investing in it.

I want to talk as well about other workers. Let me just get here—because I don't want to forget about ACTRA. These ACTRA commercial workers—this is unbelievable. People in the gallery haven't heard this before. Can you imagine this? For these workers, basically, their way of life is being stripped. They are asked to have much more reduced benefits, either gutting their pensions completely—this is how they supplement in Canada. They don't have a Hollywood industry, so a lot of actors supplement their acting and their live performance by doing commercials. That's how they make ends meet and they can perform in the field that they love.

What happened in April 2022 is that these agencies locked them out because they wouldn't accept the contract—April 2022. It's November 2024 today. That's an embarrassing thing.

On the one-year anniversary, we asked the Minister of Labour, we asked the Premier, "Will you stop buying ads?" The Premier is spending a fortune of taxpayer dollars on ads telling you how great Ontario is. "Will you stop buying ads by the companies that locked out these agencies? You don't have to pick sides. Just stop buying. There are other agencies that will provide this work." They continue to buy ads.

On the second-year anniversary, I asked again, "Will you stop buying ads?" The Minister of Labour met with the ACTRA workers just outside the door over here and said, "I'm going to look into this. I've got to find out what's going on here."

I don't know what he thought he was going to look into because shortly thereafter, there was a posting for a Ministry of Labour ad specifying non-union actors. So not only are they buying ads, they're deliberately saying, "Look, I know ACTRA has been locked out"—not even a strike. They've been locked out for two years. They would love to be negotiating and getting a fair contract. It's been two years, and the Conservative government could care less. "Not only do we not care less, I'm going to buy some more ads, specifically outlining not to use unionized actors."

At the federal level, the federal government—because the NDP has pressured them—have agreed that if you see any federal advertising, it is not done with these agencies who have locked out these actual workers. All we're asking as New Democrats is that Conservatives follow that example, but they won't. Because "Working for Workers" is a buzzword; it is not what they believe. Because if they did, these workers would not still be locked out and they would not be ignored. It's coming into 1,000 days—1,000 days just happens in January. We won't be sitting, but I can tell you, we're going to make some news on the 1,000th day because this government cannot continue to ignore workers and pretend they're working for workers on a regular basis, no matter how many \$200 cheques you hand out.

Now, we've talked in the past about these \$200 cheques that were coming out. Coincidentally, there's going to be an election soon—\$200 cheques, and the government was saying, "Oh, so you don't want people to have 200 bucks?" Absolutely I do. Do you know why? Because your policies have failed the workers of Ontario. So it's like seeing somebody who's going to a food bank and saying, "Oh, so you don't want us to give them a coupon so they can get a hamburger at McDonalds?" Yes, give them the coupon. Also pay them a rate so that they're not going to food banks.

The Feed Ontario report just came out. One in five workers now are going to food banks—one in five. If you have seen the ads that they have spent millions of dollars on—\$48 million of taxpayer dollars to tell you to "imagine Ontario." I want you to imagine Ontario when one in five

workers are going to food banks and imagine Ontario where the Conservative government is telling you, "That's okay." Because it's not okay. It is not okay.

I will tell you—and I will argue with anyone and I'll tell you, I'll win. But if we go to any Tim Hortons, any subway stop anywhere in this province and we say, "Do you think workers should be going to food banks?" They will say, "No, no, no, no." If you are working, you should be able to buy food. You should have money at the end of the day after you pay your rent. You should be able to get food on the table, take care of your kids, cover your expenses and have a couple of bucks at the end of the day so you can save towards a house or help your kids go to post-secondary or get tools for their trade school or something like that. And the way the government has been ignoring the affordability crisis in Ontario is simply shameful.

Today there was a conversation about a woman who was in her seventies being rent-evicted. The landlord had a YouTube video about how to rent-evict tenants. The Attorney General, a Conservative, kind of shrugged his shoulders: "It's a process, it's going to work out." Come on. Come on. We know people are being evicted on a regular basis. I'm not saying every tenant is a saint but if 90% of tenants are losing at the LTB and being kicked out, maybe there's something wrong with the LTB. If your policy for preventing these encampments we're seeing all over the place right now is that you're going to remove rent control on any rental unit after 2018, you are giving these developers a licence to print money, and they are printing money on the backs of our seniors, our students and just about everyone in between. That's shameful because our kids cannot move out of our houses because of policies the Conservative government has brought forward.

I want to talk about the steelworkers; talking about—there are more workers out there. Now, a lot of these bills have included presumptive cancer coverage, and the steelworkers brought forward—the minister talked about the steelworkers a couple of times and I'll get into that.

So I reached out to the steelworkers. I was a steelworker before; I know all the people in health and safety and occupational disease. And so: "Research from the Occupational Cancer Research Centre based at the University of Toronto"—we respect them—"has shown that underground workers are some of the highest exposed to carcinogens ... Furthermore, the occupational health clinic for Ontario workers recently released a report indicating that mine workers have a significant increased risk to lung cancer..." Basically what that means is that miners are getting cancer at a large rate. The thing is, I don't think that miners are as cool to pose for photos with as firefighters are. And I'm not discounting the firefighters; absolutely, they need that coverage. But other workers are having the problem too.

In the email, they said they would love to have the "opportunity for the reintroduction of the Justice for Victims of Occupational Disease Act" and have it passed, obviously. "This bill codifies the proper legal test to be

used for entitlement” in occupational disease claims. It “would help expand schedules 3 and 4 in Regulation 175/98 which in turn would make the process easier for claims that fall within those presumptions prescribed by sections 15(3) and 15(4) respectively.”

1450

It goes on more—I don’t want to bore people with it because this is kind of into the weeds a bit, but let me read this quote:

“While Ontario has one of the strongest health and safety records of any jurisdiction anywhere, too many workers are falling through the cracks when it comes to occupational illness.” Do you know who that was? The Minister of Labour. Then he says, “Under the leadership of Premier”—I can’t say his name, but the Premier—our Conservative “government will leave no stone unturned to ensure we have the best science and data ... to protect workers and make room for everyone’s voice at the table as we build a stronger system that works for everyone.”

It sounds like he wants to address this, but he isn’t.

And we can’t wait for Working for Workers bills 17, 19 or 55 to roll out before you start talking about miners. Mining is important. One of those ads that your taxpayer dollars is paying for, it’s got a non-unionized actor pretending to be a miner underground. That guy, if he was actually underground working, would be breathing diesel dust, silica and things that would give him cancer.

They want to remove indexing—just because I’m looking at my time; I’m going to run out of time. Their third ask was that Ontario should raise the loss of earnings to 90% as was promised. We brought this forward in multiple amendments. Basically, every time you have a labour bill, we bring forward the amendment to increase indexing from 85% to 90% and, oddly, 5% doesn’t sound like a ton, but I’ve talked to injured workers, as has the committee with members of government and the independent members, and we’ve heard how important this would be to them, what a change it would make to their life. Because the reality is, if you get hurt in Ontario, you’re more likely to be on ODSP than back to work. You are desperately, desperately going to be poor, because the Liberal government didn’t care about you and the Conservative government could care less.

The final thing—and this is important because we’ve had many times when we’ve talked about seniors in this House and people talk about how important they are, and I agree with that 100%, but let’s hear about this: Section 43 of the WSIA also allows the WSIB to end loss of earnings when a worker turns 65 years old. We’re seeing more and more people working past this age as the cost of living rises. If you go to a Walmart or somewhere, the greeter is probably a senior. If you go to a Tim Hortons, half the workforce are seniors. It’s great if you want to be, but it’s terrible if you have to be. If you’re getting old and sore and you have to work a minimum-wage job to make ends meet—and you’re injured, and the ministry, the Conservative government, instead of having your back, is pushing you on your back, by saying, “No more WSIB for you because now you’re 65 and you’re retired.” That has

to be changed. These are the voices we have to bring forward.

I want to talk about a couple of validators because sometimes they go, “You know Jamie, he just doesn’t like us.” I want to talk about Josh. Josh is a miner. Josh’s leg was impaled by a four-foot piece of rebar underground, and his family depends on him and his income to make ends meet. Much to his surprise, the WSIB uses a loophole to cap his loss of earnings, and because he’s a higher-income earner—like tradespeople, miners make good money—it’s an even bigger cap. And the Conservative government is okay with that. They’re okay with it. That guy in the commercial, if he got a piece of rebar in his leg, he would lose his way of life. So workers like Josh should be paid fair compensation and not have the money returned to their bosses. There’s a thing in here where millions of dollars are going back to bosses and not to employees. I’m going to get into that if I have—I’m going to make sure I have time.

Denis Brunette, millwright, had an accident underground and they had to amputate his leg. He had extensive rehab and had a prosthetic leg made—multiple years. So what happened was about 450 pounds landed on top of him and they ended up amputating his leg. It hit him in the head, hit him in the stomach, hit him in the groin—extensive rehab, multiple years of recovery. His doctor wrote a letter saying his prostate was affected as a direct result of the damage to the groin. WSIB, without even seeing Denis, overturned this. His wife is saying, “What do you mean?” His doctor, who was there, who recommended the surgeries, who inspected him, who looked literally inside him, is saying that this is what happened, and then this paper doctor is like “Nah.” This happens all the time, these paper doctors overruling people who are giving—because WSIB isn’t about protecting workers, it’s about protecting workers from getting money.

WSIB was supposed to go on a work tour with Denis—never happened. So how would they know the scope of the work the worker was doing? So his licence was revoked. He couldn’t be a millwright anymore. He lost countless dollars in his pay. They told him he was 74% disabled; he gets 21% coverage. He has not been paid from May to October last year. He’s trying to return back to work as of October this year. He hasn’t received any pay because he’s able to work now. He hasn’t got a job yet, so WSIB cut him off because he has a phantom job. And at the end of the month, he’s going to pay his bills with phantom money. I wanted to get it on the mike. I could read one of these every day for the rest of your life: workers who have been failed by the Conservative government, and the Liberals taught them how to fail them.

I want to talk about other workers because I only have about five minutes before my colleague is going to get up. Not-for-profits are starving for money. They made a claim last year for a 5% increase. I don’t understand how 5% would get them anywhere because they are so far behind. The number one thing you’ll hear from workers in a not-for-profit is, when they leave, they say, “I don’t want to leave; I can’t afford to stay. I love my job.”

Public health is underfunded. EAs are going to work wearing PPE—they're also underfunded and not paid properly. Child care workers are exiting because they're not paid properly. Autism supports aren't funded. You want to talk about workers who need help? There is a 74,000 backlog of families with autistic children who aren't receiving supports. Salvation Army was here yesterday; they need supports. Women's centres aren't receiving supports, and people can't work there. Amelia Rising in Nipissing and North Bay, who helps victims of sexual assault, needs funding to survive.

And not to mention, on top of not funding these very important sectors, \$60 million in wage theft that the Minister of Labour hasn't bothered to pick up—\$60 million. And that \$60 million is only people who reported it and thought there was a chance of getting it back. That's what's embarrassing in here.

The minister had said at one point, "I talked to the steelworkers. I listened to what they said." The whole story of that is, basically, a steel car has killed a variety of workers, and the penalties are like nothing. It feels like it's the cost of doing business for some employers.

So Kevon Stewart, who's the director of the steelworkers, had a meeting with Myles Sullivan, who was the previous director and now he's gone on to the national office. They said, "Look, if there are companies out there—bad bosses, whatever they want to call them—who think it's the cost of doing business, make it cost." And they recommended a million dollars. This bill doesn't say a million dollars, even though he said, "I followed their advice."

The other thing, too, is I called Kevon—I've known Kevon forever; I've known Myles even longer. I called him and I said, "Well, what happened here? How's it going?" And they are moving forward and it's a positive thing, but Kevon said, "Look, make no mistake: That money is going to the government." So when you're looking at the \$48 million in taxpayer-paid advertising, some of that money could be coming from people who died. There's not an injured worker who has died on the job or anyone in that family who has ever thought, "I hope there is a penalty that this company has to pay that goes to the Ministry of Labour." It should go to the workers, to their family. It should go to the people who are hurting the most.

I know personally, sadly, four families affected by workplace fatalities where I worked. Every year, I message them and let them know that I'm thinking about them on the anniversaries. I know that they never forget what happened, that money won't bring them back. But it's a slap in the face to say, "There was a fine or we've increased the minimum fines so that everyone's going to get a fine, and not one red cent is going to go to you, your sister, your brother, your mom, your dad or your daughter." That's a slap in the face to workers. Don't tell me you're working for workers and do stuff like this where you leave workers behind on a regular basis.

When we are seeing encampments grow because workers on ODSP are losing their housing, workers who are

injured are losing their housing, minimum-wage workers are losing their housing, you're not working for workers. You're picking and choosing for the photo ops and the headlines, but you're not standing up for workers.

If you're not, I urge you, in the five months that we weren't sitting, and when the House rises at Christmas, get into your office. Listen to what people are saying when they come to your office, because all of our offices are the complaint department. No one comes and says, "I got my licence." "I didn't get my licence," they come. So they will tell you they're being evicted or they don't have enough money. Then you can talk about working for workers once you start addressing those basic needs and helping them.

I'm going to sit down and share the rest of the time with my colleague from Thunder Bay–Superior North.

1500

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the member from Thunder Bay–Superior North.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I really want to start with this idea that Ontario is returning over \$2.5 billion in rebates to businesses. The headline says the province is putting more money back into workers' pockets, but they're certainly not putting money back into the pockets of injured workers. They're taking money out of the pockets of injured workers. And all workers are potential injured workers. If we don't have that backstop there, we are not, in fact, working for workers at all. We are working to use workers up while they're fit and healthy, but once they are not, we are throwing them under the bus.

I'd like to read a letter from the Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups:

"Every year in the lead up to the holiday season, countless Ontarians look forward to gathering with their family and friends to share food, presents, and good company.

"For those forced into poverty by work injury or illness and related disabilities, comfort and joy is not so easy to come by. Decades of cuts to injured worker benefits through practices like deeming—that's when you pretend an injured worker has a job that they cannot get, and then cutting their benefits—"massive denial rates (especially in psychological injuries and occupational illness), cuts to health care, and ignoring the diagnoses and advice of injured worker's actual treating doctors have left many permanently injured and ill workers in financial and emotional ruin. These practices have created massive surpluses for the WSIB. Heading into a potential spring election, injured workers had begun to wonder out loud if some of their decimated benefits might be restored with all the extra money the compensation board brags about having in their bank.

"Imagine our shock today, then, when WSIB announced that instead of restoring decades of cuts to injured workers, they are simply handing \$2.5 billion to the very employers who have left us injured, ill, and poor....

"Study after study show that permanently injured and ill workers face poverty, stigma and a cascading set of health effects that can cause people to lose their homes, their families and the lives they once knew. Instead of

addressing this known problem, the WSIB” and the Conservative government have “chosen to make wealthy employers \$2.5 billion wealthier as they head into 2025. Shame on them.”

I’ll go a little bit further. The government is promising this rebate to any company that hasn’t had more than one conviction in the last four years. This is a joke and good news for bad employers, seeing as enforcement numbers are down, which means conviction numbers are down too. Only “safe businesses” get the rebate. Ministry of Labour inspections, orders and fines have dropped significantly, just like employment standards inspections, so almost no businesses get fined or prosecuted.

This government could have announced an end to the WSIB practice of deeming but they chose not to. They could have done something about claim suppression, but they didn’t. New Democrats and injured workers have called on this government to increase loss-of-earning rates injured workers receive to help raise them out of poverty. But the current 85% of earnings—we wanted to return the 85% of earnings to 90%. This is particularly important for older workers, but the Conservative government apparently doesn’t care.

In 1998, the Conservative Mike Harris government cut benefit rates from 90% of net to 85% of net, and then cut contribution for loss of retirement income from 10% to 5% because they claimed the WSIB was in a financial crisis. Every request to improve workers’ compensation, or at least reverse the cut since 1998, has been met with the response that injured workers have to tighten their belts and wait until the WSIB finances have recovered.

But, before the last election in 2022, the Ford government gave \$1.2 billion to employers in WSIB rebates. Once again, as we head into a provincial election, the Ford government announces that the WSIB has billions of dollars to give to employers in rebates—but still, nothing for injured workers. Injured workers continue to struggle with reduced benefits that are cut off at age 65, even though they would not have stopped working if they had not been injured on the job. The WSIB is a worker’s compensation system. It’s not supposed to be an employer compensation system, but that is the way it’s being used.

I want to look at one of the reasons that there’s a surplus, and it comes out of this experience rating. That was a change made some time ago, I believe, during the Harris government. It has shifted a few times, but it’s still basically the same thing. Experience rating in workers’ compensation links the costs for workplace injury or disease—only the money paid out by the WSIB to injured workers—to the amount the businesses will pay each year. This has created an incentive for companies to focus on reducing those costs, as opposed to helping their injured and disabled workers. Many companies have been trained by the WSIB and industry consultants to “manage claims,” which means managing costs. Managing costs results in shifting those costs onto the worker, their families and our public health care system. The other behaviour this encourages is hiding the accident, suppressing claims to the WSIB, thereby undercutting good health and safety

practices, which results in more accidents and injuries in the future. All firms are now 100% experience-rated in Ontario.

I’ll continue on this. We know what “minimize the costs of claims” means: lower costs, lower figures on the claims-cost column. In real life, it means discouraging workers from reporting their accident or, once reported, to quickly return to their workplace, regardless of the severity of the injury and medical advice. In real life, it means mental and financial stress for the worker and their family and too often, a second injury, or the transformation of a temporary condition into a permanent one. In real life, it means the loss of both employment and compensation income. In real life, it means not actually lowering the cost but shifting it. The myriad of harms experienced by injured workers and their families include family break-up and loss of home. That is the cost of that shift.

In other words, there are these various incentives for companies not to report accidents. Those incentives get pressed onto other workers as well, who are often offered things like, “We’re going to buy leather jackets for everybody here, as long as we don’t report any accidents.” It doesn’t mean the accidents don’t happen.

We actually know that inspections are not taking place or they’re seldom taking place, so who’s left holding the bag? It’s workers, who have been cast aside, left to the unfortunate poor reception by the WSIB.

What I see as the significance of this announcement about giving all this money back to businesses is that it is a pre-election gift to employers, no matter their safety records. It is a kick in the teeth to injured workers. Instead of restoring decades of cuts to injured workers, the Conservatives are handing \$2.5 billion to some of the very employers who have left workers injured, ill and poor.

What would we do differently? We would be restoring benefits to injured workers, ending the practice of deeming, overhauling the adjudication process. The WSIB engages in claims suppression and denies a large number of claims, particularly for those with long-term injuries. Almost 85% of claim denials are overturned in whole or in part at the worker’s safety insurance tribunal. Think about that for a minute. You’ve got workers who go, they make their claim, and the answer is no—as the member from Sudbury was saying, “No, no, no,” the favourite answer from the WSIB. Then they have to appeal, but they’re sick. They’re trying to get doctors’ appointments. Do they have a doctor? Maybe, maybe not. And in the meantime, they have no income, nothing. But if they’re lucky enough to hold up long enough to get an appeal, 85% of those claims get overturned.

1510

Why is that happening? That tells me there’s some kind of quota going on at the front end that is denying workers what they should be getting, and that’s where the surplus is coming from. The surplus is coming from denying what workers need in order to survive. The result is that workers are forced to undertake long, emotionally and physically draining appeal processes with no financial supports in the meantime.

I think there are other things that we would also like to change. We have in fact championed many real reforms to benefit workers, all rejected by the Ford government, including: 10 days' paid leave, which is not the same as the establishment of the long-term leave for serious illness which is in this bill; anti-scab legislation; again, an end to the practice of deeming; properly classing app-based—that's the gig economy—workers as employees; equal pay legislation and enforcement of workplace law violations, including severe penalties for unsafe work conditions that lead to death—in other words, kill a worker, go to jail, along with many others.

I asked the Minister of Economic Development whether this is the cost of doing business in Ontario: undercutting injured workers, casting them aside and then giving money back to employers—just before an election—that actually should be in the pockets of those injured workers. It seems like a quid pro quo that really flies in the face of doing anything for workers at all, because as I said, anyone who is working today could easily be an injured worker tomorrow.

I also want to touch on the wildland firefighter issue. We know that words in bills, words that are there, if they're left out when it comes to actually claiming a benefit, chances are, you're not going to get it. We've had some back and forth on this today, but there's still a great deal of concern. Our researchers have been looking at it, firefighters have been looking at it, and they don't see the language anywhere in the bill that acknowledges that they're firefighters. So we're still waiting for that change of classification that actually defines wildland firefighters as firefighters. Had that been done, then we wouldn't be so worried about the way it's described in this bill. It's kind of an inference that wildland firefighters are there, but the language is not there, the word is not there.

It looks like the defining six months as a year is being left to regulations. We need to know that it's there, and we need to know it's there because we've been asking now for quite a long time, certainly, explicitly for a year. We did have a commitment from the minister to follow through on these things. We need to be absolutely confident that those things are there. Those wildland firefighters deserve those supports, they deserve the presumptive cancer coverage, they deserve to be paid properly, and unfortunately there's just no basis for trust without the exact wording being in the bill.

One of the things that came up in my conversation with the minister was some dispute about how much exposure wildland firefighters get. We're not going to get into a battle of science over this, but what I would like to recommend is that the ministry hire or bring the association called CROSH. CROSH is a research centre at Laurentian University, specializing in occupational health and safety. Now, the wildland firefighters have been asking for a long time for cluster studies into their exposures, and we know their exposures are extremely intense. It's partially funded by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, and it's based at Laurentian University. Why not immediately ask

them to do those studies so that we can know for certain the level of exposure that wildland firefighters are facing?

I also want to take a moment to talk about other workers. Truck drivers are workers too. Do you know what? Three truck drivers were killed in my region last week—killed at work, killed doing their jobs. Why? We know they're not being trained, and we know nobody's inspecting the schools. We know that they're going through DriveTest and we know that DriveTest is owned by the private company Serco, and we know there's corruption in the testing, so we know people are getting licences without the skills to drive these big machines. And then we know that there's nobody staffing the inspection stations.

We also know that these new truck drivers, many of whom are new immigrants and deserve to be protected when they come and start to work here, are pushed into accepting a status that's known as "Driver Inc." What that means is that they're virtually self-employed, and because of that, when they are killed on the job, does their family get anything? No. Are they even eligible for WSIB? No. It's a whole category of workers who we depend on, totally depend on, for the delivery of food and goods across the province, across the country, and those workers have zero protection.

Now, I kind of understand why it's a scary issue for the Minister of Transportation, because a lot of those companies are concentrated in his riding, so if he complains about those companies, will he get re-elected, will he get donations? The reality is those workers live there as well. They don't have the money to make donations. Surely their lives are worth protecting. As I say, three were killed this week alone. There's another transport truck about half an hour from my home that has been on fire. There are dozens of trucks in the ditch. And the snow only just came this weekend, so all of those accidents preceded the snow coming.

There are things that this government could do immediately, and part of it is because there are so many other categories of workers that they don't seem to care about. What about the transportation enforcement officers? Can't hire enough. You know why? They don't stay. The pay isn't good enough; it's a very dangerous job. Conservation officers: can't keep them because they won't reclassify. They were told 12 years ago reclassification was coming. It's never coming. Then we've got the wildland firefighters. You can't keep them in the jobs because it's a hard job. They're not being paid well. They're not being respected. Paramedics, same story—can't keep them in the job.

I don't know if people know it costs \$165,000 to train a traffic enforcement officer, but they make about \$20,000 or \$30,000 less than other inspectors working for the Ministry of Labour, so why would they stay? They get trained up, they're now in line, and they move over and get better pay. So they can't keep transportation enforcement officers in place. We know that Ontario is short 50% of the needed enforcement officers.

So the government has spent \$31 million to build this state-of-the-art inspection station in Shuniah, but there's no staff. It's almost never open. We've seen a bar graph of how often that station is open, and it's a little teensy, teensy couple of hours here, couple of hours there. They can't get permanent staff. And what the truckers do—because who wants to be inspected? You don't, because it's going to take time. But you need to be. They stay at the restaurant just down the road until somebody says, "It's okay. They've gone now." So those inspections are not taking place.

What I want to say is, at the very least, fill those positions, pay those workers properly so that it is not a problem having those jobs filled. Frankly, as I said, the very least this government could do would be to make sure that those inspection stations are staffed. If they don't have the courage to address the issue at its source where workers are simply being exploited and told, "Here's your key, here's your licence, off you go. The truck is automatic. You can watch TV while you're in there, even while driving. Don't worry about it"—until they're dead, until they've killed somebody else. It's happening a lot.

1520

I'm not the first to raise this. We've raised it again and again and again, and all we ever hear back from the Minister of Transportation is, "We have the safest highways in North America." I would like, for once, to see them drive that highway. And we've seen the Premier, the Minister of Transportation and sometimes the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan up in Greenstone. Well, that's not an easy drive to go to Greenstone. Do you know why they don't know what's going on? Because they're flying. They're taking a jet up to the Greenstone mine, they do their announcement and then they fly back. So they don't have to deal with the highway at all, but we do. The rest of us who live there have to drive that highway, and it's not safe. I've repeated it so many times. It is not safe. There are no shoulders; there are only half-shoulders. They're coming along in these trucks, they're in a hurry because they're under pressure to meet their deadlines. And now we've got snow and ice on the roads, and it's just going to get worse and worse and worse, and frankly, we're all workers. All the people—the parents, the drivers of the trucks—they're workers. How come their lives don't matter? How come they're not included in anything, in any consideration for workers?

I also want to think about other kinds of work. Right now, the focus of this government is pretty much 100% on the trades. Okay, that's a slice of society. It's an important slice. We want to make sure that people get training, that people are encouraged to do that. But in every other sphere of life, the entire system is collapsing. Health care is collapsing. Family health teams across the northwest have not received an increase in 10 years. It's no wonder they can't keep staff, they can't keep doctors, they can't keep nurse practitioners, and we know that part of the reason is because the pay structure for PSWs, for nurses, for nurse practitioners, even sometimes for doctors if you're in family health care—when you can move into a hospital

and get paid a heck of a lot more. But you're doing essential work. That pay structure needs to be established across the full range. Whether we're talking home care, long-term care, hospital care, there needs to be a pay grid that actually matches the responsibilities of those workers, and this government is not doing that.

I'm also thinking about universities. Universities are the places where we have the potential to have independent research. But universities are starving, and courses and programs are collapsing. I can tell you about Lakehead University, which is where I was teaching before I was elected. When I first started teaching there around 2011, there were 40 full-time faculty. We had quite a few contract lecturers, but we had a substantial number of full-time faculty. I was just there this week, and they have seven—seven—full-time faculty left. Everybody else is there as a contract lecturer. And let me tell you, I have a PhD; I had lots and lots of experience. Still, you're paid \$7,500 a course. Sometimes you're making maybe \$20,000, \$30,000 a year for your job, with your PhD, with your experience. That is what is happening in post-secondary institutions, and it is because of the persistent underfunding of this government. We know why that underfunding is taking place—I actually met some of them this week—the private universities. They want to step in as another place to make money.

And then we have the same thing going on in education, and health care workers, and educational assistants—educational assistants which this government tried to smash with Bill 28 and taking away their charter rights.

So you know we have a government that—we've got these bills called "Working for Workers," which I don't think work for very many workers. They work for a little slice and throw everybody else under the bus.

We also have institutions of learning where some kind of independent research could be produced. Why does that matter? We have a bill before the House this week that is talking about the burial of the caverns for carbon capture. We heard all about the big corporations who have funded research about this, but they've got a financial interest in the outcome. So where do we get other forms of research, other perspectives? Well, I heard already also that at least one member over there does not believe in consulting with anybody who has ever called themselves an environmentalist. So, there's a very, very narrow amount of knowledge that has already been pre-approved to bring out a very specific result.

What you have is a party that is ideologically bound to a very particular approach to business, to knowledge, to research, to who they will talk to, who they won't talk to—I imagine they hear lots from the Fraser Institute, the C.D. Howe Institute. We've also seen things like long-term care and the profits from that going into, guess who, the former Premier of Ontario profiting from privatizing long-term care. I understand that former Prime Minister Harper is profiting nicely from his ownership in Circle K. Interesting, eh? Circle K, where we had to spend \$225 million in order to open up alcohol sales a year early.

Imagine what you could do with \$225 million to actually help people, to actually provide employment. Imagine if you weren't taking away money from injured workers and putting that money back into their pockets—it was promised to them, it was promised to them way back in 1998. Yet here we are for the second time: a government that is giving back a surplus that should be going to help those workers, to help those families. It's not just the workers themselves whose lives are shattered by permanent injuries; it's the families.

Frankly, the WSIB, when it was called the Worker's Compensation Board, was intended to be a non-adversarial place where workers would be heard and fairly assessed, where their doctors—their practising, treating doctors—would be listened to and they would get the supports they need without becoming a burden on their families and without becoming a burden on society. But that's exactly the opposite of what happens now.

Those workers also wind up experiencing severe mental distress because they get told, "No, no, no. Your injury isn't real. We don't believe you." What do you do with that? Then you start to internalize that: "Gee, maybe I'm crazy. Am I not?" And yet, you can't move or you're in excruciating pain, and you get nothing but denial. It's a crime; it is very, very cruel, and it shouldn't be happening.

I think I could speak for another couple of minutes. You know, there's one other thing I'd like to say. We've also put forward a motion about heat stress, and that's a very important issue. We know that people have been dying on the job because of heat stress. We know it's even happening in schools and we would very much like to see the government looking seriously at addressing and preventing heat stress.

As I say, supporting injured workers means you're supporting all workers.

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

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the members for their contributions. I always like labour bills that this House puts forward because, like the member from Sudbury, I started out in the rebar business. I was a bender and a crane operator. I don't want to go back and look at the projects where my rebar was involved, but I just hope they're still standing.

I want to comment—part of this bill is the Skills Development Fund. Over the summer I had a great example. I mentioned it to the minister, how the carpenters' union had been working with the Saugeen Ojibway Nation on a Skills Development Fund project. It was a great example of how some of the labour legislation and initiatives that we've been putting forward as government have been operational.

1530

So with all the elements of this bill—firefighters, etc. etc.—isn't it something that you could see lending your support to, for this bill?

MPP Jamie West: I think it's a great question from the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. The Skills Development Fund is a great initiative for certain things.

There have been things that have troubled me because money has gone to places and I've tried to trace it to see, did we train some workers or not train them? But I think the system like this, where you're bringing in this case Indigenous workers, but traditionally people who aren't working in that field and gaining those skills, makes a lot of sense.

The bill itself, in general, is supportable, but I have to agree with my colleague. This part about continually giving the overflow, the money back to the employer on the backs of workers not making money—it makes it tough to swallow on it. If there was a reason we wouldn't support it, it would be based on that solely. It's a really bad part of the bill. We believe that workers who are injured should be able to pay their bills at the end of the day and not be negatively affected because the government wants to continually reward employers and not have that money go back to the employees.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: I listened to both of my colleagues speak to this bill. I know that they are both passionate about this issue. One of the things that I just want to follow up on is the WSIB funding that's going back to workers, so either one can answer on this.

One of the things I guess I find really hard to accept is the rules and how strict it is for a worker to even qualify for WSIB and the benefits. It's almost like fighting a war for their life, for their family. Sometimes people lose so much just trying to get that funding. And yet here we are, the second time, giving money from WSIB back to the employer when these workers should be benefiting, and it would actually help the economy.

MPP Jamie West: This unfunded liability—the thing is, it's a double-edged sword. What happens is, the unfunded liability is how much money will you need potentially for injured workers? And when the Conservative government—it's the second time since the Premier was elected this term, but Mike Harris did this in the past as well. What they do is they strip away the amount of money that you have available for workers. Then when workers try to get compensation, they say, "No, no, no, there's no money. We can't do it." When it finally builds up to the point, they reduce the employers' rates. They give the money back to the employers.

In this case, you only need a clean record, I think, for two years. So if you had a fatality three years ago, you're going to get some money back, right?

They talk about helping small business. Absolutely, it will, but let's be honest. The more employees you have—if you're a Walmart, if you're a Steel Car, for example, with many employees, you're going to get more money back than a small business will.

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

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Last week I was at Sheraton College speaking with Elena. Funny thing is she went to school with my son in high school and now she's becoming a plumber.

You know, women have challenges in the trades for their fitting of PPEs. Would the member opposite support this bill for the safety of women and equality for women in the workforce?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you for the question. It's kind of, of course, why not?

But what about what's going on in schools, and the fact that education assistants are having to wear Kevlar to work at school? That's PPE. We're not talking about that. We're not acknowledging, actually, the training and love and hard work that goes into those other areas where people are being abandoned.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank my colleagues for their excellent presentation. My question will be for the Ontario NDP critic for labour. I wanted to ask: This is the sixth iteration of Working for Workers from this Conservative government. But I would like to know, what does it say to workers when \$2.5 billion is going back to employers and, at the very same time, the government and this ministry is not collecting \$60 million in stolen wages?

MPP Jamie West: Yes, I think we've been clear as New Democrats that if someone stole \$60 million from workers, we would work day and night and push every button to get that money back for the workers. The thing as well with this money going and ignoring injured workers who are on WSIB and not funding them properly—it really is a slap in the face. A while ago, the Premier had said to get off your butts—he used language I can't say here—and get to work for these people who are living in encampments. Many of those workers are tradespeople. Many of those workers are people who were injured on their jobs who have lost everything. We need an opportunity to get them back into the workplace or to support them with a decent ODSP rate that will allow them to pay their bills like rent and put food on the table and stuff. We absolutely need to take care of these injured workers or else we're going to have more encampments come up.

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

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam: I just want to [*inaudible*] with my experience either driving in Scarborough or coming here to Queen's Park. I think we all have seen incidents where construction workers, roadside assistance workers—they're always risking their lives on the road while they are on the job. I think we have always seen the sign, "Slow down." We all experience this. This particular bill is definitely expanding safety for those construction workers on the road risking their lives for Ontario. This bill is definitely expanding safety for them.

My simple question is, will the opposition join this PC government to make sure we stand up for those construction workers that we see every day who risk their lives on our roads each and every day.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Response? The member for Sudbury.

MPP Jamie West: Thank you very much. I think that's a very supportable side. In fact, I noticed recently when emergency services are travelling, I'll pull over and people will honk at me like I'm blocking their way. We need to educate people about the importance of this. The minister and I were just recently talking about how it used to be mandatory to have coroner reviews when people on construction sites were killed and how we do address this so we're reducing the number of injuries that are happening for construction workers, because it isn't just being hit by a car—sometimes they're being injured in other ways and killed in other ways. We have to make sure that we're looking at how it happened and making recommendations to eliminate that from happening in the future so that workers who are dying aren't dying in vain and having the same thing happen to other works in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Quick question, quick response?

MPP Jill Andrew: From what I understand, this is the sixth or seventh iteration of "Working for Workers" put forth by this government. What I'm hearing from a lot of skilled tradespersons is affordable childcare would really be something that could help level the playing field. We've got some single parents—and also some single dads, actually, I spoke with—who could really do with \$10-a-day childcare because apparently a lot of the sites open, I learned, at 5 or 5:30 in the morning and many of the daycares are open a little later.

We're just wondering what the government thinks about truly supporting all workers in Ontario by ensuring that they could actually afford childcare.

MPP Jamie West: The thing about affordable childcare is it keeps people out of the workforce when it doesn't exist and it causes a lot of stress on families, and primarily it's overwhelming the moms that stay home—overwhelming the moms. It's very unfair to people to not be able to return to work and also to not have a place that they feel their kids will be safe at. We need to implement this. It's been happening forever in Quebec. Childcare should be something we're really looking into and we care about so we can get people back to work and we know that their kids are going to be safe.

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

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I am sharing my time with my colleague the member from Mississauga–Malton.

1540

Mr. Deepak Anand: The best riding.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: The best riding, yes.

Madam Speaker, I rise in the chamber to speak on an issue that goes to the heart of what it means to govern with compassion and purpose. I am here to talk about the safety and well-being of workers across Ontario.

As a new grad or a new immigrant, or when starting a new family, the first concern is a job. The first concern is

work, a career. As an immigrant who was new to the workforce, maybe I just got my first professional job in Canada as a new Canadian, responsible for my family—in a majority of the cases for immigrants, it's one-income families; there's one person responsible for the well-being of the whole family. We could think about this bill as the security of the job. This is not the truth. The bill is about the security of the family—the impact of this change on the family and the vulnerable newcomer, the newly added member of the family.

I'm supporting the Working for Workers Six Act because this bill is not just about policy; it's about people, families and the dignity they deserve in times of need. Our government has heard from workers across this province. We heard from parents, adoptive parents, parents through surrogacy and intended parents who have told us about the challenges they face balancing the immense joy of welcoming a child with the fear of losing their jobs. These Ontarians are building families through love and sacrifice, and it's our duty to ensure that they are supported, not penalized during one of the most significant moments of their lives.

That's why Working for Workers 6 proposes to introduce job-protected leave for parents through adoption and surrogacy. For far too long, these parents have been left behind by legislation that did not recognize their unique needs and situations. If passed, this bill will change that. It ensures that adoptive and surrogacy parents will no longer have to make the impossible choice between their new child and keeping their livelihoods intact.

This is about fairness. It's about modernizing our labour laws to reflect the diverse realities of today's families. But supporting workers goes beyond just families. It's about standing with Ontarians in their moment of greatest vulnerability. Right now, when workers fall seriously ill, they often face a ticking clock: their job security versus the time it takes to recover.

Our government is stepping up to align the Employment Standards Act leave for long-term illness with the federal EI sickness benefits, extending it to 27 weeks. This means workers facing debilitating illness will have the time they need to heal, to focus on their health without the looming fear of losing their job or returning early to a job when that will be compromising their safety and their colleague workers' safety as well.

This is not just a policy; this is compassion in action. These proposed changes ensure that no worker in Ontario is left behind in their time of need. We are telling workers, "Your government sees you, we hear you and we are working for you."

Speaker, this bill reflects what it means to put workers first. It's about protecting their safety, their well-being, their families and their at-work colleagues' safety and well-being as well. It's yet another example of how this government is leading with purpose and principle, ensuring that Ontario remains the best place to live, work and raise a family.

I would like to talk about personal experience. When I first arrived, I was looking for my profession, going back to my career with all the challenges any immigrant faces to get his first new job, with no Canadian experience, with no references here in the country which I can give as references in interviews.

The minute I managed to get into my professional career, the first job I got, I would have to think twice—twice—for anything that could jeopardize that job. If there is a limitation around illness and I am sick, I might have to try to get back to work as soon as I can so that I don't lose that opportunity. Even if I don't feel really well, even if the doctor is telling me, "You shouldn't," the safety of my job and safety of my family income, to be able to sustain and continue my career, would be an aspect of what will decide when I would come back.

Aligning that with the federal EI laws actually allows all the workers across Canada, not only in Ontario but in all different provinces, to be on the same level. It's fair for workers and it's fair for employers, because not all employers are good players. Some employers might take advantage and try to get rid of some of their workers. This alignment will allow workers to go, take care of their families, take their time off if they have to take care of their health or they have an illness, heal properly, get ready to go back to work without any fear of losing your job and without any fear of jeopardizing their family's security.

I'm very happy to support Working for Workers 6. I'm very proud of the whole series of Working for Workers, since Working for Workers 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and 5. Each one of them addressed some shortage, gap, area in the workspace, which allow employees to experience their best and also for employers to be able to have a standard they go with.

Working for Workers 1 eliminated the two years of Canadian experience from the credentials system, which opened the door for millions, maybe tens of millions of newcomers who arrived in this country at some point in time, having the unfairness in hiring because of the two years of Canadian experience missing. There could be a good engineer who has 15 years of experience, but when he comes and starts looking for a job, he is faced by the two years of Canadian experience, which eliminates him from getting into the workforce. The majority of the time, he might have to accept even a supervisor in a location or site to be able to get registered to be a P.Eng. I think this talks highly about what this government is doing.

Last summer, I attended a graduation for P.Eng. and the chapter of Mississauga president was saying that 60% of the newly graduating P.Eng. today didn't have the two years of Canadian experience and only could become the P.Eng. this time because of the changes this government did and that this man was advocating for. I was so proud as an immigrant; I was so proud as part of this government to make sure that the new immigrants who are arriving here with high skills, with a high number of years of experience, with very good education, advanced education, would get the opportunity to start their job in Canada,

start their life in Canada and start meeting the needs of their families and starting kicking off the Canadian dream.

I would like to hand the rest of my time to my colleague.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the member from Mississauga–Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: It's always a pleasure, especially when we're talking about the small businesses, we're talking about the job creators, we're talking about the workers of this province. Why? Because Ontario thrives because of its resilience and the dedication of Ontarians, strengthening businesses, supporting families, ensuring essential services remain accessible to everyone. It is this spirit of hard work and determination that fuels our province's success.

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On behalf of our caucus, on behalf of Premier Ford, we cannot thank our health care workers, educators, manufacturers, tradespeople and the service industry profession enough for being the driving force for our province's growth, innovation and prosperity. We see the results today: increasing \$150 billion to \$205 billion in revenue, over 850,000 people working. All that data is not just a number, it is the hard work and the dedication of the people and the workers of this province, and we can't thank them enough. Their expertise and commitment are the backbone of vibrant communities like mine, Mississauga–Malton, where families and job creators benefit from their contributions.

As we work to build a stronger and more inclusive economy, our responsibility is clear: to recognize, support and uplift our workers. This means providing fair wages, fostering safe working environments and creating opportunities for skill development that help Ontarians adapt to the demands of an ever-evolving economy. That is exactly what the Working for Workers bills are doing.

I want to take a moment and thank the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development for all the hard work, along with you, as the PA. I always say this is not one ministry, it's many ministries in one, and what we see today, the relationships and the workers doing well, it is not just a coincidence, it's the hard work of everyone working together, and I always say when we work together, we collaborate together, we are better together.

One of the most transformative things that we've done is investing \$1.5 billion in the SDF, the Skills Development Fund. And it's not just the money, it is saying—it's a progressive cycle. People need jobs; jobs need people. What are we trying to do through this? We're trying to fix the gap in between by providing the skill set required for those people to do that job. People like Ontarians, people like—I see uncles-ji and aunties-ji sitting right there from Peel region who have come here. It's many of their family members who are going to be benefiting from this. Their grandkids are going to be benefiting from this. Who are they? They are the Ontarians building this Ontario. So I want to welcome all of you who are here.

So what are we doing here, Madam Speaker? Just to give a small example, a little taste, because I don't have much time: Through this legislation, we're proposing eliminating the \$150 certificate of qualification exam fee for apprentices on their first attempt. It's not just \$150; what it is is basically saying if somebody's looking to get into an apprenticeship, and if they have a financial hardship, and if they cannot afford \$150, they'll not be able to apply. If they cannot apply, they will not be able to become an apprentice; if they can't become an apprentice, they're not going to go into the skilled trades; if they're not going to go into the skilled trades, they're not going to start working. We are breaking that cycle. I'm going to say thank you again to the minister. This is being thoughtful, building a progressive cycle. When we will eliminate this exam fee, by removing this hurdle, we empower apprentices to build a career and strengthen our skilled trades workforce. This government understands that when businesses, the job creators, succeed, so do workers and the community.

I'll give you another example, Madam Speaker, of what we're doing through this bill: reducing the average WSIB premium rate for safe employers to \$1.25, which is the lowest rate in the last 50 years. While other governments had a choice, this is the government that's taking bold steps and making sure the job creators are supported.

We're giving job creators more resources to invest. For an example, a small construction company, HKC, Helen and Kosta construction, in the riding of Mississauga–Malton with about 50 employees, could save as much as \$46,000 from this WSIB surplus rebate. When they get this money, they can put that money back into their employees, improving health and safety, and might well add one more employee, creating another job so that they can actually go out and maybe bid for more of the opportunities and projects. By getting more opportunities, they might be able to employ more people—again, a very progressive cycle. This is exactly what this government is doing through this bill. When businesses reinvest, everyone benefits, more jobs are created, wages are strengthened and our communities gain greater economic stability.

Working for Workers 6 also is emphasizing the importance of workplace safety. Through the safe business incentive program, companies across Ontario, including in Mississauga–Malton, will be rewarded for prioritizing the well-being of their workers. Again, the idea is very simple: When the government is going to provide \$1,000 for every new health and safety action plan, we're not just reducing the cost for employers; we're building a culture of prevention and fostering safer workplaces.

While others may speak of affordability, our government is delivering meaningful, decisive action. Bill 229 reflects an unwavering commitment to real results. What are we doing here in this? We're cutting costs for workers. We're empowering job creators. While we're doing this, we're creating opportunities for all.

When the ministry does all this, they didn't just do it in a silo. I always say, if you have a great, good idea, bring it to your MPP. Your MPP can take it to the ministry.

Through the consultation—I'll give you some of the partners the ministry has consulted with: Ontario Road Builders' Association, Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs, Fire Fighters Association of Ontario, Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario, Canadian Cancer Society, Newcomer Women's Services and many more.

When we did all this, what it resulted in—Madam Speaker, some of the quotes I would like to share with you. For an example, Marc, business manager of the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario, said the council appreciates “the progressive steps forward announced today to improve the lives of working people.”

Another example, Daniel Tisch, president and CEO, Ontario Chamber of Commerce: “The Ontario Chamber” of Commerce “shares the government's focus on lowering the cost of doing business, removing barriers to employment and rewarding organizations that create the safe, healthy environments for their people.”

Madam Speaker, Bill 229 is more than just a collection of updates. It's the vision of Ontario's future by protecting our workers. If passed, the legislation and the related regulatory changes we're proposing will support the safety and well-being of workers and their families; crack down on immigration scams and bad actors; reduce service duration for kidney cancer and remove the age limit for firefighters' cancer diagnosis; keep costs low for workers and businesses; honour workers by celebrating the contributions and accomplishments of skilled workers of the past, present and future; growing Ontario's workforce.

Some of the additional supports include expanding PPE protection for women; minimum fines for the corporation; increasing the fines for the corporation; new job-protected leave for adoptive and surrogacy parents; cleaner washrooms to increase accountability and transparency; better training and jobs to improve training, jobs and paycheques—building on previous actions to support millions of Ontarians.

The legislation is a key step to building a stronger, more sustainable and prosperous Ontario, one that benefits every community, including Mississauga–Malton. For Ontarians, this bill represents progress, security and hope. Under the leadership of Premier Ford, we're making sure we are building a better, stronger, progressive Ontario.

So I urge all the members to support this vital piece of legislation, ensuring that Ontario remains a great place to live and work.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I beg to inform the House that the Clerk has received a submission related to Bill Pr55, An Act respecting Mount Pleasant Group of Cemeteries. Pursuant to standing order 93(a), the submission stands referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Questions?

1600

Ms. Catherine Fife: I want to comment on the member from Mississauga–Erin Mills, who said that this is a very compassionate bill. I would argue that it's a very selective compassionate bill in the fact that you've left out wildland firefighters and are not considering them to be full-fledged firefighters. In fact, in April the province said it would give wildland firefighters the same cancer, heart and post-traumatic stress disorder coverage as municipal firefighters and expand presumptive coverage.

And then this is what the firefighters are saying: “This government intentionally excluded wildland firefighters from inclusion into the WSIB presumptive coverage for heart conditions, cancer and other chronic diseases. This was very cleverly done by including a new definition for wildland firefighters under subsection 14.1 of the act.”

How can you say that this is a compassionate piece of legislation when you are intentionally leaving out wildland firefighters from the act?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I respect the question from the colleague opposite, but especially wildland firefighters, I don't think there is any distinguishing between this and that. This is not true. The old fire workers—we already have been since day one supporting our firefighters—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Just to remind the member to watch the language.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you.

Since day one we have been supporting our firefighters, and actually firefighters specifically have been getting some specific conditions in regard to long-term and short-term illnesses to make sure that they are protected as the rest of the workers in Ontario, even if they serve for a shorter period of time.

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

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Thank you to both the member from Mississauga–Erin Mills and Mississauga–Malton for their presentations on Working for Workers Six.

As a former small business owner, I've heard from many business owners and apprentices in my riding about the financial challenges they face, especially as they start their careers and try to build their businesses. These groups have expressed how even small savings can make a big difference.

How does this bill lower costs for apprentices and businesses, and what impact will these changes have on Ontario's economy?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the new member here. Actually, you're not the only one. The member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore had a similar concern, and she was asking the same thing too.

What we're doing through this Working for Workers Six package is, if passed, we'll waive the \$150 exam fees for apprentices for taking their initial certification of qualification, eliminating financial barriers and making it easier for the workers to achieve their certification. It's not just removing the cost. It is basically giving them an opportunity. Say, for example, if somebody doesn't have

that \$150, think about that situation. They will not be able to apply. If they will not be able to apply, they will not get the apprenticeship. If they're not going to get the apprenticeship, they're not going to get the skilled labour. We're removing that barrier, changing that path and making sure that they're ready to serve the communities.

Again, thank you to the member for that wonderful question.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Mississauga–Malton for your presentation—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Erin Mills.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Erin Mills. Thank you; I apologize for that.

I have a question around outstanding fines and what the government is looking at doing to address outstanding fines. There are over \$104.3 million in outstanding Ontario health and safety act fines, which means a company has been fined for having an unsafe workplace, yet the government hasn't come in to collect, which sends a message to the company that they can continue to have unsafe workplaces.

What is your government's plan to collect on these unpaid fines?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: As much as I, of course, respect the point of the discussion here about the fines and the outstanding amounts and stuff, I don't think this is covered as part of this bill, so I would stay within the discussion of this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions? I recognize the member for Mississauga–Lakeshore.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Mr. Steve Clark: The great state of Etobicoke.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: It is the great state of Etobicoke. Thank you, Speaker, for the question.

I thank my colleagues and the minister for the debate today. It's been really interesting. We talk about labour and how important it is in our communities. I often have the opportunity to speak to many people at events in my riding, and a lot of them are internationally trained professionals. Sometimes, they're frustrated and they're trying to obtain their recognition. They come to the great state of Etobicoke or Ontario or Canada, and they just want recognition for their qualifications and we're leaving their skills underutilized. We need these workers. We need them in the workforce, but it causes stress for them and their families. They just want to get to work. They want to get a paycheque and bring presents home and have presents under the Christmas tree, just like everybody else.

I'm wondering how will this bill address these delays and ensure that Ontario benefits from the expertise more quickly.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore. You really touched my heart. I talked about it earlier as well: Today is the day when my dad passed away five years back. I do remember when I

was in grade 12, we were having a conversation and he said he wanted to become an engineer, and he couldn't because he was a refugee from Pakistan in 1947. So he wanted me to live his dream. I actually ended up doing my undergrad in chemical engineering.

But when I came to Canada, the first thing I was told was, "Oh, engineering is only for those who are professional engineers," so I could not work in my field. I had a choice: Should I take care of my nine-month-old child or get into the education? Madam Speaker, I took care of my child first.

But what are we doing through this bill? No more 2000-01; we are in 2024. We have Premier Ford as our leader. We're making sure we're cutting the decision-making timeline in half, reducing registration wait times for internationally trained professionals from six months to three months, so you do not have to pick between food—

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

MPP Jill Andrew: I've got a couple of questions for the government. I'm wondering where 10 paid days for sick days, where that is in the legislation for workers. I'm also wondering, in this Working for Workers edition 6 bill, where the anti-scab legislation is in this bill. Because I don't see it there, and these are two things that could really support workers.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the member for that question. If passed, this bill will introduce 16-week job-protected leave under the Employment Standards Act for adoptive and surrogacy parents. We're making sure that for workers that need the support, we're here to help them. Another example is workers with a serious medical condition can get federal EI benefits, which is why our proposal is for 27 weeks to align with the federal government's system. This would be one of the longest job-protected leaves in the country. We're also unlocking \$400 million in workers health and safety programs through the Workplace Safety Insurance Board to support injury prevention, mental health and worker recovery.

This is a government who believes in working for workers—to make sure we appreciate, we thank them for what they've done. That is the reason we're a thriving economy in Ontario, and we'll continue to work for our workers.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Quick question, quick response.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I am really happy to see how skilled trade labourers are very proud of what they are contributing to the economy for Ontario, but sometimes they are really frustrated that they are not recognized as much. I would like to see how that Skilled Trades Week and why is it so important to encourage them.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I would like to say thank you to the member, but before—I do not have much time, so I quickly want to say, actually, thank you to the member from Scarborough Centre for all his advocacy. Thank God, we have a week to appreciate our skilled workforce. Thank you for all your hard work.

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As I said earlier, this is a government that believes in progressing the whole province together collaboratively, and we'll continue to work together with our workers.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It's an honour for me to rise today to talk to the sixth iteration of Working for Workers.

I think we can all recognize that almost everyone here in Ontario is a worker. I think back to my history; from the age of about nine or 10 years old, I have worked. I have always had a paper route, worked in restaurants, worked in retail, worked in the service industry. We are always, all of us, having to work at some point. In fact, all of us here today are doing another mode of work.

I had the opportunity to participate in the committee hearings during Working for Workers Five, at which point we heard many concerns that were brought forward to us by Parkdale Community Legal Services as well as the Workers' Action Centre.

When I first heard that we were going to be looking at yet another Working for Workers bill—in fact, Working for Workers Six, this time—I was quite pleased. I thought, “Perfect. Here will be the things that have been missing in all of the numerous iterations of this bill—all of the recommendations that we heard at committee that didn't make it into Working for Workers Five, four, three, two, or one, for that matter.”

However, while I will say Working for Workers Six does have some important provisions within it, there still is quite a bit missing. Something that is top of mind and something that I brought again and again to this chamber is the need for wage parity, the tremendous disparity that health care workers face across the province of Ontario—and that is down to this government. There is a scale of pay, regardless of the job that you do, depending upon the different domain of health care in which you find yourself, such that individuals who are a PSW or a nurse within the home and community care sector are paid the lowest. They might enjoy their job. They might be excellent at their job. They might be doing what they're motivated by and where they would like to stay. However, given the cost-of-living crisis, they can't stay, because it is such a burden for them when their pay is so low. So they will move from the home and community care sector into the long-term-care sector, which pays marginally higher. After training up within that sector, and despite the fact that they might enjoy the work there—the next best level is the acute-care sector; it's the gold standard. Why is it that despite doing a PSW's job, a nurse's job, a dietitian's job, there is this gradient of unequal pay? That's a system of inequality that we've allowed to persist here in Ontario, and that's something that is not addressed with Working for Workers Six.

I am not certain, as well, that there has been consultation with workers in the creation of this bill. I don't believe that the OFL, the largest organization that represents workers, was contacted for this bill. If indeed I am wrong,

I'm happy for the government to show me the receipts and indicate that I am indeed wrong.

I think back, as well, in my thoughts about wage parity, about community mental health workers, some of the people who are working with folks who are struggling on the most significant, profound human levels on our streets, who are providing those relationships, getting people to supports, getting people to services—who have really found a difficult time being homeless and struggling with their mental health. What is disturbing to me is that those dedicated, wonderful, caring people in that sector are often standing in the same line at the food bank with the clients they serve. And why is that? Why is that, in a province as rich as Ontario, that people who are providing that tremendous, caring service are doing so at a significant fiscal cost to themselves? That's something we could fix and yet is not fixed in Working for Workers Six.

I think as well about the wonderful people who are working in non-profits across the province. Non-profits have stepped in to address the gaps that have been created by gaps in government policy and gaps in government attention, and yet, in that sector, they are there by the grace of their good hearts. They're certainly not well paid and they're certainly not given enough respect by this government. Providing them with respect would be to pay them far better and also to provide year-over-year budget allocations rather than having them chasing grants again and again and again. It's a situation that the government could fix.

I think as well to my area of London North Centre, and I think of the Thames Valley District School Board as well as the London District Catholic School Board. As it turns out, educational assistants have a tremendous depth of knowledge and a breadth of knowledge, and such care and advocacy and concern for the students that they serve, yet these educational assistants in the Thames Valley District School Board earn \$5 less per hour than the same job in the London District Catholic School Board. That's something the government could address immediately with a one-time payment, and yet does not.

I must also mention that this government is not funding education properly in terms of the statutory benefit increases for CPP and EI. They're expecting the school board in London to pick up that cost, which is also wrong, considering that is legally mandated.

Physicians who are working in family health teams are working in funding arrangements that have not been updated since, I believe, 2017. That is the model of care that the province wants to promote. It is a wonderful model of care where you have team-based care, where people are able to provide all the different care that we need for all the different dynamics of our health. But why are they promoting a system that still has an outdated funding model? It makes no sense.

What is also missing from this bill is what advocates have been calling for and the official opposition NDP has been calling for, for a number of years, which is 10 employer-paid sick days. This bill, Working for Workers

Six, does establish a long-term leave for serious illness, but that is not the same. We're talking about sickness, we're talking about reducing the risk and we're talking about not spreading infection through our communities after the COVID-19 pandemic, and yet this government seems ideologically opposed to preventing risk for people in our community.

What's also missing from this legislation, Speaker, is something that workers have been calling upon for decades, ever since a Conservative government removed it from legislation, which is anti-scab legislation. You cannot have a government that pats itself on the back for supporting workers and still allows the use of scab labour. Scab labour undermines the work that everyone does. It allows contract negotiations to go on for weeks, sometimes months—or, in the case of ACTRA, it will go on for years; 1,000 days, I believe, is going to be the anniversary that is coming up, according to our critic for labour, the MPP from Sudbury.

Also, the use of scab labour is something that benefits employers. In my community, at Western University, the workers there from CUPE had to walk off the job because they were not being paid fairly, according to their labour. They were not being paid the same as workers in the London District Catholic School Board, Fanshawe College and Thames Valley District School Board, so they had to withdraw their labour. But because there is no anti-scab legislation in Ontario, the employer sought to use these fly-by-night scab labourers to really put the pressure on workers, to take the power away from workers and to try to make them accept a deal that was less than what they deserve.

Workers from CUPE stayed strong. They did not break, despite not having support from this government, and they ended up getting an agreement, and congratulations to them for that.

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What's also missing from this legislation—and it's such a surprise because this government has known about this for years, which is the practice of deeming, determining that injured workers are able to work jobs that they don't actually have. The WSIB was set up to protect workers, to advocate for workers, and to make sure when they became sick or injured as a result of the work that they performed, that they would have supports. And yet the WSIB is, for the majority of the time, saying no to workers; is, in fact, in the business of denying people the supports that they have paid in to.

With this government we're seeing money given back from WSIB to employers, and at the same time, this government is not collecting on stolen wages. This is a very curious situation which doesn't make sense on the face of it. How is it that this government is giving money back to employers, and there are employers who are stealing from their workers? How can that happen at the exact same time? It makes very little sense.

We could also have equal pay legislation, something that is missing from this. We don't see that within this bill.

I had thought, when I saw Working for Workers 6, okay, we're going to clean up all the loose ends; we're going to finally address all of the issues that have been missing. And yet, unfortunately, we're not.

I wanted to talk a little bit about the workers who have had money stolen from them. As we head in toward the holiday season, when we're living in a cost-of-living crisis, \$60 million is owed to people who've worked for that, who've laboured for that, who have toiled for that, and this government has not done the right thing and made sure that those workers got the money that they have so rightfully earned.

This is money that has been between 2017-18 and July 2024. It's also been shown that since 2017-18, on average, under a third of money that has been stolen from workers has actually been paid. That's not even a passing grade; that's not even 50% or 51%—30%, under a third.

From the Workers Action Centre, Deena Ladd says that the system is broken in Ontario. While this government has promised tougher penalties under the ESA for those who violate it, when is this going to be enforced? Clearly, employers have found that they know that the government will not enforce stolen wages, so they are free and fit to continue this wage theft from their employees because they know the province—there's a high chance that they won't ever be discovered, and even if there are orders issued, they won't actually have to pay.

In fact, Ladd says that the numbers that we see could just be the tip of the iceberg. I'd like to quote Ladd, who said, "Many of the workers that we work with don't even file complaints because they just don't see the point," and I've got to say, I agree. When only 30% of these are recovered, it's no wonder workers don't have faith in this ministry or enforcement to make sure that they get back their money.

What is also missing is that when a worker makes a complaint of this nature, of wage theft, why does that not trigger a broader investigation under the ESA? If an employer has done this once, the likelihood is so incredibly high that they've done this to numerous other employees. It shouldn't just be a single complaint-based system.

What's also to mention is that there's very little deterrent for these individuals. We see these increased fines, but if they're never levied, that's not a deterrent whatsoever. An employment and immigration lawyer, Sharaf Sultan, has said, "Unfortunately, I think there is an understanding out there that the ministry is not as hard as they should be and you can delay [paying wages] with little to no consequence." While the maximum fines have been increased, we can see the ministry is not doing the job.

I'd also like to quote one of the ministry's spokespeople who said, "If employers don't pay their orders letters are issued" with "follow-up calls." And, "If there is still non-compliance, the ministry can register and enforce warrants of seizure and sale, put liens on property and garnish bank accounts," but we don't see that happening. We see legislation that is titled "Working for Workers," but why is this not happening? Why is there still \$60 million owed

to workers in the province and the ministry not standing up and fighting for them?

When we consider the WSIB—when the WSIB does not support workers who become sick or become injured, not only does it destroy lives, but they end up on social assistance and that cost is far greater.

I want to say that a 2015 study was conducted at McMaster and Trent Universities. It found that 46% were living on the poverty line a mere five years after their accident. This cost is borne by all of us. Despite the fact they have worked, they've worked hard and whether it's through their own fault or through a situation at work, they became injured. They became exposed to a chemical. Instead of receiving the supports that they're guaranteed, no, they end up being a cost on the system, and what a terrible thing. Nobody goes to work hoping to become injured, hoping to become ill. They should have a province that has their back through the WSIB.

Last but not least, I also want to, first, also look and consider the multiple intersections of identity, how many of the folks who are in low-wage and precarious jobs can become ill, and this includes both mental and physical illness. This leads to such financial hardship. Lives can come crashing down from them when they're sick or when they're injured, and many workers are forced to go to work sick because they don't have access to this short-term paid sick leave. So not only are they going to work because they don't have that protection, but they can often make themselves yet more ill because these things are missing.

I notice my time is starting to run out. I was hoping when I first saw that we were addressing Working for Workers 6 that we would have a chance to tie up all of these loose ends, to listen to workers' organizations who have presented at committee, who have brought up strong concerns about things that are missing, and then we see those pieces have not been addressed. Whether it's wage parity, whether it's making sure that folks who are working aren't having to visit food banks along with the people they serve and making sure that there's fairness, fairness across sectors, fairness across systems.

There are things in this bill that are supportable, but I did want to lastly point out a concern that's very curious. The government has said and made very bold claims about their support for wildland firefighters, and there's nothing in this bill that recognizes that a fire season will be considered a year of service. The government has been claiming this will be in regulation, but why isn't it in the bill in the first place? If this is something that you're committed to, if this is something that you recognize, if this is something that you believe in, why is it being left to the regs?

We have these outstanding questions, as do wildland firefighters: Why is it not in the bill? It remains a question for us, and considering that this is the sixth iteration of this bill of Working for Workers, why has it not been included in the bill?

There are many things that still remain outstanding: whether it's 10 days paid sick leave, whether it's anti-scab

legislation, whether it's updates to the WSIB, ending the process of deeming and phantom jobs, whether it's properly classing app-based or gig economy jobs, making sure people are paid equally according to the work they do or whether it's actually collecting on the money that is owed to workers. Unfortunately, I gather, Speaker, we'll be seeing a Working for Workers 7 because these pieces, despite being brought up again and again and again, are still yet missing. I have to ask myself, and I have to ask this government, why they remain missing. Why are these curiously absent? It is not from a lack of official opposition advocacy or from people coming to this Legislature. I hope that they'll be addressed, and perhaps they'll be added during the committee process.

1630

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): It's time for the questions.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Women in trades face unique challenges, including a lack of properly fitting PPE. Will the member opposite oppose Working for Workers 6, which ensure safety and equity for women and other under-represented groups in the trades?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Bay of Quinte for the question. I hope that the member listened to my speech quite fully and completely because I was speaking quite a bit about women-dominated professions, in fact, many of which are in the health care sector, many of which are in the education sector. And yet we see these workers being neglected. I think we can all agree that women should be able to go to work with properly fitting PPE, but women should also be able to go to work and be paid not only the same as men but paid the same according to their health care sector. This is something the government could address. One could consider that it is actually misogynistic to not pay women properly and that is something—

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's sexist.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: —that has been sexist and ignored for many years: that people in home community care are paid less than long-term care and are paid less than those in acute care. The government could address this.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: I listened to my colleague from London North Centre, and he talked a lot about WSIB and the practice of deeming. One of the things that we recently found out is that the government is actually giving back money to the employers. And when we know a lot of workers—and you mentioned health care workers and women workers who are struggling. And when they have to go into a battle where they're trying to get from WSIB something that they're owed. And yet there are all these restrictions, there are all these ways to undermine workers. Why is it, do you think, that the government is giving back money to the employers when they could actually make it possible for so many of these workers to be treated fairly and get the benefits that they truly deserve?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank my colleague from Scarborough Southwest for an excellent question. The process of deeming in the WSIB has been flawed for many, many years. When a person who has become injured in a workplace is treated by their doctor and their doctor makes recommendations, the WSIB and insurance companies will employ their own paper doctors who never physically see that person, yet in their "wisdom" and "expertise" are able to determine that that person is not as sick as the original treating physician had said. That is wrong.

And at the same time, the government giving all of this money back to employers—some of whom have stolen from their employees—makes very little sense. It's a contradiction. If indeed we had a system where workers were supported fully, where they were getting the treatments that they rightly deserve, where other employers are not stealing from their employees, then and only then could one justify giving money back to employers. But workers are not getting the supports that they require and that they deserve from the WSIB, which almost always says no.

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

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member for his comments, and he touched on a number of subjects. What I like about this bill—and it comes on top of so many other measures that we've done for workers. But in this bill itself, there are so many measures: There are measures for supporting families, such as the 16-week job-protected leave; fire-fighters, as been mentioned before; employment; primary skills; kidney, cancer, 20 years etc.; Skilled Trades Week; waving of exam fees; Ontario immigrant nomination program; cracking down on fraudulent representatives, etc.; and protections for women.

I just look at the comprehensiveness of the bill and it touching on so many measures. I'm wondering if that would be enough to have the member support the bill.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank my colleague from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for the question. I'm not going to stand here in my place and say that everything in this bill is bad and wrong and a mistake—absolutely not. There are things in this bill which are entirely supportable. But what I have tried to say throughout my comments is how much is missing, how many things that workers have been asking for for year upon year upon year which are entirely absent from this bill.

I also wanted to point out that I strongly believe that this bill was not informed by the voices of workers. We had the opportunity, during Working for Workers 5, to hear from the Workers Action Centre and Parkdale legal services about things that were missing: making sure that there were proactive inspections under the ESA, making sure that there were also comprehensive inspections when one complaint was made. Unfortunately, we have seen these cuts being made. We have seen a lack of inspections. So we need to see things that are done to support workers, especially ones who are being stolen from, and especially ones who are being denied their rightful supports under WSIB.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the member for London North Centre. Thank you very much for your presentation. One thing that I noticed when I was looking at this bill is it's a piecemeal bill. It tinkers at the edges: There's a little bit here, and a little bit here, and a little bit here. But when we're looking at making working in Ontario the kind of—we want to make it livable, we want to make sure that people can afford a home, they can afford the rent, they can afford a mortgage, they can pay their bills. What kinds of changes would you like to see in bill Working for Workers 7 to help us get to the kind of good working conditions that we need in Ontario?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to my friend from University–Rosedale for her question. I think what I would like from this government, if they want to truly in word and in action state that they work for workers—I'd like an acknowledgement of the mistake that was made with Bill 124 of taking a women-led profession and making it suffer with a 1% wage increase. I would also like some acknowledgement about Bill 28, with educational assistants, another female-dominated profession that was attacked by this government. There are many things where this government could improve its track record on working for workers, not simply by introducing multiple pieces of legislation that tinker around the edges. We could address wage parity, we could address wage theft and we could address WSIB. Unfortunately, those things are still yet absent. Here's hoping for number 7.

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

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member for his debate today. The member and I have had many conversations over the years here at Queen's Park, and he'll probably agree with me that we need more doctors here in the province of Ontario. As well, he'll probably agree with me that—I don't know if he remembers when George Smitherman was the Minister of Health; he starved health care, and he got rid of a lot of the spots at the universities for health care. Yet the member opposite will not support the immigration pathway for self-employed physicians, as we are trying to do with Working for Workers 6.

Why are you standing in the way of the solution to address critical health care labour shortages here in the province of Ontario?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore for a very interesting question. I think maybe the member forgets that it was the official opposition that brought forward a motion to make sure that there was more access for people to family physicians across Ontario. That would be to tackle the administrative backlog that family physicians face. They spend 19 hours per week filling out administrative tasks. Our opposition day motion would actually make sure that two million more people had access to a primary care physician, because that number of people without a family doctor right now is 2.5 million. It's going to grow to 4.4

million in a very short period of time. That was something we could fix right away, and yet the Conservatives, curiously, voted against Ontarians having a family doctor. I can't fathom why they wanted to block that opportunity for physicians to practise their skills with yet more Ontarians.

I also want to point out that I did mention in my remarks the outdated funding model for family health teams that this government is trying to push upon people. They're not paying people fairly. They've got to pay people what they're worth.

Report continues in volume B.

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Ke, Vincent (IND)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC)	York Centre / York-Centre	Solicitor General / Solliciteur général
Khanjin, Hon. / L'hon. Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
Kusendova-Bashta, Hon. / L'hon. Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Leardi, Anthony (PC)	Essex	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Energy and Electrification / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Électrification
Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Sport / Ministre du Sport
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean	
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Mantha, Michael (IND)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
McCarthy, Hon. / L'hon. Todd J. (PC)	Durham	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises et de l'Approvisionnement
McCrimmon, Karen (LIB)	Kanata—Carleton	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
McGregor, Hon. / L'hon. Graham (PC)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	Associate Minister of Auto Theft and Bail Reform / Ministre associé de la Lutte contre le vol d'automobiles et de la Réforme relative aux mises en liberté sous caution
McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York	
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones
Oosterhoff, Hon. / L'hon. Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries / Ministre associé des Industries à forte consommation d'énergie
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences Deputy Government Whip / Whip adjointe du gouvernement
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pinsonneault, Steve (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Mines / Ministre des Mines
Quinn, Hon. / L'hon. Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Kaleed (IND)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation / Ministre des Affaires autochtones et de la Réconciliation économique avec les Premières Nations Minister of Northern Development / Ministre du Développement du Nord
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Deputy Speaker / Vice-Présidente Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée des Petites Entreprises
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon. Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	Associate Minister of Housing / Ministre associé du Logement

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué à la Santé mentale et à la Lutte contre les dépendances
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Vaugeois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	