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Mercredi
1^{er} avril 2026

Speaker: Honourable Donna Skelly
Clerk: Trevor Day

Présidente : L'honorable Donna Skelly
Greffier : Trevor Day

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 1 April 2026

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 1^{er} avril 2026

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

1000401924 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2026

Ms. Bell moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr21, An Act to revive 1000401924 Ontario Inc.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 89(b), the bill is ordered for third reading.

1000401924 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2026

Ms. Bell moved third reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr21, An Act to revive 1000401924 Ontario Inc.

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

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

1000401927 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2026

Ms. Bell moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr22, An Act to revive 1000401927 Ontario Inc.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 89(b), the bill is ordered for third reading.

1000401927 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2026

Ms. Bell moved third reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr22, An Act to revive 1000401927 Ontario Inc.

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

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

668986 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2026

Mr. Vanthof moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr28, An Act to revive 668986 Ontario Inc.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 89(b), the bill is ordered for third reading.

668986 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2026

Mr. Vanthof moved third reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr28, An Act to revive 668986 Ontario Inc.

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

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE
OF ST. CATHARINES IN ONTARIO
ACT, 2026

Mr. Dowie moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr34, An Act to incorporate the Roman Catholic Bishop of St. Catharines as a corporation sole.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 89(b), the bill is ordered for third reading.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE
OF ST. CATHARINES IN ONTARIO
ACT, 2026

Mr. Dowie moved third reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr34, An Act to incorporate the Roman Catholic Bishop of St. Catharines as a corporation sole.

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

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

HOLY TRINITY RESTAURANT INC.
ACT, 2026

Mr. Blais moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr9, An Act to revive Holy Trinity Restaurant Inc.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 89(b), the bill is ordered for third reading.

HOLY TRINITY RESTAURANT INC.
ACT, 2026

Mr. Blais moved third reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr9, An Act to revive Holy Trinity Restaurant Inc.

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

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

1955274 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2026

Mr. David Smith moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr12, An Act to revive 1955274 Ontario Inc.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 89(b), the bill is ordered for third reading.

1955274 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2026

Mr. David Smith moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr12, An Act to revive 1955274 Ontario Inc.

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

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

0910

FARIS TEAM MORTGAGE
BROKERAGE CORP. ACT, 2026

Madame Gallagher Murphy moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr13, An Act to revive Faris Team Mortgage Brokerage Corp.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 89(b), the bill is ordered for third reading.

FARIS TEAM MORTGAGE
BROKERAGE CORP. ACT, 2026

Madame Gallagher Murphy moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr13, An Act to revive Faris Team Mortgage Brokerage Corp.

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

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

JARM HOLDINGS INVESTMENTS LTD.
ACT, 2026

Madame Gallagher Murphy moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr14, An Act to revive Jarm Holdings Investments Ltd.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 89(b), the bill is ordered for third reading.

JARM HOLDINGS INVESTMENTS LTD.
ACT, 2026

Madame Gallagher Murphy moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr14, An Act to revive Jarm Holdings Investments Ltd.

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

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

PICKERING COLLEGE ACT, 2026

Madame Gallagher Murphy moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr19, An Act respecting Pickering College.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 89(b), the bill is ordered for third reading.

PICKERING COLLEGE ACT, 2026

Madame Gallagher Murphy moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr19, An Act respecting Pickering College.

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

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

1505756 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2026

Ms. Smith moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr24, An Act to revive 1505756 Ontario Inc.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 89(b), the bill is ordered for third reading.

1505756 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2026

Ms. Smith moved third reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr24, An Act to revive 1505756 Ontario Inc.

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

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

ACME RESTORATION INC. ACT, 2026

Ms. Smith moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr25, An Act to revive Acme Restoration Inc.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 89(b), the bill is ordered for third reading.

ACME RESTORATION INC. ACT, 2026

Ms. Smith moved third reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr25, An Act to revive Acme Restoration Inc.

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

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

1758195 ONTARIO LTD. ACT, 2026

Ms. Smith moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr26, An Act to revive 1758195 Ontario Ltd.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 89(b), the bill is ordered for third reading.

1758195 ONTARIO LTD. ACT, 2026

Ms. Smith moved third reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr26, An Act to revive 1758195 Ontario Ltd.

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

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

PEMBROKE AND AREA AIRPORT
COMMISSION ACT, 2026

MPP Denault moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr35, An Act to amend the Pembroke and Area Airport Commission Act, 1992.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 89(b), the bill is ordered for third reading.

PEMBROKE AND AREA AIRPORT
COMMISSION ACT, 2026

MPP Denault moved third reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr35, An Act to amend the Pembroke and Area Airport Commission Act, 1992.

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

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

PLAN TO PROTECT ONTARIO
ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2026LOI DE 2026 SUR LE PLAN
POUR PROTÉGER L'ONTARIO
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 31, 2026, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

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

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

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Good morning. I appreciate the opportunity to join the debate today on Bill 97, Plan to Protect Ontario Act, which proposes to implement budget measures further to the tabling of our government's budget last week.

Budget 2026 outlines our Ontario government's plan to protect Ontario by building the most competitive, resilient and self-reliant economy in the G7. It is a road map to create jobs, attract investment, lower costs for businesses and workers, keep life affordable for all, and make targeted investments in key public services that support our long-term prosperity.

I want to take a few minutes to highlight several aspects of this plan to protect Ontario in relation to my roles as Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks as well as Acting Minister of Infrastructure.

0920

First, on the infrastructure side, budget 2026 advances the most ambitious capital plan in our province's history,

with more than \$210 billion in planned infrastructure investments over the next 10 years. This includes \$37 billion in this fiscal year alone, 2026-27. This includes building highways, transit and community infrastructure to keep workers on the job, thereby strengthening Ontario's economy and ensuring communities thrive for generations to come.

We have also increased funding to the health and safety water stream of the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program, or MHIP. This increase is \$700 million, for a total investment of \$875 million. This funding is supporting 120 projects across 127 municipalities and First Nations communities to build, expand and/or rehabilitate aging water, waste water, stormwater, flood and erosion infrastructure, protecting housing that would otherwise be at risk.

Through the other two MHIP streams—the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund, HEWSF, and the Housing-Enabling Core Servicing Stream, HECS—we are helping to unlock new housing opportunities.

Since we launched MHIP in 2024, about 800,000 additional new homes have been made possible across Ontario, and some 375,000 existing homes are protected from health and safety risk.

The Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program is also enabling housing development by building core infrastructure projects, such as roads and water systems, to support growing and developing communities.

Madam Speaker, as we work to build the Ontario of tomorrow, our government is also looking at ways to improve processes, procedures and practices that have been holding this important work back.

Last fall, as Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, I announced our Ontario government's plan to improve the Ontario conservation authorities system through the amalgamation of conservation authorities and by ensuring province-wide standards to better align conservation efforts with provincial priorities for housing, infrastructure and economic growth.

In the months since that fall 2025 announcement, we consulted extensively on proposed boundaries for the consolidation of conservation authorities, and we gathered very important feedback to inform our plans. We met with conservation authorities, municipalities, Indigenous communities and a wide range of stakeholders. These consultations included six regional workshops that engaged directly with conservation authorities and municipal leadership.

And on March 10, 2026, I announced the next steps in our government's plans to strengthen conservation and to protect communities across Ontario.

Madam Speaker, Ontario currently has a fragmented system of conservation authorities, and each of those has different policies, different standards, different fees and different levels of staffing and technical capabilities. These inconsistencies have hampered the ability of conservation authorities to perform their duties and to properly fulfill their core mandate. And this has led to unpredictable and inconsistent turnaround times for

approvals. That has created uncertainty and delays for farmers, for homeowners, for landowners, for builders, all of whom seek permits from conservation authorities.

That is why our Ontario government has proposed a new, regional model for conservation authorities. This model would strengthen watershed management, improve service delivery, and continue to protect local knowledge and decision-making.

So Bill 97 includes amendments to the Conservation Authorities Act that, if passed, would begin the process of consolidating the current 36 conservation authorities into the nine new regional conservation authorities that we're proposing. The proposed conservation authorities are:

- the Northwestern Ontario Regional Conservation Authority, for the Thunder Bay area;

- the Northeastern Ontario Regional Conservation Authority, for the Timmins, Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury and North Bay areas;

- the Lake Huron Regional Conservation Authority;

- the Western Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority;

- the Eastern Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority;

- the Western Lake Ontario Regional Conservation Authority;

- the Central Lake Ontario Regional Conservation Authority;

- the Eastern Lake Ontario Regional Conservation Authority; and

- the St. Lawrence River Regional Conservation Authority.

If passed, this consolidation would take effect in early 2027; in fact, schedule 3 to the bill suggests February 1, 2027. This will give us the time that we need for a smooth, coordinated transition without any disruption to current services, permits or partnerships.

An important aspect of the new structure is that it is watershed-based, maintaining the natural hydrological boundaries for effective watershed management.

By consolidating into nine optimized regional conservation authorities, we could reduce administrative duplication while delivering consistent provincial standards, modern tools and strengthened capacity. It would mean stronger flood resilience, clearer processes for municipalities and permit applicants, and better support for housing and infrastructure projects, all while maintaining the science-based decisions that people and businesses expect.

Madam Speaker, it is important to highlight that the new regional conservation authorities would continue to be independent, municipally governed organizations. They would continue to fulfill their provincially mandated programs, such as managing flooding and other natural hazards, drinking water source protection, and, of course, the management of their lands and recreational trails, ensuring public access to local nature areas and outdoor activities.

I also want to take this opportunity to emphasize two very important points. First, there will be no reduction in staffing levels. And secondly, local expertise will remain

central to conservation work. This is something that we heard loud and clear from our consultations—the need to ensure that local decision-making is never lost.

Our plan contained in the legislation currently before this House would require each regional conservation authority, once consolidated, to establish one or more local watershed councils. These could be made up of individuals from municipalities, Indigenous communities and the local community. These watershed councils would help identify local priorities and ensure that watershed management continues to be informed by the people who know their watersheds best.

Additionally, as outlined in the legislation, the proposed new regional conservation authorities would continue to be governed by municipalities with members appointed by upper-tier and single-tier municipalities across their jurisdictions. This structure would ensure that decision-making remains balanced, local and accountable.

If passed, the transition to nine new conservation authorities will be overseen by the new Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency, which was created by Bill 68 last fall. This agency will work to ensure that every conservation authority has the tools and the resources they need to deliver effective watershed management today and into the future. To support the agency's work, our government is providing new additional annual funding of \$9 million. During the transition, these funds will be used to help transition. After the transition is complete, this additional annual funding—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Hon. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Good morning, colleagues. I wanted to—

Interjection.

Hon. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Yes, I know. I'm getting to my question.

I wanted to start by saying hi to my grandmother in Poland, who is watching the debate this morning.

Remarks in Polish.

And now, on to my question for the Acting Minister of Infrastructure: Through this budget and in previous budgets, we have been working diligently, hand in hand, to use surplus government lands to build important social projects, like long-term care. For example, the surplus lands in Hamilton and Aurora have been successfully sold to parties, and now we have begun construction on long-term care.

0930

Can the minister explain to us why it is so important that we use government surplus lands and invest in social projects like long-term care?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I thank the minister for the question. This is an important consideration.

Obviously, the province of Ontario has an extensive realty footprint, and when it comes to how we utilize that real estate for the benefit of all Ontarians, we have to look at important social programs like expanding our long-term-care capacity. So, following the strict protocols for utilizing surplus land and designating it for purposes other

than what it was originally there for, and to be pragmatic and to address the very important need to build long-term-care homes, we are deploying this surplus real estate plan to assist in building.

The situation before was that only a few hundred long-term-care beds were built under the previous government. We are changing that, with 58,000 being our target.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Ms. Jessica Bell: This a question to the member for Durham.

In response to the budget, all of the major education unions representing teachers and educational assistants released a statement saying that this budget fails students: "Despite the government's messaging, per-student funding (once adjusted for inflation) remains lower than when this government first took office."

We know that EQAO results show that students are not meeting grade level standards. The majority of students in grade 6 are not meeting grade level standards for math, for example.

How is this government going to increase and improve learning outcomes if they're cutting funding to schools?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I appreciate the question from the member opposite.

When it comes to investments in our education system, this government has exceeded all other governments before in terms of real, new education spending. Since taking office in 2018, education is second only to health care in terms of the investments that we're making.

In this particular budget, the member may recall seeing the support for teachers. It seems to us that the idea that teachers have to be out of pocket for classroom supports seems to be inconsistent with supporting teachers in terms of their mandate. So we have created direct-to-teachers funding of up to \$750 for classroom supplies and other supports for teachers that they can spend in the best interests of the students as they see fit, in their wisdom.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to thank the minister for his remarks this morning. He talked about so many things that are so important to building Ontario and providing housing.

Not too long ago, the minister came to my riding—it was a very cold day—and we talked about water investments in our community and how that enabling system will allow for more housing.

We've also had a lot of really great positive announcements recently that are going to make it a lot easier for people, especially homebuyers, to make purchases.

I'm just wondering if the minister could provide more information about housing in our communities and how that budget transfers into the betterment of housing in Ontario.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I appreciate the question from the member for Thornhill. She's an excellent member and an excellent advocate for her community.

It was a cold day that we were in Vaughan making that important announcement. I'm happy to say it's now April

1, we're into spring, and the weather is getting warmer—I say that as Minister of the Environment, proudly.

This question raises a matter for the Ministry of Infrastructure, where I have the acting role. We are making these investments to enable housing, to enable the building of the Ontario of tomorrow, to get shovels in the ground, and that means we need the core infrastructure to be funded. That's why we launched the MHIP, the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program, in 2024. We have targeted \$3 billion of the \$4 billion associated with that plan, and there's \$1 billion more to go and more streams of funding to come for all municipalities to enable housing and to enable building.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

MPP Wayne Gates: In my riding, seniors and young families—their rents are between \$2,200 to \$2,700 for a two-bedroom apartment.

It was your government that took off the rent controls on new builds in 2019. That drove rents to go up.

This budget does nothing to bring in real rent control or lower grocery prices.

How does the government expect young families and seniors to get ahead when their biggest costs are still rising faster than their wages and their pensions?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Well, I appreciate the member's question. He no doubt has observed—as Canadians and Ontarians coast to coast to coast observed recently—that our Premier, our cabinet team, the Prime Minister and members of his cabinet team stood with the mayor of Toronto just earlier this week, announcing measures to bring about attainable, affordable housing—new housing included. Housing doesn't come in one shape or size; it does include purpose-built rentals. The announcement in Etobicoke was actually at a construction site for that very purpose, purpose-built rentals, because the rental housing market is equally important as the new housing market, as the resale housing market.

Also, our transit-oriented communities are about building housing, office space and retail space close to transit. That is the way of the future.

I'm very proud, as well, of our transit-oriented program, which includes rental housing.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Through this budget bill, the government is choosing to invest significantly in expanding correctional facilities. We heard all about building more jails, and we've heard the Solicitor General put a lot of emphasis on this big investment. It's all about keeping criminals behind bars and locking up people who are creating problems in the community. However, what we see in communities is people asking for more mental health support, more addiction treatment and supportive housing to deal with the problem, instead of locking up people.

So I'd like to hear from you, if you have any information to share to show that prioritizing incarceration over prevention—and provide evidence that this approach is

actually improving community safety rather than simply cycling more people through the justice system.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I appreciate the member's question.

I believe that that member and her party, along with, I think, every other member of the House but one, supported our Keeping Criminals Behind Bars Act. We appreciate that support, because there are matters and measures where we come together and we agree on a priority.

Respect for the rule of law is undermined when we have lawlessness and disorder. That cannot stand. So it's very, very important that we keep violent criminals behind bars. That means increasing correctional facility capacity so that we have the ability to properly and reasonably house those who are in custody, to keep them away from those they might otherwise harm.

We are moving forward to make sure that we have the ability and the capacity to put away those who would harm individuals or the broader community.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Quick question?

Mr. John Jordan: Speaker, the high cost of living is a major concern, especially among our young people.

Can the minister tell us what is included in this budget that will assist our young people in getting into the housing market?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I appreciate the member's question.

It's absolutely transformational. Again, working across all levels of government, our government—Minister Bethlenfalvy, Premier Ford, our entire team—is laser-focused on the opportunities that are now going to be unleashed over the next year with the elimination of HST on new housing. We encourage, then, with this measure contained in Bill 97, everyone to consider getting into—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Further debate?

MPP Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to rise on behalf of my constituents in Windsor West to talk about the provincial government's recently tabled budget. We all know that budgets are about priorities. What we've seen from this government is that their priorities are about them and what benefits them and their donors and their well-connected friends, and not the people of this province.

When we found that the government was tabling a budget, we, New Democrats, were talking to our constituents, asking, "What are some of the key things that you need to see from this government in this budget? What are your priorities? What are you struggling with right now?" And there were some top points—about five of them. One of the questions was, does it lower the cost of rent or groceries? That's what people wanted to know. The answer is no; this budget does not lower the cost of rent or groceries. People wanted to know if it's going to fix the health care system or the education system. Is this budget going to stop this government from their drive to privatize health care?

And to be clear, the government wouldn't—

Interjection.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Actions speak louder than words over there, sister.

This government is driving taxpayer dollars into private health care. They are paying more for procedures in private health care than they would for that same procedure in the public system. They are funnelling money—

Interjections.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: If the member from Peterborough—would you take a deep breath? Settle down. Let me finish my thoughts.

0940

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I cannot hear the member present. Thank you.

Continue.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I just want to be clear. The member from Peterborough was trying to shout over me and then basically—

Interjection.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: There he goes again, basically accusing me of making things up.

The people of this province know when—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I'm going to ask a second time to please come to order. I cannot hear the member's presentation.

Continue.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: When people are getting treated in the hallways, that's a problem.

Hallway health care started under the Liberals. This Conservative government campaigned on ending hallway health care, and it has gotten worse; in fact, you've expanded it. You have expanded it into linen closets—so any room that they can find.

People are waiting hours for care. We have emergency departments closing and hospitals closing and urgent cares closing across this province, as this government is funnelling money into the shareholders' pockets of private, for-profit health care.

So the member opposite can try to shout me down all he wants. That's the reality. That's the reality of your constituents, my constituents and everybody's constituents in this place.

Speaker, the people of Ontario asked another question about this budget: Does it build homes that people can afford? I can tell you that as we have a historic number of people who are experiencing homelessness in this province, from young children right through to seniors, this budget fails to address their needs. Those folks can't purchase an \$800,000 home like this government is pushing. What they need is deeply affordable housing. What they need is for you to bring back the rent control that you cut.

People have asked, does it create good jobs and opportunities? We are seeing workers—health care workers, education workers, those in manufacturing, the folks at Diageo—out of work. Some 700,000 people are unemployed in this province under this government's watch—another historic number for this government. Over 100,000 of those unemployed are youth. And this government's response is to cut OSAP and charge students interest. Why

on earth are you trying to make money off the backs of the young people in this province? Why are you saddling them with debt when we need to be training more professionals? We need to be encouraging the youth to go to post-secondary education. Why are you making it harder for them and their families? Why are you making it harder for those 700,000 people who are unemployed to be able to afford to go back to college or university, to upskill or retrain for a better chance of employment?

The biggest question people wanted to know about in this budget was, will the government spend their money responsibly? And that is a big fat F. I'm going to explain that.

This government, who likes to pretend they are very fiscally responsible, are paying \$16 billion in 2026-27 just on borrowing, on debt—\$16 billion in the year on debt, which is more than the government is actually putting into post-secondary education.

They've spent \$2.2 billion on the Toronto waterfront, their fantasy island project, which includes a privately owned luxury spa in downtown Toronto—\$2.2 billion. By the time the 99-year contract expires, which this government gave that spa—the bankrupt spa that you gave money to will cost the taxpayers \$1 trillion. That's your priority. A record number of people experiencing homelessness, a record, historic number of people going to food banks—food banks can't keep up. And this government is spending \$2.2 billion—which will eventually cost taxpayers \$1 trillion—on a privately owned, bankrupt luxury spa in downtown Toronto.

They gave \$10 million to a strip club owner, and \$100 million went to the Premier's campaign manager—tax dollars.

That is this government's priorities—not the people of this province.

I want to read something from the Ombudsman. This is specific to the MCCA, children with developmental disabilities, children with mental health struggles, complex needs. This is what the Ombudsman said:

“When it comes to some of society's most vulnerable, including youth involved in the child welfare sector and those with complex needs,” the Ombudsman said that “his biggest concern is a lack of resources.

“Whether it's being able to provide adequate care and support within a community ... whether it's having the resources in terms of placements and not having to put up kids in hotels and in offices and trailers and these temporary, unacceptable situations, it speaks to a lack of resources and lack of options'....

“Children's aid societies (CASs), for example, have for years been saying they 'don't have enough options, we don't have enough resources, we want to do better'....

“I think that is my biggest concern ... the lack of adequate resources for these agencies that have such crucial and important services to provide, and the need is so acute for these services.”

Yet there is a cut to the MCCA budget in this current budget. We have parents who are stretched to the brink because they can't access community supports because

this government is not investing in them appropriately or they're cutting services. They feel like they have no other option but to surrender their children to children's aid, who don't have the funding or resources. And these children, in some cases, because of a lack of resources, are being trafficked; they're being introduced to drugs and alcohol. That's the government's priorities.

Speaker, I don't have much time left, but I want to read a Globe and Mail article that came out today that is specifically about the freedom-of-information law change, the government's change in the law to get around the court system, because they were told they had to release government documents that the Premier and staff were hiding on their personal devices. This is what experts have said in the Globe and Mail today:

"Proposed amendments to Ontario's freedom-of-information law would make the province the most secretive in Canada ... despite Premier Doug Ford's assurances that they would be in line with legislation in the rest of the country.

"The changes, introduced as part of the provincial budget on March 26, would put the offices of Mr. Ford, his cabinet ministers and the many PC MPPs named parliamentary assistants completely out of reach of the Ontario's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act."

What they are saying is that this government is going—regardless of what they say—well beyond any other jurisdiction.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague from Windsor West for her comments this morning. She began her deputation this morning talking about listening to constituents, hearing from constituents.

So I was wondering, if I were to go to Windsor West, would I hear from small business owners about the small business tax—over 30% cut on the tax. Over 350,000 small businesses in Ontario will benefit from this. Would they say that it's a good measure? And would the member opposite then support that measure in this budget?

0950

MPP Lisa Gretzky: As we know, you don't vote on one item in the budget. So if you wanted members on all sides of this House to vote on one or two specific things, pull them out of the budget—pull them out of the budget. Instead, what you've done is put in cuts to programming; what you've done is put in the FOI law changes, rather than doing that as separate legislation and being transparent about it.

Do you know what hurts businesses? When 700,000 people in this province are out of work and can't afford to support those businesses; when we have a historic number of people visiting food banks—children, right through to seniors—who can't afford to support those businesses because they can't even afford to keep a roof over their head or food on the table.

So if you really want to support businesses, then what you need to be doing is investing in the programs that will

actually help people in this province, and you need to get the cost of housing and food down.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

MPP Wayne Gates: I've already said this this morning, but Niagara seniors and young families—their rents are between \$2,200 and \$2,700, to get a two-bedroom apartment, almost unaffordable. And what caused that was that this government took real rent controls off new builds in 2019, which has caused the rents to go up—and charge whatever they like.

So I'd like to ask the member, can you speak to Windsor and what you're hearing from your renters in your community about the lack of real rent control and affordability measures in this budget?

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Thank you for the question.

What I can tell you is, almost daily, we have people coming into my office or people calling my office, desperate for this government to do something, to bring in real rent control, to get the cost of housing down. We have people who come in in tears because in the next week or the next couple of days they are going to have to move out of the apartment they're in because they can't afford it anymore and they've been evicted.

People all over this province—and it is reflected in the historic number of people going to food banks, relying on food banks. It is reflected in the number of people—children, right through seniors—who are experiencing homelessness.

What this government needs to do to make life more affordable is to bring in real rent control and build truly, deeply, permanently affordable housing.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I want to thank the member for her comments on poverty and food banks.

Just last weekend, I was speaking with the people who run the North York food bank—one in 10 rely on food banks. It is institutionalized poverty at this time. Why can we all see it, but they can't?

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Thank you for the question.

What we're also seeing is food banks that cannot keep up. Literally, the shelves are bare. And we're in a situation where life is so unaffordable under this government, due to their policies, that even community cannot donate because they're struggling to get by.

To answer your question, I don't think it's a matter of, they don't see it; it's a matter of, they don't care. They don't care. All you have to do is look at where they shovel the money—into for-profit health care, into a privately owned luxury spa in downtown Toronto. How does that house or feed the people in my community? Explain that to me. When they're giving \$10 million to a strip club owner and \$100 million to the Premier's campaign manager, it tells you that they see it—they hear it from their constituents—but they just don't care.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Ms. Laura Smith: I listened to the member opposite.

I know that affordability is a huge issue for our communities, and we were talking about that earlier in the House.

One of the things that our government is doing to increase the supply of housing is, obviously, the measures—we dropped the HST for all homebuyers, which was a great announcement.

Also, we created the Building Ontario Fund, which is an innovative model that allows Ontario companies to partner with Canadian institution investors to deliver projects that might otherwise not move forward, including long-term-care homes, student housing and affordable housing. This approach leverages Ontario's strong balance sheets and credit rating.

Through you, Madam Speaker, I'm asking, will the member support this budget and the Building Ontario Fund to help deliver long-term-care beds and housing for Ontarians, or will they once again vote no and block the infrastructure communities desperately needed?

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Maybe the member opposite hasn't been paying attention, but you have a majority government, and you do whatever the heck you want. That's what you do. You do whatever the heck you want. So you can't put it on this side of the House for your failures.

Speaker, I'm going to say again—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Can you speak through the Chair, please?

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Yes.

To answer the member opposite's question, you cannot cherry-pick minor things—a tax break that's for a year. And they talk about \$800,000 homes. The people who are going to food banks—the 700,000 people out of work—can't afford a \$200,000 or \$300,000 home, let alone an \$800,000 home.

What this government needs to do is bring back the rent control that they cut. They need to bring down the cost of groceries. They need to address the fact that 700,000 people in this province are unemployed, and that we have a historic number of people going to food banks. And they need to reverse their cuts to OSAP.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to my colleague for debate on the budget bill. I want to thank you, as well, for bringing forward the freedom-of-information legislation that is buried in this bill; in fact, it's buried as one paragraph on page 139.

While the rest of Ontario is focused on why the Conservative government doesn't care about the cost of living, health care, education or building homes—I think it's important to the public and Ontario to understand that the Conservative government—the Premier and many of the members are under RCMP criminal investigation for the greenbelt grab that tried to transfer \$19 million to their wealthiest, greediest donors, while not building any homes for anybody at all.

I'm wondering, why would the government think that it's appropriate, in the midst of a criminal investigation, when the Premier lost the case to conceal his private cell-

phone, which he said multiple times, probably hundreds of times, that he does public business on—why would they think it's appropriate to try to hide that information to prevent them from going to jail?

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I appreciate the question from my colleague.

Yes, the government is under RCMP investigation and, yes, the Premier lost a court case. He was ordered to release the government documents from his personal cell-phone that shouldn't have been on there in the first place. He now has a high-ranking former staff member who has those documents in his Gmail account, and they're fighting that. That is the only reason why they are changing the FOI laws. And they put it in the budget. They put it into the budget bill. Tell me how that actually makes life more affordable for people in this province—you putting that law in.

Speaker, there have been experts who have weighed in, and one of them has stated: "It looks like a way for lobbyists and developers to just come into minister's offices ... and do what they will. Because nobody will ever know."

Someone else said, "It's as if they're building a brick wall around each of the ministers, around the Premier, and saying the public has no right to know what happens within that walled-in space."

That is what the FOI legislation is doing.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you to the member opposite for her remarks this morning.

I want to talk to her about Ontario's energy demand and the projected increase of up to 90% in energy demand by 2050. Without action, that puts growth of jobs, affordability and competitiveness of the Ontario economy at risk. Those are good-paying jobs for individuals across the province of Ontario. Energy security is economic security.

So, through you, Madam Speaker: Will the member opposite support our plan to power Ontario's future?

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I'll just remind the member opposite that it was actually the Conservatives who started the privatization of health care, which has driven the costs through the roof.

Manufacturers, homeowners, businesses have all said—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I recognize the member for Toronto—St. Paul's.

1000

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I rise today to speak about Bill 97, Plan to Protect Ontario Act (Budget Measures).

As we've been hearing, budgets are not just about dollars and cents, but priorities and choices that are being made; perhaps most importantly, they're about trust.

Trust is something that has been on my mind a lot recently, especially with a curious section in this budget that is directly related to trust.

When this government asks Ontarians to trust it with billion of dollars, sweeping regulatory authority and the power to reshape public institutions, Ontarians have the right to know what their government is doing with their money.

That's why I want to focus my remarks today on schedule 7 in this budget bill, involving the changes to Ontario's freedom-of-information laws, which have already been nicely highlighted by members beside me. Yes, buried inside the massive budget bill is something that is deeply troubling: changes that weaken transparency, that limit oversight, that reduce accountability, at the very moment when Ontarians deserve more of all three.

Before entering public life, I spent the majority of my career as a journalist, and that work taught me something: Access to information is not an inconvenience for government. It is not red tape. It is not optional. Access to information is the foundation of accountability in a democracy. Remember that.

Freedom-of-information laws, or FOIs, are not just tools for reporters; they are tools for everyone. They're tools for families. They're tools for researchers—everyday people who just want to understand how decisions are made. When governments start to restrict access to information, it sends a message—not about efficiency, but about secrecy.

The most alarming change in schedule 7 is that this bill creates a blanket exemption from freedom-of-information laws for records in the custody and control of ministers and their offices—so, not limited exemptions, not carefully tailored protections; a blanket exemption that includes records held by ministers, parliamentary assistants, political staff. What makes this even more concerning is that this exemption is retroactive. That means records created before this bill passes, records that Ontarians already have the right to access, could suddenly be placed beyond reach—wow—extinguishing existing rights. It invalidates decisions that have already granted access. That isn't modernization, the one nice excuse being put before us. That is rewriting the rules after the fact, and this does not instill trust. Transparency laws are supposed to protect the public's right to know; not protect political offices or officers from scrutiny.

And schedule 7 doesn't stop there. It also introduces a series of changes that will make it even slower and harder for Ontarians to access information. Timelines for responses are now extended from 30 to 45 business days. Institutions will now be allowed to have multiple extensions, including for vague reasons such as employees being unavailable. Requests can be broken into staged releases, with applicants required to respond in writing within that really tight time frame or risk having the request completely abandoned. Once those staged plans are accepted, further changes by the institution cannot be appealed.

Ontario already struggles with FOI delays. Just ask anybody who has tried to get one. In many cases, people wait months; sometimes they wait far longer to receive records that should be accessible. These changes don't fix that problem; oh, no, they make it worse. They create more delay, more barriers, more frustration, and ultimately, less accountability and, absolutely, less trust.

That means less visibility into how government handles sensitive personal information, less transparency when

things go wrong, when you're talking about personal information banks. And this at a time when data security is more important than ever—weakening transparency around personal information, not modernizing it. It is an absolute risk.

Schedule 7 also weakens independent oversight. Currently, Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner plays a central role in reviewing data standards and protecting privacy rights. This bill shifts that responsibility to a chief digital and data officer, an internal official appointed by the government. Mandatory reviews are removed. Independent checks are reduced.

Speaker, independence matters. Oversight only works when it's separate from the institutions being overseen. When power shifts from independent officers to internal appointees, accountability weakens, whether intentionally or not, and Ontarians lose confidence in the system that was meant to protect them.

All these changes raise that fundamental question: Why is this government making it harder for Ontarians to see how decisions are made? Why is transparency being treated as optional?

Transparency is not an obstacle to good government; it is the evidence of good government.

There's also the principle of fairness at stake here. Freedom-of-information laws are not just used by journalists or lawyers. Remember, they are used by everyday Ontarians—parents looking for answers about school safety; residents trying to understand environmental decisions like, say, the changes to the conservation authorities and all this land that we're suddenly wondering what it's going to be used for; advocates working to improve public services; and communities seeking accountability. When access to information becomes harder, slower and more restricted, it is not politicians who suffer; it is the public. And when trust erodes, rebuilding it becomes far harder than protecting it in the first place.

Governments may argue that these changes are about efficiency, about managing workload, about adapting to modern technology. But efficiency—supposedly—can't come at the cost of accountability, modernization can't come at the cost of transparency, and convenience can't come at the cost of democratic oversight, especially not in a budget bill, where billions of dollars and countless decisions are being made, affecting Ontarians' lives.

Transparency protects governments just as much as it protects citizens. When decisions are open to scrutiny, confidence grows. When information is accessible, trust deepens. And when oversight is strong, mistakes can be corrected before they become scandalous. Weakening transparency does not eliminate risk; it absolutely increases it.

So I urge this government: Please, reconsider these changes. Withdraw the blanket exemption for ministerial records and retroactive exemptions.

Transparency is not a partisan issue. Accountability is not ideological. These are democratic principles and they are worth defending.

Remember, it all comes down to trust. Lack of trust leads people to stop believing in government.

So show the people you have nothing to hide and exempt section 7 of this bill.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Stephen Blais: I'd like to thank my colleague for her remarks around the freedom-of-information changes this government is making.

As we know, the government took 100 days off over Christmas to hide from the accountability of this Legislature, to avoid the scrutiny and accountability of the opposition. During that 100 days off, their big idea was to also avoid accountability and scrutiny from the media and the public by retroactively changing freedom-of-information laws.

My question to my friend from Toronto: Given their choice to avoid accountability from the opposition and avoid accountability from the public and from the media, what do think it is that they're hiding?

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you for the question.

Yes. It's not freedom from information; it's freedom of information.

There's so much we are waiting to see, from cellphone records to all kinds of documentation that we know has been carried on outside of government devices. There are countless things that we are looking for answers on: how they come to conclusions; their donors and friends; what kinds of relationships there were that impacted things, yes, from the greenbelt, with that RCMP investigation and further issues, potential scandals, that we're waiting to learn about. So we just don't know exactly how much there is there that we are missing, but one thing for sure is, they are definitely trying to hide whatever is in, say, the Premier's cellphone, that was ordered to be released, and the lengths that they're going to, to protect that information from going public, is frightening.

1010

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Speaker, under the previous Liberal government, the major credit agencies not only downgraded the credit rating of the province of Ontario once, but they downgraded it twice.

But under our government, the major credit agencies have upgraded our credit rating not only once, but twice. That is two major upgrades of our credit rating, according to the major credit agencies for Ontario.

My question to the member opposite is this: Will she join the major credit agencies that have upgraded our credit rating, by endorsing our government's budget?

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Sorry, that's the half-a-trillion-dollar debt that we're looking at right now with this government?

What I am endorsing right now is what I'm talking about: freedom of information. So that's your answer. I'm talking about freedom of information right now. Ask me anything about it.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

MPP Wayne Gates: I don't know if you noticed, but in the budget, this government is amalgamating the conservation authorities, from 37 down to nine. We know that we won the battle on forcing this government to stop developing on the greenbelt. This is nothing more than a backdoor way to get at the greenbelt. If you amalgamate all the conservation authorities, it's going to allow their friends and their developers to develop on the greenbelt. That's what this is really about.

Niagara—we're going to be amalgamated with Toronto. Can you imagine? With all the greenbelt we have and everything that's going on down in Niagara, they're going to amalgamate us with Toronto. I don't understand that.

So my question to you is clear: Do you agree with the statement I just made—that it's nothing more than another way to develop on our greenbelt and our protected lands?

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I would have to say that is a very strong suspicion. I would absolutely say the purpose—when you put in measures to restrict access to something, to restrict the availability of information that highlights decision-making, I would absolutely suspect anything and every motivation this government has.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I will move right now into members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

RIDING OF MISSISSAUGA EAST— COOKSVILLE

MPP Silvia Gualtieri: I rise today to share a snapshot of the incredible community spirit alive in Mississauga East—Cooksville. Over the past several weeks, I have had the privilege of connecting with residents of all ages, backgrounds and cultures, with each experience reinforcing the strength and diversity of our community.

In February, my constituency office launched a free community skate at the Burnhamthorpe Community Centre. Week after week, families, friends and neighbours came together, filling the ice with laughter and connection.

I also welcomed students from Brian W. Fleming Public School right here at Queen's Park.

Our seniors, too, continue to lead with strength and clarity. I was honoured to address the Mississauga Seniors' Council, representing more than 50,000 members, hearing directly about their priorities.

I attended the launch of a regional bakery program at Father Michael Goetz Catholic Secondary School, equipping students with hands-on skills and pathways to a rewarding career.

February also brought celebrations. I marked Chinese Lunar New Year and Vietnamese Têt at city hall, highlighting our rich cultural fabric.

I recognized the very first hospitality workers of—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Members' statements?

SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Jessica Bell: I'd like to share a story about a constituent who recently came into my office, Daniel. Daniel came into my office exhausted and frustrated with how this government is treating people with developmental disabilities.

Daniel cares for his sister Nancy, who is 43 and developmentally disabled. She will always need support, and much of that responsibility falls on him. Recently, her disability support payments were suddenly cut off due to an administrative error. Daniel spent hours—days—trying to fix it in a system that does not treat him or his sister with respect. It's not because the caseworkers don't care. It's because they're overwhelmed and managing impossible caseloads.

But what troubled Daniel most was not the bureaucracy; it was Nancy's quality of life. Programs have been cancelled for Nancy; activities have gone. In his words, "People are being warehoused, not supported."

He's also worried about her safety. He shared reports of abuse in care settings, including an assault in Nancy's own building.

He said to me, "We are failing an entire cohort of vulnerable people who can't speak for themselves ... I can't take much more of it."

Daniel's story is not unique. There are over 250,000 people in Ontario who have developmental disabilities, and just as many family members carrying that care. They need more support. They need dignity. They need safety—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Members' statements?

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Constituents in my riding of Don Valley West are very concerned about the rise in break-ins and car thefts in our community.

One constituent wrote: "There have been countless home invasions and car thefts in our immediate neighbourhood ... it has become an almost nightly occurrence in recent weeks."

Last month, I held a town hall with our city of Toronto councillor, Rachel Chernos Lin, and our member of Parliament, Rob Oliphant. I'd like to thank them and the Toronto Police Service for their collaboration and for the police's attention to this issue.

But Speaker, this government is not giving enough resources to our provincial courts to process cases quickly enough.

The Ombudsman of Ontario says that the overcrowding in our provincial jails has led to reduced sentences and early parole "due to unlawful treatment behind bars. Some inmates have applied to have their charges—even murder charges—stayed."

Unfortunately, this year's budget shows that the justice sector will not get any more money for at least three years.

It's past time for this Conservative government to fix the system, which will be one real way for them to protect Ontario.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. John Jordan: In December, I was honoured to welcome the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to my riding of Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston. We were part of a very special day in Smiths Falls, as one of 28 HART hubs this government announced last March opened its doors. This HART hub is a welcome addition to health services in Lanark county. The Lanark Leeds and Grenville HART Hub is led by Lanark, Leeds and Grenville Addictions and Mental Health.

My sincere congratulations to Kim Gifford and her incredible staff for all their hard work and dedication over the last several months.

This funding represents vital partnerships and collaboration between this government; Lanark, Leeds and Grenville Addictions and Mental Health; the town of Smiths Falls; Lanark County Mental Health; Rideau Community Health Services; the Saumure Group of Companies; and other organizations.

I want to thank the great member from Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes for his advocacy and support.

The Lanark Leeds and Grenville HART Hub brings together mental health and addiction services, along with primary health services, transitional housing and social supports—all under one roof. It not only gives some of our most vulnerable residents a way out of crisis, but a pathway towards stability and hope.

Already, the Lanark Leeds and Grenville HART Hub has brought meaningful and lasting benefits to Smiths Falls and surrounding communities by creating a safe, welcoming space where individuals can access supports, resources and compassionate care.

LUTTE CONTRE LES INCENDIES DE FORÊT

M. Guy Bourgoin: Aujourd'hui marque le début de la saison des feux de forêt en Ontario. Alors que les feux deviennent plus fréquents et plus destructeurs, ce gouvernement coupe 121 millions de dollars dans la lutte contre les feux de forêt. Chaque année, la fumée force la fermeture d'autoroutes, menace notre santé et pose de sérieux risques pour les communautés du Nord et les Premières Nations.

Au-delà de la lutte contre les feux de forêt, on a besoin d'une stratégie de prévention pour mieux contrôler leur intensité. Faute de marché pour la biomasse, la fibre de bois n'est pas transformée et demeure dans la forêt, augmentant ainsi le risque des feux. Sans une stratégie forestière adéquate, nous n'avons pas les moyens de gérer

nos forêts, de retirer la fibre morte et sèche, de prévenir les feux de forêt, de les combattre efficacement, ni de développer des forêts durables.

1020

En réduisant directement le budget consacré à la lutte contre les feux de forêt, le gouvernement compromet le développement futur de nos forêts. J'espère que le gouvernement réalise que sa négligence met à risque les communautés du Nord et les Premières Nations.

EVENTS IN MARKHAM–UNIONVILLE

Mr. Billy Pang: Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to share some of the meaningful opportunities where I connected with the residents of Markham–Unionville during the recent winter recess. It was a privilege to meet with families, seniors, youth at their doors, and small business owners, through a variety of community events and visits, from a meet-and-greet at Markville mall to a mall walk at First Markham Place with the Premier and fellow MPPs, as well as many cultural and neighbourhood gatherings. These conversations were invaluable and ensured that the voices of our community are heard at Queen's Park.

I was also delighted to host a March break dim sum concert, bringing families together to celebrate music, culture and community spirit.

In addition, my office organized two Queen's Park tours for local families, helping residents better understand Ontario's legislative process and civic engagement.

Winter recess is always a meaningful time to reconnect and reflect, and I remain committed to serving the diverse and vibrant community of Markham–Unionville.

Stay connected.

MERRITTVILLE SPEEDWAY

Mr. Jeff Burch: It's an exciting time in my riding, as the Merrittville Speedway kicks off its 75th-anniversary season.

Opened on July 1, 1952, Merrittville Speedway is Canada's longest continuously operating racetrack. It was also the favourite pastime of legendary Welland MPP Mel Swart.

Owners Lorraine and Don Spiece have done a fantastic job of giving back to the community through their annual Christmas toy giveaway, bike giveaways and, in 2024, the distribution of 500 pizzas from Merrittville Wood Fired Pizza to individuals experiencing homelessness, in coordination with community organizations across Niagara.

This Saturday, April 4, is the third annual Merrittville Speedway Easter Eggstravaganza, offering free admission for families and children throughout the Niagara region. Every child aged 13 and under will receive free candy from each community partner station they visit.

These events have become cherished traditions in Niagara—including Victoria Day fireworks, nostalgia nights, wall of fame inductions, and Civic Holiday weekend celebrations in August; in September is the

fourth annual Drive Dreams car show, and in October the ninth annual fall craft and vendor market.

Merrittville Eats is located in front of the speedway and offers ice cream and wood-fired pizzas, along with beef brisket, ribs and fried chicken from the smokehouse.

Come join us for a fantastic anniversary season at the Merrittville Speedway. Everyone is welcome.

SHILO ROUSSEAU

MPP Bill Rosenberg: It has been a productive and eventful winter, including great funding announcements across Algoma–Manitoulin. I'm now looking ahead with anticipation to the arrival of spring.

Today I'd like to talk about my hometown, Thessalon, recognizing our very own athlete Shilo Rousseau, who had an incredible opportunity to compete in the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Milano Cortina. Shilo made her Olympic debut at the 2026 Winter Olympics in the sport of biathlon, competing in the women's 15K individual event, where she finished 78th, and placing 80th in the women's sprint. Shilo also had great World Cup results in the early part of the season, placing 26th and 21st.

Shilo is an emerging talent, demonstrating a strong combination of endurance, precision and competitive determination. With ongoing dedication and support, Shilo has the potential to make a meaningful impact in the sport and serve as an inspiration to developing athletes.

Shilo has applied to medical school and is awaiting a decision from the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. She has also had her undergraduate research published in *Comparative Biochemistry and Physiology Part A: Molecular and Integrative Physiology*, a peer-reviewed scientific journal.

It was truly wonderful to see our community come together in support of her journey as a rising athlete. We are also incredibly proud of Shilo's academic achievements and wish her continued success in all she does.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: During this season of Holy Week, Good Friday and Easter, we remember the miraculous story of sacrifice, hope and love. To the Christian community, happy Easter.

Speaker, I have had the opportunity on a few occasions to visit the Peel police communications centre and meet with the 911 dispatchers.

Ontarians know that when there is an emergency, there is one number to call: 911. Unfortunately, too often 911 is also being used for non-emergencies. In some areas, between 35% and 45% of 911 calls per day are non-emergencies.

Local police agencies have a 10-digit phone line for non-emergencies. But each region has its own number, so it's very difficult to remember.

That's why I introduced my private member's motion which would, if passed, propose standardizing an easy-to-remember three-digit non-emergency phone number. The

advantages are clear. If Ontarians remember the new non-emergency number, they will call it instead of 911. Since I first discussed this issue in 2021, we have had consultations and meetings to put this into action. Inspired by the idea, Toronto police piloted the *877 number last year and received over 11,000 phone calls in the first four months. This is a great success. We can do the same province-wide.

I look forward to discussing this more when we debate my motion next month.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: We have heard loud and clear in this House that budget 2026 is a disappointment for families looking for affordability and government to meet them in a time of dire need.

But do you know who else is disappointed with this government? Our farmers.

The members opposite quite frequently position themselves as the primary advocate in government for rural Ontario.

I called on this government to act, decisively, and invest in Ontario's agri-food industry when talk of trade issues surfaced. This sector contributes nearly \$51 billion to our provincial GDP and supports close to one million jobs. Let's be clear: That rivals the economic impact of the auto manufacturing sector.

Speaker, food manufacturing is a unique strength for the provincial economy, but without investment it cannot deliver its full potential.

Straight from the OFA's news release: "We are disappointed by the absence of direct policy aimed at expanding food processing capacity in Ontario. The budget did not introduce any targeted policies aimed at expanding Ontario's food processing sector."

Speaker, agricultural mentions in the budget are largely recycled news.

We could be changing the economic landscape in this province today if we established a dedicated agri-food processing growth fund, enhanced the risk management program, strengthened foodland and local initiatives, modernized wildlife damage compensation for farmers, and strengthened the agricultural impact assessment framework and resources.

This government continues to overlook and undervalue the very people who put food on our tables.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Folks, he's not here yet, but he was just in my office, so I know he's on his way. Soon to be in the Speaker's gallery today, we will have the former MPP for Stoney Creek from the 39th, 40th, 41st and 42nd Parliaments: Paul Miller.

And in the Speaker's gallery is a dear friend of mine, a former colleague—we used to share the anchor desk at CHCH—and she's also the former MPP for Stoney Creek, from the 38th Parliament: Jennifer Mossop. With Jennifer

is the Honourable Robert King, MP—he is the shadow minister of national security, MP for constituency 10, the Parliament of Bermuda—and his wife, Miriam Shaya-King.

1030

Also in the Speaker's gallery today: a cohort of interns from the Parliament of Canada's Parliamentary Internship Programme. They are here to learn about Ontario's Legislature and meet with their counterparts in the Ontario Legislature Internship Programme.

Please join me in warmly welcoming our guests to the Legislature.

Also here today: a constituent of mine from the riding of Flamborough—Glanbrook, Michael Treadgold, who is also the executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters, Grand Erie, Halton and Hamilton.

Welcome to Queen's Park.

MPP George Darouze: I would like to extend a warm welcome to the Carleton University students from the Carleton Campus Conservatives: Daisy, Matthew, Benjamin, Lauren, James, Evan and Colin. You represent the future leaders of our province, and it is wonderful to have you here today as you explore how our Legislature works.

I would also like to welcome the Carleton PC riding association's CFO, Reynold Peters.

And finally, I have the great pleasure of welcoming my amazing constituency office staff here at Queen's Park, who make sure things run smoothly in Carleton: Stephanie, Jane, Candice, Ethan and Owen, as well as my legislative assistant here at Queen's Park, Katherine.

I'm excited to have you all here today. Welcome to your House.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to welcome visitors here today for EDS and CCI advocacy day: Dr. Mendes Pereira, Dr. Laurent Bozec, and Susan Carleton of Canerecator Foundation.

I want to also acknowledge the Gesualdi family: Sydney, Kimberley, Giuseppe, Maria and Santo.

Welcome to the Legislature.

Hon. Kevin Holland: Visiting us today from Thunder Bay, as part of Big Brothers Big Sisters, is Jackie Knough. Welcome.

Mr. Ric Bresee: I'm very excited today to rise to recognize someone very special in my riding. Our page captain today, Lily Smith, is here—a proud student of Tweed Elementary School. She's here alongside her mother, Suipa Warner, and her little brother Dean Smith, here in the members' gallery.

Lily, I know your family is very proud today, and so are we all. Thank you for giving us this opportunity.

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'aimerais souhaiter la bienvenue aux membres de l'Association des gestionnaires de l'éducation franco-ontarienne. On a Olivier St-Maurice, qui est le président; Nya Njeuga, qui est le vice-président; Marc Bertrand, Amine Aïdouni, Jean-François Bélanger et Nicolas Cardinal, les quatre sont administrateurs; Jennifer Lamarche Schmalz, qui est directrice générale; Éric Foisy,

qui est coordonnateur de projets; et Jean-Guy Fréchette, associé principal. Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I'd like to introduce two wonderful people from beautiful Beaches—East York: bubbly Barry Pausey and lovely Lee Pritchard.

Welcome to your House.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm just over the moon to be able to welcome today Sam Snobelen from Bruce county. He's a wonderful business person and a very thoughtful family member who has had a cousin sit in this very House back in the day: John Snobelen.

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: I want to welcome the sisters from United Steelworkers Local 1-2010: April Chernosky, Naomi Nowlan, l'inoubliable Annette Matte and Local 1-2010 president, Jacques Jean. Welcome.

Mrs. Michelle Cooper: I would like to welcome Sam Lambert, who is up here in the gallery. He's a grade 10 student, and he's here to job shadow me today for his career day, for grade 10. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Brian Riddell: Today, I'm introducing Julie Phillips, who I think a lot of, from Big Brothers Big Sisters. She has a wonderful job. She's also a part of my riding staff.

Welcome.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: It's my pleasure to introduce the Ontario Pharmacists Association, which represents over 20,000 pharmacists, technicians and students from across Ontario.

Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Tom Rakovec: I am proud to introduce members from my community: Shundell Critchlow and Sabrina Rodriguez, with their daughter Melinda Gutierrez.

Welcome to Queen's Park.

MPP Mohamed Firin: I would like to welcome today Randolph Scott, the father of page Quentin Luong-Scott.

I'd also like to wish a happy birthday to Achilles Nayyar, who's one of the pages, from Brampton South.

Mr. Dave Smith: I'd like to introduce a great friend of mine who is with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Peterborough, and she plays for Team Canada on the Gaelic football team: Zoe King.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Here with us today is His Eminence Archbishop Papken Tcharian, prelate of the Armenian Prelacy of Canada; Right Rev. Father Karekin Shekherdeman; Rev. Father Shahe Yaacoubian; and chairperson of the prelacy board, Ms. Zovigs Terzian. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I want to welcome visitors here today for the EDS/CCI advocacy day: Gabrielle Gallant, Karen Powers, Kristine Hughston, Tina Williamson and Nicole Cancelliere, as well as many other visitors. Thank you very much for your advocacy.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): To our members who were not introduced, my apologies, but I hold a fast and hard line on time—but to our members in the chamber, you may come back at 1 o'clock if you would like to read in the record.

JEREMY HANSEN

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Before I go to you on a point of order and before we begin question period, I would like to take this opportunity to wish astronaut Jeremy Hansen, a proud native of London, Ontario, all the very best as he prepares this evening to embark on an extraordinary journey around the moon. His dedication, courage and commitment to exploration has inspired Canadians from coast to coast to coast. As he reaches new heights, he carries with him the pride of a nation.

We wish you safe travels, clear skies and a safe return home. Godspeed.

Applause.

STEPHEN LEWIS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Leader of the Opposition on a point of order.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, yesterday we lost a great Canadian, a great Ontarian. I seek unanimous consent of the House to observe a moment of silence in remembrance of Stephen Lewis, former MPP for Scarborough West, leader of Ontario's first NDP official opposition and, of course, Canada's ambassador to the UN and UN special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, who, very sadly, passed away yesterday, March 31, 2026.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): MPP Stiles is seeking unanimous consent of the House to observe a moment of silence in remembrance of Stephen Lewis. Agreed? Agreed.

The House observed a moment's silence.

QUESTION PERIOD

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, here in Ontario, we have right now our country's most secretive government. First, they tried to use personal Gmail and code words to make it harder and harder to search for records under freedom-of-information laws. Now they are changing the law to keep records of government business completely out of reach.

So I want to ask the Premier of this province if there is any length that he and his government won't go to keep information from the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement.

Hon. Stephen Crawford: It's always a pleasure to speak in the House. I certainly appreciate the question from the member opposite about this legislation that strengthens privacy, protects people and preserves transparency where it matters the most: on decisions, outcomes and spending.

Speaker, let me talk about FOIs. Ontario processes approximately 25,000 FOIs every single year. That's

double what all the western provinces do combined—every single year.

The member opposite talks about FOIs and whether this will continue. I can assure the House and the people of Ontario that over 95% of the FOI requests that come in today will still be processed. All decisions made by government, all outcomes made by government will still be FOI-able. The people of Ontario will be able to see what the outcomes are that this province has put forward.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, I'd say to the government that you give the people of this province a lot of reasons to make requests for information, let me tell you.

To the minister: A lot of the excuses this government has given for why they are making these changes are incorrect. The law already protects cabinet confidence. Most other provinces do not exclude members' offices from being searched. But as usual, this government is aiming as low as they can. It is always a race to the bottom with this government.

The Premier buried these sweeping, undemocratic changes to freedom-of-information laws in their budget. It's like he is holding the entire province hostage until he gets what he wants.

So my question is, what is the Premier so desperate to hide?

Hon. Stephen Crawford: Yes, this legislation is a part of the budget, but I went out several weeks ago in front of the media and the public to talk about what we're doing. What we're doing is aligning legislation with the majority of the provinces in Canada, whether it's NDP BC, Conservative Alberta, CAQ in Quebec—different political parties—Liberals in New Brunswick, or the Liberal federal government. What we're doing is aligning legislation, uniform across Canada—and not only Canada; other jurisdictions within the Westminster democracy too, whether it's Australia, New Zealand, the UK or Ireland. What we're doing is not different, and it crosses across different political parties. This is not a partisan issue.

Some 95% of what people are able to FOI will still be FOI-able. Outcomes, decisions made by government, the most important aspects of what we do as a government are open to the people and will continue to be, and the people will judge us on that. By the way they're judging us today, I think we're doing a pretty good job.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, that is incorrect. Actually, it is certainly not what the Information and Privacy Commissioner is saying.

If this budget passes, the changes to freedom-of-information laws are actually going to be retroactive. This government will be closing the vault on nearly four decades of government records with a stroke of a pen.

The Premier is building a fortress around himself, and every single MPP sitting here on the government side is letting him do it. The courts have ruled that the Premier

needs to serve up his phone records. He doesn't want to do that, and he is changing the laws of this province to prevent it.

Will it take a police investigation to get the truth out of this Premier?

Hon. Stephen Crawford: The courts have ruled, and they've ruled in our favour. In 2024, when the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in favour of cabinet confidentiality, it codified what we're doing. The legislation we are putting forward in the budget, which has been very open and transparent to the people of Ontario, is something that the Supreme Court of Canada has codified.

Having said that—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order. The member for Windsor West will come to order.

Hon. Stephen Crawford: Having said that, this government, under Premier Ford, has been the most accessible in the province's history. I don't see the phone number for the Leader of the Opposition out there. I don't see her talking to the people of Ontario. The Premier of Ontario talks and takes calls from thousands upon thousands of Ontarians. We have led the way. I have never seen a leader, in fact, in the history of this country who has been more open and accessible than he. I challenge the Leader of the Opposition to put her phone number out there and hear from the people of Ontario.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: Honestly.

Speaker, this question is for the Premier.

Patients in Ontario are now waiting an average of 20 hours in emergency rooms—20 hours. The number of patients being treated in hallways has doubled under eight years of the Premier and his government. If Ontarians are wondering why—it is because this government fired 700 nurses last year.

Can the Premier explain how firing nurses and cutting staff is supposed to make emergency room waits shorter?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, even in this chamber, facts matter. The facts are that there is a 15% increase in the number of nurses who are working in our publicly funded system—15%. We have licensed an additional 100,000 nurses in the province of Ontario to work in Ontario. We are currently training 30,000 nurses in our colleges and universities so that they can have those opportunities in our publicly funded system.

And yes, again, I will repeat: a 15% increase in the number of nurses who are working since Premier Ford and our government took office—a 15% increase.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: What the minister fails to acknowledge is that they are losing nurses quicker than they can actually hire them.

And instead of fixing hallway health care, it sounds to me like what the minister is doing is just making it easier

to treat people in hallways. Is that the standard of care that this minister thinks is acceptable?

It's simple: To end hallway health care, to put an end to these long wait times in emergency rooms, we need the staff to do it. To even get to the average of the rest of Canada, we would need to hire 48,000 more hospital staff. But you are not doing that. No. In fact, what you are doing is, you are laying off health care workers—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Through the Chair.

Ms. Marit Stiles: This year, 1,000 jobs are being eliminated in hospitals in North Bay, in Hamilton, in London, in Ottawa, in Niagara, and in the GTA.

Why is the Premier choosing cuts and layoffs instead of getting people the care they need?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Again, I will say, the facts do matter.

The truth is, as they are fearmongering about North Bay, they know that there have been no changes in terms of individuals who have been redeployed. Those were vacant positions that the organization decided they no longer needed, and so they actually eliminated the position, not the individual. We have union representatives in North Bay who are acknowledging that fact.

When I look at the expansions that we are doing across Ontario, whether it is new hospitals, whether it is expansion in our colleges and universities, ensuring that we have not only a pathway to train additional primary care and clinical staff, but we're actually putting the money in those investments and ensuring that as we expand capital, as we expand hospitals—\$60 billion in 50 different hospital builds—we have the exceptional care and the exceptional clinicians that—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member from London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Yesterday, we learned that 288 registered nursing positions will be cut at London Health Sciences Centre. These cuts, which amount to more than 500,000 hours of RN care, will of course have an impact on patients and will also increase workloads on already overburdened nursing staff.

Mandatory safe-staffing ratios are urgently needed to protect patients and support nurses, but this government refuses to put them in place.

Speaker, how can this Premier possibly think that cutting nursing positions is going to do anything to improve patient care?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I think it's important for that member to have those conversations with London Health Sciences Centre and make sure that she understands exactly what they are proposing.

When we invest in our primary care physicians, when we invest in our nurses, when we invest in our lab technicians, we are actually getting that world-class care.

And I will never talk down the world-class health care that we have in the province of Ontario. SickKids is the number one pediatric hospital in the world. UHN is the number two publicly funded hospital in the world. I will not talk down our hospital systems because we have

world-class, we're training world-class—people want to live and be working in these world-class systems.

HEALTH CARE

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

These Ford Conservatives are tired, out of touch and out of ideas—hallway health care, ER closures, increasing wait times. And if you listened to the finance minister's remarks last week, you wouldn't hear much about those or very much about health care, if you listened to his speech. You certainly wouldn't hear about the two million people who don't have a family doctor or nurse practitioner, or you wouldn't hear about all those people having to use their credit card instead of their OHIP card to get the basic primary care that they need.

1050

My question is simple. To the minister: Why does she think it's okay for families to have to use their credit card instead of their OHIP card to get basic primary care in this province?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As we continue our expansion of primary care—\$3.4 billion—we're already seeing results. Last year alone, 330,000 people across Ontario have an opportunity and are connected to a primary care clinician now. We are ensuring, through our investments, that those continue.

The member opposite asks what we have been doing. I'll tell you what we've been doing.

We have a Learn and Stay program that didn't exist when the Liberal government was in power. It's a program that is actually training lab technicians, northern Ontario primary paramedics, nurses.

We are ensuring that we are not only putting in place the education for individuals to train, who want to practise in the province of Ontario, but we're actually welcoming the world. We've directed the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario and the College of Nurses of Ontario to quickly assess, review and ultimately approve and give a licence to internationally trained people who want to come to Ontario. Why? Because we have a world-class system and they want to work—

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

Mr. John Fraser: That answer just shows how tired and adrift this minister and this Conservative government is.

Two years ago, when this issue was raised of nurse practitioners not being able to bill OHIP, the minister said that her hands were tied, that it was the federal government's problem.

My colleague from Don Valley East put forward a bill that said, "Well, no, actually, it's not the federal government's problem, that's stopping this. Here's something we can do so that families don't have to use their credit card." These folks, and some of them over here too, voted it down. They're perfectly okay with people having to use their credit card instead of their OHIP card.

Back to the minister: I don't really understand why they believe, in the middle of an affordability crisis, that people should have to pull out their credit card to get an appointment, when they're just trying to pay the bills. So can the minister tell us if she's really okay with that?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Our Premier and our government have never been more clear: People do not have to use anything but their OHIP card to get access in the province of Ontario.

Do we see the value of nurse practitioners? Speaker, 100%, we do. We've seen 170 new seats available for nurse practitioners.

I spoke to a mother this weekend, and she said, "Thank you for expanding nurse practitioner seats in the province of Ontario, because my daughter got in, and she's starting in September." That was at the Orangeville home show this weekend.

People know that there are changes coming and that there are improvements happening in our system.

And we absolutely believe that nurse practitioners are 100% part of those multidisciplinary teams. We welcome them in Ontario.

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

Mr. John Fraser: This minister is clearly out of touch, because more and more Ontarians are having to pull out their credit card instead of their OHIP card.

The federal government, 15 months ago, removed the barrier that the minister said was there and then mandated that nurse practitioners be covered under OHIP provincial plans by yesterday.

You missed the deadline; you didn't meet it. People are still having to use their credit cards. I know it's April Fool's Day. It's not a joke, Minister. The thing you said prevented you was taken away—it didn't—and now you've been told you need to do this, and you're in contravention of the Canada Health Act.

Speaker, how can this minister sit there and tell us everything is okay? People are having to use their credit card when they're having a hard time paying for groceries. Can the—

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I want to be very clear: We will be in compliance with the federal government. But what the federal government has done, without any additional funding, is actually say, "It's your problem, provinces and territories. You go figure it out." So, yes, Ontario is a leader, and we will figure it out.

I also want to highlight the nurse practitioner-led clinics—one in Cambridge alone that is actually expanding services—because we as a government see their value and are continuing to expand their funding.

Nurse practitioner-led clinics, multidisciplinary teams where nurse practitioners work with physicians, work with nurses, work with dietitians and mental health workers—that is where Ontario is going.

Speaker, with the greatest of respect, I do not want to go back to where we were when the Liberal government was in power.

NURSE PRACTITIONERS

Mr. Adil Shamji: Simple question: Should patients always pay with their OHIP card, not their credit card? Should they? Because that's not a question—that is a supposed promise that this Premier has repeated over and over and over again. But after eight long, expensive years under these guys, Ontarians are paying more for health care than ever before—even getting invoiced for massive bills when getting medically necessary care delivered by nurse practitioners.

The federal government ordered nurse practitioners to be fully funded for medically necessary services by today—they haven't been, and now patients are paying the price.

Will the Minister of Health look into the camera and tell patients who are seeing nurse practitioners as we speak that they will always pay with their OHIP card—even as they are being forced to pull out their credit cards right now?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: An expansion of nurse practitioner-led clinics, as a result of our primary care investment of \$3.4 billion; an expansion of nurse practitioner seats available in our post-secondary schools, as a result of our investments and the investments of the minister of universities and colleges—we know that multidisciplinary teams are the key.

And as a member of the Ontario Medical Association, I would respectfully suggest that the member opposite also knows that multidisciplinary teams where physicians work with nurse practitioners, work with nurses, work with dietitians and mental health workers are what patients want and are what clinicians want. And we have given that opportunity, with a \$3.4-billion enhancement to primary care. Even the member opposite's numbers are changing because—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

Mr. Adil Shamji: Madam Speaker, if your parents were slowing down and beginning to forget their words, shouldn't you be able to see a nurse practitioner or a physician?

If your baby won't stop crying or has a fever that just won't break, wouldn't it be great to see an MD or an NP?

And if you're down to your last dollar or couldn't make ends meet, should you have to ask yourself whether you'll pay for a meal or pay for an appointment?

These are the questions that Ontarians are being forced to ask every day, after the Premier failed to meet today's deadline to publicly fund nurse practitioner services.

After eight long years, patients are paying more for things that they've already paid for once with their taxes. They shouldn't have to pay out of pocket to see their nurse practitioner.

When will the Minister of Health choose to stop private billing and fund nurse practitioners as generously as this government funds its Premier's office?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Allow me to quote: "The Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario (NPAO) is thrilled by the recent announcement from the Ontario Ministry of

Health regarding the allocation of additional funding towards”—wait for it—“expanding interprofessional primary care and existing programs.” That’s Michelle Acorn and Barbara Bailey from the Nurse Practitioners’ Association of Ontario.

Even nurse practitioners understand the importance of working within our systems. And whether they are in our hospitals, our primary care teams, or our long-term-care facilities, nurse practitioners play an incredibly vital role as part of that clinical community of care that we so value in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Final supplement-ary?

Mr. Adil Shamji: Speaker, nurse practitioners would be even happier if all of their services were funded.

But after eight long years under this government, Ontarians have little to show. ERs are closing, hallways are overflowing, and millions of people don’t have a family doctor. If their primary care action plan was working, nurse practitioners would be already funded by now.

1100

This government is out of touch and out of gas. And beginning today, it’s out of line, because a federal deadline to fully fund nurse practitioner services has officially passed and there’s no plan to take action for an entire year. The Minister of Health has gone from non-compliance with the Canada Health Act to open defiance.

I will remind her that section 13 of Ontario’s Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act specifically states that patients shall be reimbursed for any unauthorized health care charges.

Will she reimburse every single one of the patients who has paid for nurse practitioner services today or will she continue to defy the law?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: What I will do today is remind the member opposite that there are 330,000 people in Ontario who last year did not have access to a primary care clinician and now do.

I will point out to the member opposite that we have made a \$3.4-billion investment that ensures that every single Ontario resident will be connected to a primary care provider in 2029.

Speaker, I know the member opposite doesn’t want to hear the numbers and the facts, because they don’t jibe with his narrative. But the truth is, we are making progress. Whether it is through education, whether it is through welcoming internationally trained physicians, clinicians, nurses and nurse practitioners, and, yes, whether it is expanding access through our primary care action team, we are making progress, and we will see that progress continue through 2026.

ENTRETIEN HIVERNAL DES ROUTES

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

M. Guy Bourgouin: Ma question est pour le ministre des Transports. Depuis des mois, nous demandons de

l’information sur le manque des réserves de sel et l’entretien hivernal. Malgré des conversations et deux lettres envoyées depuis décembre, le ministre n’a toujours pas répondu.

Monsieur le Ministre, pourquoi refusez-vous de répondre et nous forcer à l’accès à l’information?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Hastings–Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Ric Bresee: Thank you very much, Speaker, but unfortunately, I have to indicate that my translation did not come through. Could I ask the member, through the Speaker, to repeat the question?

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): No, it doesn’t matter. We’re going to go back to the member.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Définitivement, je n’ai pas besoin d’une excuse. Pourtant, c’est très important les questions qu’on vous demande. Que ce soit dans les deux langues officielles, on mérite le même respect que si tu es franco-ontarien et tu parles français.

Nous devons maintenant passer par l’accès à l’information. Par contre, votre gouvernement veut réduire ce droit essentiel. Sans transparence, les concitoyens, les journalistes et les élus ne peuvent pas effectuer leur travail et tenir le gouvernement responsable. Donc, monsieur le Ministre, qu’avez-vous à cacher?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Did the member hear the question?

Mr. Ric Bresee: Partially.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Is your earpiece working? Is your translation working?

Mr. Ric Bresee: Unfortunately, the audio is very, very quiet, and hearing that over the rest of the noise—the translation was there, but it’s so quiet that I have a great deal of difficulty hearing it.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Can you answer the question?

Mr. Ric Bresee: Unfortunately, I can’t; I can answer in generalities, Speaker.

To the member opposite: This government has nothing to hide. This government is working towards improving transportation networks all across this province, including the northern highways. Our minister is working every single day to make sure that northern highways are supported, are expanded, are growing and are maintained in the best way possible.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Stop the clock.

You had two opportunities to speak. You had two questions.

The member for Nepean.

Start the clock.

HEALTH CARE

MPP Tyler Watt: My question is for the Minister of Health.

This morning, we've heard about how facts matter. Well, here are some facts: In my riding of Nepean, over 30,000 people don't have access to primary care through a nurse practitioner or family doctor. Millions in Ontario still do not have access to primary care. So where do they go when they need to see a nurse practitioner or family doctor? They try to go to a walk-in clinic. In my riding, they're often closed by 10 a.m. You have people lining up at 5 a.m. and 6 a.m. in the morning in the hopes of seeing a doctor. Where do they go from there? They go to the emergency room. What if the emergency room is closed? We're seeing emergency room closures in every region across this province. Let's say they're lucky enough to get in there. I just worked in the emergency room a couple of weeks ago, and I can tell you how bad hallway medicine has gotten. Hallway bed 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7—it just goes up and up. I saw a patient in a storage closet. That was the premium spot because at least they had some privacy.

Speaker, this so-called transparent government is withholding data on how many patients are receiving care. Why are they hiding hallway health care wait time data from the public?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As we see expansions in primary care, we're actually seeing diversions away from our emergency departments, with programs, again, that didn't exist under the Liberal government, where 911 models of care—paramedics connect with, and, upon approval with a patient, take individuals to where they are best served, making sure that the treatment is happening quickly and expeditiously. We have dedicated offload nursing programs now, where individuals are actually assigned to our emergency departments to make sure that they can assess and quickly review and get those patients triaged and in appropriate care.

Again, I will never talk down our Ontario health care system, because I see the incredible innovation that is happening in our hospitals across Ontario. It is indicative to me that, while we are enhancing and encouraging that innovation, the member opposite wants to keep with the status quo. And as I said previously, I have no—

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

MPP Tyler Watt: I don't know why the minister's response is to always say that we're talking down hospitals. I'd like to remind the minister that I am a registered nurse who works at a hospital. We do more with so little from this government. I'm not talking down the hospital; I'm advocating for our hospitals and for our patients and our health care workers in the system that you are actively destroying.

That response was so out of touch with what is happening on the ground. Has this minister actually spoken to a health care worker recently? Have you spoken to a patient recently? Seriously.

A physician from Perth said, "We're frankly sick of it. I saw somebody last year in a toilet. In a physical toilet, I examined a patient because I had no other space to see them." That's your system.

Again, I ask, why is this government hiding hallway health care wait times and refusing to be transparent with the public?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As recently as last week, I was stopped on a street in Toronto, and they said, "You're a really busy lady. You're doing a lot of great things. Keep going."

I've worked 20 years in the health care system. Respectfully, clinicians see it—they see those investments. They know that Ontario has the highest rate of attachment in all of Canada, with almost 90% of Ontario residents attached to a primary care clinician. We know that with our \$3.4-billion investment in primary care, we're going to continue to see that number creep up, to 2029, where 100% of Ontario residents are attached to a primary care physician. Why does that matter? It means that people have choices and they can actually go and have a long-term, committed relationship where they understand and their clinicians know what their issues are and they can manage those. Whether those are high blood pressure, whether it's diabetes, having that long—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is for the Minister of Finance.

In my riding of Whitby and across the province, workers, families and job creators are playing close attention to the global economic picture. With ongoing trade tensions, supply chain disruptions and uncertainty affecting economies across the world, people want to know that their government has a responsible plan—a plan that protects Ontario, supports growth and keeps life affordable. The minister has made it clear that Ontario is choosing a different path than many other jurisdictions.

1110

Through you, Speaker: Can the minister tell this House how our government's budget plan is helping protect Ontario's economy and strengthen the foundations that communities like mine depend on?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the PA to finance.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thanks to the member for Whitby for that question.

Speaker, the reality is that we're in global economic uncertain times, and it's affecting every single jurisdiction across Canada. How the government responds to it is really what matters. When we look at other jurisdictions across the country, they're raising taxes, they're cutting services, they're running record deficits.

But Ontario is choosing a responsible and balanced approach. Because of prudent fiscal management, our economy continues to grow, private sector jobs are increasing, and Ontario remains one of the few provinces

with a clear path to balance. That strong foundation allows us to cut taxes. It allows us to put money back into people's pockets, support businesses and, at the same time, make historic investments in public services.

Speaker, this is what it means to protect Ontario, for today, and for the long term.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you to the parliamentary assistant for this encouraging update. I know the people in my community appreciate that our government is staying focused on economic growth while keeping costs down for hard-working families and businesses.

We know that protecting Ontario's future means continuing to make strategic investments in competitiveness, in innovation, and in good-paying jobs. We must also ensure that our public services remain strong and, yes, sustainable.

Through you, Speaker: Can the parliamentary assistant explain how our government is building long-term prosperity and resilience so that Ontario remains a place where businesses invest, workers succeed, and communities like Whitby continue to grow?

Mr. Dave Smith: Again, I want to thank the member for Whitby for it, because the reality is, I'm probably one of the few guys who geeks out on some of this stuff. It absolutely is fantastic for me, working directly in it.

Protecting Ontario means strengthening our competitive advantages, supporting Ontario-owned businesses and investing in the sectors that are going to drive the economy and growth for generations to come.

That's why, through our budget, we're proposing new tools like the \$4-billion Protect Ontario Account Investment Fund, historic tax relief for small businesses, and measures that lower the cost of investing and doing business in this province.

At the same time, we're making record investments in infrastructure, skills training, health care, housing, community safety—all at the same time as managing our province's finances responsibly. It's delivering the growth, resilience and confidence that Ontario needs right now.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, in 2023, the Minister of Health advised that there would be additional neurosurgical funding and resources for Ehlers-Danlos syndrome—EDS—patients with craniocervical instability. Yet there's still no clear path for these patients to access neurosurgical care here in Ontario.

Can the minister explain where the allocated funding was spent and why it has not resulted in improved access to neurosurgical care for EDS and CCI patients, as was promised?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, the member opposite raises a really important issue, and of course it's related to rare diseases. The funding that she highlights was actually used for research, because there is still a lot of work that has to happen at the research level, at the clinical level to

ensure that we are providing the most appropriate service for EDS patients. We constantly have conversations and challenges as we work through the rare disease strategy with the federal government. We know that as fewer and fewer people are impacted, it is so challenging to get the diagnosis and to have the pathway to treatment. But we really, truly need that clinical advice, and that is why the research that we've provided to both UHN and SickKids is absolutely critical.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for London—Fanshawe.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: This is not a rare disease.

Last year, the head of the GoodHope EDS clinic confirmed that there's currently no neurosurgeon in Ontario accepting EDS and CCI patients and no established referral pathway. However, treatment is available at specialized centres in the United States. But since 2018, every single out-of-country prior-approval application for EDS-related CCI has been denied by the ministry.

Where does the minister expect patients to go to access care if experts are confirming it is not available in this province?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I'm sure the member opposite appreciates and understands that decisions made about whether out-of-country access is appropriate are clinical decisions. These are not political decisions. These are not decisions that should be left to anyone but clinical experts.

As we continue to fund the research, as we work with the University Health Network and SickKids, who are currently operating a joint two-site specialized EDS clinic, we need to make sure that we are following all of the clinical advice. It is what we deserve, it is what the patients deserve, and it's what we must do when we are both accessing out-of-country and ensuring that we're putting the appropriate investments where the clinical advice lies.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Ted Hsu: Kingston General Hospital is the oldest in Ontario. They've established hallway beds in the jammed-up emergency room and throughout the rest of the hospital. Everybody knows that this 188-year-old hospital cannot be restored or rebuilt.

To the finance minister: In the budget, you predict a \$14-billion budget deficit next year—almost as big as during COVID 19. People in the five ridings who depend on Kingston's hospital look at that deficit, are worried and want to know, did you leave any money to build the urgently needed new hospital in Kingston?

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

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you, Minister of Social Services and Minister of Labour. I got two.

In all seriousness, it's a very important question.

Of course, the member opposite being such a learned man—and I'm sure he has gone through the budget—would be very in tune with the fact that we've increased

funding for the health care sector, from about \$62 billion to over \$100 billion, since we took office.

And more than that, we have a plan to build more acute-care beds. Unfortunately, the member opposite is part of a party that, when they were in power for 15 years—supported at times by the NDP—built nothing. They built absolutely nothing, and we inherited—the member opposite knows full well—the deficit in building acute-care beds.

Thanks to the leadership of this government and thanks to the support of the people of Ontario, we're building those hospitals.

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

Mr. Ted Hsu: Speaker, unfortunately, in the budget document there is no mention of the new hospital in Kingston, even though nine other places are mentioned.

Two years ago, the budget predicted a surplus for fiscal year 2026-27. Last year that turned into an \$8-billion deficit, and in this year's budget the 2026-27 deficit has ballooned to \$14 billion—nearly as big as during COVID.

After eight years, this tired government has developed a scary habit: Future surpluses melt away into deficits as their spending meets the reality of their misplaced priorities, like the fantasy tunnel under the 401.

So I ask the finance minister, is there money left to pay for the new Kingston hospital? What hope—real hope—can we give to my constituents and everybody between Ottawa and Toronto?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Well, with respect to the member opposite, I don't know what world he's living in.

The world we're living in is—we've gone through a pandemic, we've gone through very high inflation, two-million population growth, a tariff-related economy, and now a global conflict. And notwithstanding all that, this province is leading the country in terms of investing in infrastructure, investing in our people, investing responsibly so we take care of every single Ontarian.

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I might add, in that hospital that we're talking about—this Minister of Health is leading the country and getting everyone attached to a primary care physician.

I'm sure the member opposite read the document to see that another \$3.4 billion is invested into primary care, to make sure that every Ontarian is attached to a family doctor.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: My question is to the Premier.

Yesterday was the deadline for Canadian gun owners to declare their prohibited firearms to qualify for compensation under the federal buyback program. Concerns over property rights, the effectiveness of the policy, logistical hurdles and the potential criminalization of previously law-abiding owners is creating a great deal of anxiety here in Ontario.

Last month, the Premier praised a homeowner who used a firearm to defend himself against an intruder. I

agreed with the Premier's sentiments, and we agree that the buyback targets legal gun owners and hunters rather than criminals.

But there has been no official statement from this government, so I would say this is precisely the moment that calls for real protection, not sound bites.

Speaker, I see the buyback as an unconstitutional attack on the rights of Ontarians. So through you, to the Premier: Will he commit to using every provincial tool available, including legislation, to protect the rights of Ontario firearms owners?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Solicitor General.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I appreciate the question.

I can't be clearer. The Premier has been very clear: We in the province of Ontario do not support the federal government's gun buyback program. I'll tell you why, Madam Speaker. Not one gun that's used in an illegal activity in Ontario will be surrendered by this program.

We will work with the federal government to make sure that they will have grants and investments that will work with our police services to get our illegal guns off the street. And I'm waiting for the phone to ring.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Haldimand-Norfolk.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I'm questioning why the minister would allow our firearms owners to wait. It's not enough said—like one of the members yelled across the way.

I want to point out that both Saskatchewan and Alberta are leveraging provincial legislation to protect gun owners from federal confiscation—including Saskatchewan's new certificate of exemption and Alberta's prohibition on local law enforcement involvement. I have the legislation right here; it's already done for us.

This government is building a reputation on tough talk when it comes to the buyback. But I will remind you, Minister, rhetoric does not lawfully protect a single Ontario firearms owner.

While the OPP is opting out, not all municipal services are. Waterloo Regional Police has announced it will take part.

Once again, to the Premier: Why is this government leaving Ontarians exposed to a patchwork of enforcement instead of delivering real province-wide protection like Premiers Smith and Moe?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: The member opposite knows that the federal government has a right to enact federal law.

The member also made reference to the fact that almost every single police service in Ontario—led by the OPP—said, "We will not participate in the gun buyback program."

You could ask the member from Waterloo opposite why her service thought it was okay to join the program. I've spoken to the chief.

I'll say this—again, for the record. I said it in four FPT meetings with the Attorney General present and this past

year in Kananaskis with the Associate Solicitor General present. Ontario does not support the gun buyback program. We will stand with legal gun owners every single day, and we will work hard to make sure that there is a strategy to get illegal guns off our street.

ENERGY POLICIES

MPP George Darouze: My question is to the Minister of Energy and Mines.

Around the world, we are seeing the consequences of energy dependence. In Europe, reliance on foreign gas has led to price shocks and supply disruptions, forcing families and businesses to pay more. At the same time, global supply chains for energy and critical materials are increasingly dominated by countries like China. These realities underscore the importance of building greater self-reliance here at home.

Through you, Speaker: Can the minister explain how Ontario is protecting our energy sovereignty and ensuring families have access to reliable, affordable power?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy and Mines.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: The member is absolutely right; when jurisdictions rely on foreign energy, they lose control over their prices, their supply and their economic future.

That is why Ontario is taking a different approach. Today, Ontario has one of the cleanest electricity grids in the world, powered by nuclear and hydro, together providing over 75% of our electricity. Nuclear alone delivers over 50% of that power—clean, reliable, zero-emissions baseload electricity, 24/7. That is not just about reliability; it is about sovereignty.

Our nuclear sector supports over 80,000 jobs across Ontario, with more than 200 companies participating in the supply chain. Up to 90% of the project spend stays right here in Ontario, supporting local workers, local businesses and local communities.

At Bruce Power, approximately 95% of the spend is through a made-in-Canada chain.

Speaker, while other jurisdictions depend on foreign energy, Ontario is powered by our own workers, our own resources and our own expertise.

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

MPP George Darouze: Energy sovereignty is critical, but so is control over the resources that power that system.

As global demand for critical minerals continues to rise and supply chains remain concentrated in a small number of countries, jurisdictions that fail to act risk falling behind economically and strategically.

Ontario is uniquely positioned, with abundant resources and a strong mining sector, but we must ensure we are capturing the full value of those resources here at home.

Speaker, can the parliamentary assistant explain how our government is strengthening Ontario's mineral and resource sovereignty and ensuring these resources support

jobs, investments and long-term economic growth in our province?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Thank you to the member for that question.

True sovereignty means not only producing our own energy but also securing the resources that power it.

Global demand for critical minerals is projected to increase by over 500% by 2050, while supply chains remain highly concentrated, with countries like China controlling up to 85% of production.

Ontario is stepping up. Our mining sector already supports 31,000 direct jobs, 46,000 indirect jobs, 37 active mines and more than 200 companies advancing more than 400 projects, many in northern Ontario. We are building on this strength by developing a complete, made-in-Canada supply chain, supporting everything from extraction, processing and advanced manufacturing—because this is about more than resources; it is about ensuring that the jobs, the investments and the economic benefits stay right here in Ontario in this time of uncertainty.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question is to the Minister of Education.

We've already lost 5,000 educators in this province because of this government's funding cuts. Classrooms are already drastically overcrowded. But instead of hiring more teachers and education workers, bringing down class sizes and helping our kids, this government has continued to gut our classrooms with \$150 million in cuts to education.

The 2026 provincial budget cuts have forced the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board to announce layoffs. Preliminary staffing levels for next year show a reduction of 125 jobs, including 55 fewer elementary school teachers.

My question is simple: Why don't our young students deserve so much more than this?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member, of course, will know that that board is facing severe enrolment declines, and that is why there have been some notices sent out. But the member will also know that typically these notices go out at this time of year, and in September, after a recalibration is done, most of these teachers are hired back.

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More importantly than that, we're of course looking at an education system and renewing that system. This budget, thankfully, does have significant increases in the core education funding, so we're proud about that.

More importantly, we are seeing literacy rates at the highest level that they've ever been across the province of Ontario. Reading and writing scores are absolutely smashing previous records. We're seeing graduation rates at the highest level in the province's history. And we're seeing math scores finally starting to increase, after 15 disastrous years under the Liberals. What we have said is that it's not good enough; we want to do better.

That's why we're reinvesting—this budget actually reinvests in math so that we can see even better outcomes in the future.

What we're doing is building a system that works for students, parents and teachers, and gives us the best opportunity for success going forward.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Minister, there is no parent in Hamilton who thinks their kids need fewer teachers in the classroom. In fact, we've received hundreds and hundreds of petitions asking just that—that the government will increase staffing to make sure that we can reduce these dramatic class sizes. Kids need more help than what they were getting, not less. Hamilton students can't afford to lose more teachers. With this government's chronic per-student underfunding, the school board says they are waiting to see what will be cut next. The parents of Hamilton expect more support in their classrooms, not less.

So my question, again, is very simple: When will you invest in our students' education and give the students and their families the supports that they need? Reduce class sizes, increase supports, increase programs to—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the Minister of Education.

Hon. Paul Calandra: We're doing just that.

Of course, some of the challenges that she's talking about in her community stem from decisions that are being made by trustees. We've seen this with parents choosing to get their children out of that system and put them in different systems. That's why the enrolment is decreasing.

What we're doing is refocusing the education system on students, parents and teachers. That is why this budget gives an extra \$750 per teacher on top of existing supports for classroom education—because we want to focus our resources in the classroom. Why do we want to do that? Because we want to support teachers, who are the lifeblood of the education system and who have told us, "Refocus the education system on what matters"—giving our teachers the opportunity to give our students the ultimate opportunity for success. We're doing that with increased funding. We'll refocus the education system. That's why literacy scores are up. That's why graduation rates are up. That's why math is going in the right direction. We are refunding. We're putting it back into the classroom, and what we're going to see is more people get back into the public education system because it's on the right—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Beaches–East York.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: This government brags about record investments in hospital capital infrastructure, but how many patients have actually been moved out of hallways and into a room? How many Ontarians have been matched with a primary care special-

ist? And how many Ontarians were taken off the wait-list to see a specialist?

Magnificent Michael Garron Hospital in my riding treats over 100,000 patients just in their emergency department, delivers approximately 3,000 babies per year, and drastically reduces ER visits with their Transitional Youth Program. And yet, they have been waiting three years for approval on their planning and construction grant for Project Imagine, phase 2 of their redevelopment plan.

My question to the Premier: Why are you holding up life-saving care for 400,000 Ontarians across 22—

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: When I visited Michael Garron Hospital—the work that they are doing is absolutely incredible.

The member opposite talks about the ED diversion rate, but I hope she also heard about the partnership that they have with SickKids hospital, with their pediatric patients, making sure that—with the partnership with SickKids, their pediatric patients are actually ensuring that they can stay at Michael Garron.

I'm surprised the member opposite isn't congratulating Michael Garron on their phase 1, which will actually be open in August of this year. A half-a-billion-dollar commitment, investment that our government has had, because we see the incredible work that Michael Garron Hospital is doing, as are many other hospitals across Ontario—\$60 billion worth of capital investments in our hospital projects.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: What do they say, Speaker? "The waiting is the hardest part."

Michael Garron Hospital has been waiting three long years to begin phase 2 of their redevelopment project. That is three long years of postponing the replacement of operating rooms, adult and newborn critical care units, cardiac in-patient units, their emergency department, and more. Despite the lengthy wait, they innovate, implementing state-of-the-art dialysis machines, 63 advanced infusion pumps, 46 mechanical ventilators. And if that weren't enough, over 20 of their physicians were just recognized as Toronto's best doctors. So I am darn happy to brag about them, but they need to be funded. They do all of this without provincial support.

My question to the Premier and the Minister of Health, who is smirking about this question: Why won't you just sign off on phase 2 for Michael Garron and stop smirking?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, this is a smile—a smile that a member opposite is actually acknowledging the world-class care that we've received every single day in our Ontario hospital system.

Whether it's at Michael Garron, whether it's at Trillium, whether it's at the Ottawa Hospital, whether it is at London Health Sciences Centre, we have incredible clinicians doing incredible work across Ontario.

I know that the member opposite will be there with me in August when we celebrate the half-a-billion-dollar investment that our government has made on their completion of the patient care tower project. I hope she spends

the time, in the next few minutes, to sit down with Michael Garron and learn about the innovation that they've been doing in their emergency department, in their SickKids pediatric—it is—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Beaches–East York will come to order.

I apologize to the health minister. You have about 10 seconds.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you.

Again, I am very pleased to see the member opposite actually encouraging and acknowledging the amazing work that our Ontario hospitals do every single day across Ontario.

SPORTS AND RECREATION FUNDING

Ms. Jess Dixon: My question is for the Minister of Sport.

Helping kids and families stay active in their communities is not something that should ever be a partisan issue—although you would be forgiven for questioning that, given the voting record of the members opposite.

I was just at the Woolwich Memorial arena for youth sports. I'm also now an honorary member of at least two cricket teams—shout-out to the Knight Warriors and to the Rhinos.

Minister, can you give us some more information on what our government is doing to make sure that kids and families stay active and our sports and recreation facilities stay vibrant and well used in this province?

Interjections.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: Speaker, I'd ask the crowd to control themselves for a second, please, especially those behind me.

Thank you for the question, and thanks for all the work that you do as a member in the hard-working community.

When we talk about the budget and the \$300 million that is going through the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund—it's real money, and we're excited about what's going to happen. The previous opportunity I had was the \$200 million—and I can tell you, just under a hundred communities benefited from that, both for revitalization and new builds.

When you look at community, what does that mean when you talk about sport and recreation? Speaker, it's talking about getting the community—the youth, the adults, the volunteers—involved in their community and making a difference.

Young people, from playground to podium, have to have a place to start. They start in their community. They become champions and better people as a result of sport. Leadership skills and all those things come into play.

I'm so proud we were able to do that through our government and make a difference. There's nothing lazy about what we are doing when it comes to making a positive impact in our communities on behalf—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Thank you.

AVIS D'INSATISFACTION

NOTICES OF DISSATISFACTION

La Présidente (L'hon. Donna Skelly): Conformément à la ligne 36(a) du Règlement, le député de Mushkegowuk–Baie James a donné avis de son insatisfaction par rapport à la réponse à sa question donnée par l'adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Transports concernant l'accès à l'information. Cette question sera conservée après la période des affaires d'intérêt public émanant des députées et députés.

Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Kingston and the Islands has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to the question given by the Minister of Finance regarding new Kingston hospital funding. This matter will be debated today, following private members' public business.

MEMBER FOR TORONTO–DANFORTH

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Leader of the Opposition on a point of order.

Ms. Marit Stiles: If I may, Speaker, there are few members in this place who stand the test of time with such determination, such dignity, such integrity and who are so grounded in community as the member for Toronto–Danforth.

Please join me in congratulating the MPP for Toronto–Danforth on, this week, his 20th anniversary as elected MPP.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Congratulations from all of us.

I recognize the member for Scarborough–Agincourt on a point of order.

Mr. Aris Babikian: I beg your indulgence to introduce Archbishop Babgen Charyan, who just arrived—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): That's not a point of order.

I will remind members that we are going to be holding back for a brief presentation—but until then, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1142 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to wish a warm welcome to Becky Parent, who is the executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: This afternoon I would like to welcome Erin Graybiel from Niagara from Big Brothers Big Sisters. At this time, I really want to thank them for all they do for St. Catharines and the Niagara area.

Thank you, Erin. You are a great resource to have.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'd like to add my voice to that chorus of welcomes, especially to Big Brothers Big

Sisters, in particular the representatives and leaders that I met this morning, Stachen Frederick and Alexandra Gruber.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I would like to draw your attention to the Speaker's gallery, where I have two guests—I actually met one of them at the PDAC convention—all the way from Germany, correct? We have with us Martin Hoff and his daughter Franziska Sophia Hoff, from Germany. Welcome to Queen's Park.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

JINGHUA TRADING (CANADA) LTD. ACT, 2026

Mr. Pang moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr45, An Act to revive Jinghua Trading (Canada) Ltd.

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

First reading agreed to.

PETITIONS

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: It's a pleasure to be able to introduce this petition on behalf of the residents of St. Catharines. They have been diligently getting signatures for this, and I want to explain a little bit of this bill.

The \$6.3 billion that has been cut from public education since 2018 has resulted in larger classroom sizes, increased violence and inadequate special education and mental health supports for our students in Niagara and across Ontario. Larger classroom sizes negatively impact the quality of education. They reduce access to teaching resources and significantly diminish teacher-student interaction, which is detrimental to most students, who need that additional support.

I also want to say that I agree with Tracy Roblin from St. Catharines, who has signed this petition, that Ontario has internationally recognized public education systems that require careful attention and investment to ensure all our students can succeed.

They are calling on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to commit to making the necessary investments in our public education to lower the classroom sizes, increase student supports and ensure students have the schools they need and that are safe for them.

I wholeheartedly agree, affix my signature to this petition and send it down with Liam, my page.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I just want to thank the ETFO members of Waterloo region and the partners of Together in Education for filling out so many petitions to show how

much you care about smaller class sizes. When we have smaller class sizes, it means that that teacher gets to have one-on-one attention to every student in her class by the end of the day. It means that there's enough room in the class for all the desks. It means that kids have a quieter environment where they can hear the teacher speak and they're not overwhelmed by sensory overload.

We need this government to start keeping up with inflation on the education budget. Inflation is a real thing and now we're \$6.3 billion short because we have not done that. Our kids need us now more than ever to stand up for them.

I support this advocacy for smaller class sizes. I will affix my signature and hand it to the page.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'm proud to rise in this House to present this petition on behalf of those in Toronto Centre and to call on this government to build more affordable housing.

The petition is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, recognizing that families throughout much of Ontario now recognize that owning a home is really just a pipe dream and renting is becoming painfully expensive, especially during the cost-of-living crisis.

The petitioners also recognize that consecutive Conservative and Liberal governments sat idle while housing costs have spiralled out of control. Speculators have made fortunes and families have been asked to put their lives on hold—understanding that every Ontarian should have access to safe, affordable, decent housing, and yet they do not. Whether a family wants to rent or own, live in a co-op or perhaps a townhome or a condominium, they should have those options. Those options are not available.

Therefore, those who have signed this petition are calling on this government to immediately prioritize the repair of Ontario's social housing stock, build new affordable housing, crack down on housing speculators and make rentals much more affordable through real rent control legislation.

I will proudly sign this petition and send it back to the centre table with wonderful page Robbie.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

MPP Tyler Watt: I rise today—this is day four of the Ontario Liberals tabling the petition signed by some residents in my riding, asking the government to reverse their cuts to the grants for OSAP. We are calling on the Ford government to fix OSAP ASAP and uphold Ontario's commitment to accessible, affordable and quality post-secondary education for all.

I will affix my name to this petition and give it to Liam to bring forward.

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank the Ontario Nurses' Association, specifically Local 13 that represents the nurses at Health Sciences North, the hospital in Sudbury. They have collected 237 signatures for this petition called "Stop Privatization and Support Staffing Ratios."

Basically, what they're saying is that understaffing is having a negative impact on our health care system, causing longer wait times, unreliable access to care and unmanageable workloads. Understaffing also causes burnout with nurses, and a lot of them choose to leave the profession because they can't handle it anymore. They want nurse and health care professional staffing ratios to be restored in our public hospitals, as well as every other part of our health care system: home care, long-term care, public health and hospitals, of course.

They talk about the undermining of our health care system by the privatization that has been going on. They also talk about the number of nurse vacancies and burnout, which decreases as soon as you put in nurse-to-patient ratios.

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to mandate staffing ratios for nurses and health professionals across the health care system to ensure that the people of Ontario have access to the care they need within the public system rather than private—and no more outsourcing of services to private, for-profit companies.

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

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm honoured to rise to present a petition on behalf of Pam Sheehan and all of the members of the Trinity United Church justice committee. This petition is entitled "No More Cuts: Fund Special Education in Ontario."

Because the government has taken more than \$6.3 billion out of our education system with their funding cuts, all of our children are being harmed. But there's no children who are being more harmed by this action than children who have disabilities and special needs. The system is really failing our kids. Far too many aren't even able to attend school. Their parents are being asked to keep them at home. For kids who are at school, schools aren't always able to keep them safe, let alone meet their academic needs.

This is a challenge. Every parent wants to know that their child will go to school in the morning and come home safely and receive the supports that they need, but we have fewer EAs, longer wait times for assessments and IEPs that are just not being implemented.

1310

The petitioners are calling on the government to increase special education funding so that it actually meets the needs of every child in the province, to ensure we have the caring adults hired to support them every single day

and that we commit to long-term funding in the province of Ontario so no child is left behind.

I wholeheartedly support this petition. I will add my name to it and send it to the table with page Jasper.

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I have a petition here collected by the Ontario Nurses' Association called "Stop Privatization and Support Staffing Ratios."

What we know is that without those staffing ratios, there have been a lot of problems. One has been the extraordinary expense behind paying for substitute agency nurses.

But what we need and what this petition is asking for is a good ratio between patients and nurses. We know that it improves outcomes. The petition also goes on to say that we want the funding in the public system not going to private, for-profit health care.

I fully endorse this petition. I'm eternally grateful to people in my riding for pulling this number of petitions and signatures together. I'm very proud of them. I will give that to page Sara with my thanks.

LABORATORY SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Brenda Crites, from Capreol in my riding, for these petitions, but they come from all over the northeast. I have close to 10,000 names of people. The petition is called "Keep Medical Lab Testing in the North."

As you know, Speaker, in 2024, LifeLabs—the biggest community, private, for-profit lab provider in Ontario—was bought by Quest Diagnostics, an American company. The American company has one goal: to make as much money in Ontario as possible. So in order for them to make more money, they decided to close their lab facility in Sudbury.

The lab facility in Sudbury employs about 40 people. It serves as a backup whenever there's—I don't wish for a pandemic or an emergency, but they do happen. We have MLT. It is a place where most of the students that go to Collège Boréal and Cambrian College do their placements. In order to become a laboratory technologist, you need to do a one-year placement. Most of them did them there. All of this will be gone, because they want to make more money by moving the testing to Toronto and letting go of their facility in Sudbury.

People are not happy about this. Physicians are worried as to what that will mean. We just had a snowstorm two weeks ago where the highway was closed for three days. That means no testing would happen during those three days. A lot of people need results the same day.

So clinicians are worried, people are worried, colleges are worried, and they want a lab facility to continue to exist in northern Ontario. They petition the Legislative Assembly to immediately take action to "ensure medical laboratory testing continues to be done in Sudbury" and that the resources that we have stay in the northeast.

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

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

MPP Tyler Watt: I rise to support a petition sent to me by the Ontario Nurses' Association, calling on the government to mandate staffing ratios for nurses and health care professionals across the Ontario health care system.

As a front-line nurse myself, our staffing ratios are a huge concern. Something like this would go a long way in not only the safety of our patients, but for morale for nurses as well. They're also calling to "develop staffing ratios in consultation with nurses and health care professionals through their unions" and to "use health care funding to ensure that Ontarians can access the care they need within the public system, rather than privatizing health care through outsourcing services to private, for-profit corporations."

I fully support this. I will affix my name and give it to Ronald to bring forward.

EDUCATION FUNDING

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Again, I'm very proud to rise in this House to present this petition on behalf of the residents of Toronto Centre. This petition is entitled "Stop Cuts to Education!" It calls on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to recognize first-hand experiences of families who have been harmed by this government's cuts to education.

The residents who have signed this petition want all of us in this House and this government to understand that the schools are so understaffed. They're overrun now with crowded classrooms, creating unsustainable and unsuitable learning environments for children. The schools are now dangerously overpacked, especially because there are so few one-on-one supports.

The undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to call on the government to prioritize children and worker safety by investing in education, hiring more teachers and education workers and, of course, keeping those classroom sizes small.

I will be proud to sign this petition and send it back to the centre table with wonderful page Achilles.

CURRICULUM

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you very much to Laura Lee Matthee and the Ontario Music Educators' Association for this petition, which is regarding elementary music instructional minutes.

We know from research that instruction in music is incredibly important for student success, that it helps them with literacy and numeracy, in addition to supporting their mental and emotional well-being. Every child should have equitable access to musical instruction. I know that, as a parent, I was very keen for my children to have it because

I definitely benefited from it. It's like learning another language all by itself, Speaker.

But not all children in Ontario have equitable access to music education right now. There are definitely challenges around funding for specialist teachers and for school boards to be able to provide musical instruments for every child. I know that there are teachers who are paying out-of-pocket right now to try to make sure that children have access to musical instruments, and certainly safe musical instruments, such as clarinet reeds.

The petitioners are calling on the Legislative Assembly to reflect the importance of music education by ensuring that all students in grade 1 through grade 8 receive the recommended minimum instructional time for music each week, with these times not occurring on the same day for any one class and divided into a minimum of two sessions per week in a five-day schedule.

I wholeheartedly endorse this petition, will add my name to it and send it to the table with page Jasper.

EDUCATION FUNDING

MPP Lise Vaugeois: This is a petition that has come to me from the Superior-Greenstone teachers and occasional teachers. It's entitled "Invest in Our Public Elementary Schools."

It is a request that the government really return the money that has been taken out of the system since 2018 and make sure that class sizes are smaller, that kids with special needs are looked after. This makes the school safer for everyone—for the teachers, for the students—and it's extremely important.

I do want to mention that this petition has been signed by people from Schreiber, Geraldton, Terrace Bay, Longlac, Marathon and Nakina. I want to thank them for going to the trouble of putting this petition together, making sure we have it.

I also want to thank them for the fact that they probably have to drive on Highways 11 and 17 to get to and from work and we know the risk that they are taking to do that. So I want to thank them for that.

I will sign this and give it to Ibrahim.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING HOMES AND IMPROVING TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 POUR LA CONSTRUCTION DE LOGEMENTS ET L'AMÉLIORATION DE L'INFRASTRUCTURE DE TRANSPORT

Mr. Flack moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill 98, An Act to enact the Fare Alignment and Seamless Transit Act, 2026 and to amend various Acts /
Projet de loi 98, Loi édictant la Loi de 2026 sur

l'harmonisation des tarifs et l'intégration des transports en commun et modifiant diverses lois.

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

Hon. Rob Flack: I will be sharing my time with the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation and to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

Speaker, it's been an eventful and consequential week for the people of Ontario and our housing sector. While I rise today to speak to Bill 98, the Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act, our actions have been focused and our actions have been targeted to get the right conditions to get more homes built faster and smarter in Ontario.

1320

Since becoming minister, I have been open with the challenges facing our government's housing sector. Over the past four years, we have seen the most dramatic changes in the Canadian population in history. We have lived through inflationary shocks, rate hikes, and now we feel the chaos to the south has created unbelievable uncertainty.

People have hit the pause button, and our housing sector has been hit hard. At its core, it takes too long and costs too much to build a home in Ontario and it is our duty to help fix that.

Today as I stand here, I can say with absolute confidence we are closer than ever to experiencing historic change in the housing sector in Ontario. Our budget before the House right now cuts the HST on all new homes, and we have secured historic funding with the federal government to cut development charges. These initiatives are transformative and historic.

This is a generational tax cut, Speaker—the largest reduction in government costs to housing in our history. But cost is only one aspect—important for sure, but not all-encompassing. The bill before this chamber is about reducing delays and getting shovels in the ground faster. At its heart, this bill is about protecting the dream of home ownership, ensuring that the next generation of Ontarians can realize their dream remains within reach.

Let's be clear: For too many families, the path to owning a home feels longer, more uncertain and more expensive than ever before. Young people are working hard, doing everything right and still wondering if they'll ever be able to afford a place they can call their own. Parents are worried that their children will not have the same housing opportunities that they did. Communities across this province are feeling the pressure of a housing system that has not kept pace with demand. Once again, it takes too long and it costs too much to build housing in Ontario. We are fixing that, Speaker.

This legislation builds directly on the foundation we've already put in place through Bill 17, the Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act, and Bill 60, the Fighting Delays, Building Faster Act. Those bills began the hard work of breaking down barriers, cutting red tape and restoring common sense to a system that has become too

slow, too complex and far too costly. Bureaucracy and delay have become the norms in too many municipalities and we are ending that.

Today we are taking the next step. This bill ensures that we will lower costs. We will also speed up the process to municipal housing solutions, because lowering the price of a home means little if it still takes years to get shovels in the ground. Speaker, the reality is that delays are one of the biggest drivers of housing costs in Ontario today. Every month in the approvals process adds costs. Every duplicated study, every inconsistent requirement, every unnecessary layer of review all add up to time wasted. And these costs are not absorbed by the system. They end up being passed on to the consumer, the people who buy our homes. That is why this legislation takes decisive action to reform how we plan, approve and build housing in Ontario.

One of the most important changes we are proposing is a simplification and standardization of official plans. Today, official plans have become overly complex, inconsistent—for sure—and difficult to navigate. They are often hundreds, even thousands, of pages long, with different formats, different rules and different interpretations from one municipality to the next—and we have 444 of those in Ontario.

This creates uncertainty for builders, delays for municipalities and ultimately fewer homes for Ontarians. We are changing that. By introducing a standardized, simplified format for official plans across Ontario, we will make them clearer, we will make them more predictable, and we will make them faster to approve. This will reduce delays, improve coordination and ensure that planning decisions are focused on what they should be focused on, which is enabling growth and getting homes built.

We're also taking action to reform the site plan process—an important process—a process that was intended to ensure good design and safety, but which in many cases has expanded far beyond its original purpose. Too often, municipalities are imposing enhanced development standards that go well beyond health and safety initiatives—requirements related to aesthetics, landscaping and design that add cost and time without improving outcomes for residents. The result? Project delays, increased costs, homes not built.

In Bill 60, we promised that, by the next construction season, these premium “Cadillac” design standards would be fully optional—no longer mandatory. If people want them, they can have them and they can pay for them. They just have to be voluntary. Municipalities cannot mandate them any longer. I expect a few in this chamber will disagree. They will make claims that this has put Ontario's future at risk. Voluntary, not mandatory, Speaker—this is not adding risk or cost to any homes.

The status quo is a no-go. This legislation will prohibit those unnecessary requirements and refocus site plan control on what truly matters: functionality, which will ultimately lead to accountability; and, most importantly, affordability. At the same time, we are consulting on broader reforms to reduce duplication and eliminate repeated rounds of feedback that slow projects down.

Speaker, the numbers speak for themselves. Site plan delays alone are estimated to cost the Ontario economy \$3.5 billion—that's a B—in lost opportunity, \$3.5 billion in added costs, and that is \$3.5 billion that ultimately makes housing less affordable for the very people we are trying to help, and I know everyone in this chamber is trying to do that. We are putting an end to that. These policies, driven by many urban municipalities, have real cost, and we are saying no more.

Furthermore, this bill also addresses another key barrier to housing supply: outdated and inconsistent planning rules. For example, minimum lot sizes: In many communities, local rules required lots to be larger than necessary, limiting the number of homes that can be built and driving up costs. By establishing a more consistent, province-wide approach, we will enable smaller, more attainable homes, giving more Ontarians the chance to get their foot in the door.

A good example is starter homes for people trying to buy their very first house. Because the dream of home ownership should not be reserved for a select few; it should be available to anyone willing to work for it, save for it and sacrifice for it.

We are also unlocking new opportunities for housing in areas that have historically been difficult to develop. Through a new framework for communal water and waste water systems, we will enable the creation of new communities in rural and remote areas that cannot currently access municipal servicing—a policy advocated by our housing champion, the MPP for Newmarket–Aurora.

Interjections.

Hon. Rob Flack: Hear, hear.

These systems are safe, regulated and widely used in other jurisdictions, and they will allow us to expand housing supply in parts of Ontario that have been left behind for far too long. These utilities will be subject to the same standards as all municipalities in the province are. The Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, who I'm splitting my time with today, will have more to say about this in the coming minutes.

At the same time, we are strengthening the infrastructure that supports housing growth. Our work to advance publicly—and I repeat publicly—owned water and waste water corporations will provide municipalities with the tools to finance critical infrastructure, without placing the full burden on new homebuyers through development charges. This is about a long-term sustainability, about a long-term sense of fairness, and ensuring that infrastructure keeps pace with growth, which it has not.

I have always been clear: This legislation enshrines public ownership of public utilities—full stop. Many in this chamber and outside have peddled a falsehood based on nothing more than feelings and vibes. This is most unfortunate, Speaker. Why, you might ask? This is an innovative solution that provides long-term, patient investment for infrastructure in a more effective way; amortized over decades, not just the short-term on the backs of builders.

And don't take my word for it; take the words of the municipal leaders who, at ROMA and elsewhere, have been lining up, asking to be next to set up a municipal service corporation—publicly owned—because they know this provides opportunities for their communities to grow.

1330

We are also taking steps to improve transparency and accountability in the housing system. For too long, many of the costs associated with buying a home, particularly development charges, have been hidden and unclear. Buyers deserve to know exactly what they are paying for. That is why we are moving forward with measures to require clear disclosure—again, clear disclosure—of these costs in agreements of purchase and sale. Because when someone makes the biggest financial decision of their life, they deserve full transparency. This very policy, adopted unanimously by this chamber thanks to the MPP for Burlington, who is here today—thank you so much.

We are also continuing to support a full housing continuum by extending development charge exemptions to not-for-profit senior housing. We are helping create more options for older Ontarians to downsize. When seniors have more housing options, it frees up existing homes for families and first-time buyers, increasing supply right across the entire market.

Speaker, all of these measures share a common goal: getting more homes built faster and at a lower cost. Because protecting the dream of home ownership is not about one single policy; it's about fixing the entire system, from planning to approvals, to construction and to infrastructure. It's about removing barriers, not adding to them. It's about saying clearly that obstruction, duplication and unnecessary delay will no longer be accepted as the status quo. And it's about working in partnership with municipal partners, with builders, with workers, and with communities to deliver meaningful results that will make a difference.

We know that Ontario is growing. We've seen our population explode in the last number of years. We know that demand for housing will continue to rise because of it. We know that global economic uncertainty only makes it more important that we act decisively here at home. That is why we are taking a forward-looking approach, updating our housing forecast, aligning our policies and ensuring that we are planning not just for today, but for the future.

Speaker, there is no single solution to the housing challenge—I think we've all learned that in the last few years—but there is a clear path forward: lower costs, faster approvals, smarter planning, more infrastructure built in a growing province. That is the path we are on and that is the path we will follow to success.

With this legislation, combined with the HST reduction, combined with an \$8.8-billion investment to reduce development charges by the federal government and Ontario, with the reforms we have already put in place through Bill 17 and Bill 60, we have travelled down a very

busy path—miles to go—of great success, with more to come.

This is more than a single bill or a single announcement. This is about a long-term vision for housing in Ontario. This is about rebuilding a system that for generations—I repeat, for decades and decades—allowed families to buy a home, build equity and pass opportunity onto their children. That needs to stay alive.

For much of Ontario's history, home ownership was attainable for all people working in this province. A single income could support a mortgage. New subdivisions were built quickly. People occupied, built and grew. They raised their families. Infrastructure kept pace with growth. Communities expanded in an orderly, predictable way. That didn't just happen by accident; it happened because governments planned for growth, invested in infrastructure and ensured that the system made it possible to build homes at scale to meet a growing population.

Over time, however—and I think we all know this—the system has become far too complicated, and layers of approvals were added. We need to unpeel the onion, so to speak, to get down to what really matters to get homes built. Planning documents became longer and more complex. Standards diverged from municipality to municipality. Think about how, across Ontario, there are 444. We can't have 444 iterations of official plans and building code amendments. Timelines stretched into months and into years, and with every delay, costs rose and the dream of home ownership further moved out of reach for most people.

What we are doing is now resetting that system, starting from ground zero. We are returning to a model that recognizes a simple truth: If we want housing to be affordable, we must make it possible to build homes faster, more efficiently and, I would add, with scale. We need to meet that scale element—building faster, building smarter—because at the end of the day, all of our efforts and actions are about the people of this province and the generations to come.

It's about the young couple saving for their first home. It's about the growing family looking for more space—maybe their forever home. It's about the senior hoping to downsize and stay in their home community. It's about ensuring that Ontario remains a place where hard work is rewarded, where opportunity exists and where the dream of home ownership is not just a promise, but it is a reality that can be lived day in and day out.

Speaker, we have said and been clear from the very beginning: It takes too long and it costs too much to build housing in this province—again, we are fixing this. We are building on our progress, we are reducing delays, we are lowering costs and we are protecting the dream of home ownership, again, for generations to come.

Thank you for your time, Madam Speaker. I'll turn it to my colleague.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I recognize the member from Hastings–Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Ric Bresee: As the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation, I am proud and honoured

today to speak to the Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act.

I want to thank my colleague the Honourable Rob Flack, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, for his vision and for his remarks outlining the government's plan to build Ontario faster.

Speaker, our government was elected on a promise to protect Ontario by building a stronger, a more resilient and a more self-reliant economy in the face of growing global uncertainty, and that's exactly what we're doing. Ontarians are counting on us to deliver the homes, the transit and the infrastructure that our province needs to grow and to compete. That's why we've tabled the Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act. The measures in this bill demonstrate our government's unwavering commitment to build faster, to fight gridlock and to keep Ontario moving.

Gridlock in Ontario is far more than just an inconvenience; it's an actual threat to our economy. It's a drag on our competitiveness and on our shared prosperity. Every year, gridlock costs Ontario upwards of \$56 billion. That's simply unacceptable. At a time when we're rethinking our trading relationships across the world and working to strengthen our interprovincial trade, fighting gridlock has never been more important.

Last year, our government quickly ended the interprovincial trade barriers that cost Canada's economy \$200 billion a year. As we continue that work, we also need to keep people and goods moving across Ontario. We want to do business with other provinces and they want to do business with us. We want to get Ontario-made goods to new markets here in Canada and abroad, and we need to do that faster. That means reducing gridlock. Our Ontario economy depends on it; Canada's economy depends on it.

Therefore, our government is taking bold, decisive action to keep traffic flowing across this province. Our government is making historic investments in transportation infrastructure all across Ontario. We are investing \$30 billion to build, repair and expand highways, roads and bridges in every corner of the province. We're building Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass, which will save drivers across greater Toronto about 30 minutes per trip. We're twinning the Garden City Skyway bridge on the QEW that supports the movement of more than \$1 trillion—trillion with a T—worth of goods every year, and we're laying the groundwork to widen sections of Highway 401 and Highway 400. We've also launched a study to assess the feasibility of a driver and transit tunnel under the 401 in the GTA. That is one of the most congested corridors, one of the busiest highways in all of North America.

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These are critical projects to improve traffic flow and to support the movement of people and of goods all across Ontario. And Speaker, I can tell you, we're delivering results.

Our government invested \$73 million to accelerate the construction of the Gardiner Expressway here in Toronto. That work was completed more than a year ahead of

schedule, saving drivers 22 minutes per trip and saving the Ontario economy \$273 million.

Speaker, we truly are making a difference, and our plan to fight gridlock extends far beyond construction projects.

Ontario currently has 237 kilometres of high-occupancy vehicle lanes across provincial highways, with more of them planned. We know that these lanes can be better used during off-peak periods, and we also know that single-occupant vehicles represented 72% of the cars on roads in the greater Golden Horseshoe in 2022.

To get the most out of our transportation network, we need to give drivers more choice. That's why we're proposing a regulatory amendment to the Highway Traffic Act that would allow single-occupant vehicles to use the HOV lanes during off-peak hours. It makes better use of the existing highway infrastructure to help reduce gridlock and keep people moving along the provincial highways.

Speaker, our government is also taking action to harmonize municipal road building standards. This is hard to believe, but right now, our ministry estimates that there are over 10,000 municipal road construction standards all across the province—10,000 different standards just to build roads. That patchwork has slowed down construction and simply made it harder to build the roads that Ontario needs.

That's why we're proposing a new regulation under the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act that would require municipalities to adopt uniform road-building standards for hot mix asphalt, for aggregates, drainage and for general contract conditions. This would ensure that all municipalities are working from a common set of standards, helping to save time and reduce costs through greater efficiency. This is good for the municipalities and it's good for the province—streamlined procurement and faster project approvals.

Road builders across the province have been asking for more consistent road-building standards for years. We've heard them, Madam Speaker; we're listening. We're taking the steps to help build roads faster, more efficiently and more cost-effectively all across Ontario.

Public transit is also a key driver of our economy, our quality of life and our plan to protect Ontario. That's why our government is investing \$70 billion in the largest transit expansion in North America and, by far, the largest subway expansion in Canadian history.

Speaker, we all know we recently opened the Finch West and the Eglinton Crosstown LRTs here in Toronto. Those rapid transit lines have transformed the way people travel across the city, carrying tens of thousands of passengers each and every day.

We invested almost \$1 billion to increase the Canadian content in TTC subway trains being manufactured by Alstom in Thunder Bay—and actually tested in my own riding by Alstom as well—supporting more jobs for Ontario workers. It's a better experience for transit riders.

We're building the Scarborough line, the Ontario Line, the Yonge North subway extension, the Eglinton Crosstown West extension. We're also building the Hazel McCallion Line and the Hamilton LRT. And on top of

that, Speaker, our GO Expansion program will deliver two-way, all-day service to GO Transit's busiest rail routes.

We're restoring passenger service to northern Ontario by bringing back the Northlander. Just as important, we're making public transit more accessible and more affordable than ever before.

In 2024, our government launched the One Fare program—a program that is saving Ontarians up to \$1,600 per year by allowing transit riders to transfer between GO Transit, the TTC and other participating transit agencies across the GTA on a single fare. Since its launch, One Fare has enabled nearly 72 million fee transfers, just since 2024, and that has saved Ontarians over \$230 million. That's why we extended the program in December of last year. And if the Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act passes, One Fare will deliver even more benefits for Ontarians.

This legislation lays the groundwork to explore future regulations to advance our vision for One Fare 2.0. Under this One Fare 2.0, municipal transit systems across the GTHA would move forward under a single, unified fare structure, with common fares, discounts, fare affordability programs and free transfers across the different transit agencies. This will simply make transit easier and more affordable, no matter where someone starts that trip.

Speaker, the legislation would also support better service on priority routes that cross municipal boundaries. And this one is near and dear to my heart: It will improve accessible transit by requiring transit agencies to use a unified trip-booking service. Together, these measures will create more consistent fares for similar trips across the region. They will shorten travel times, reduce transfers and offer more frequent service. These are the kinds of forward-thinking measures needed to improve transit connections between the municipalities and make people's trips easier and faster.

Our government is also restoring passenger rail service to northeastern Ontario by bringing back the Northlander. It's about time. Northlander will connect Toronto to Timmins with a rail connection to Cochrane, supporting northern industry, supporting northern tourism and access to essential services.

Our government has invested more than \$100 million in Northlander rail infrastructure. Earlier this year, we celebrated the arrival of the first Northlander train set, with the second actually just arriving earlier this month.

One of the challenges: In many of the communities along the corridor, there are still gaps when it comes to people getting to and from the station. Some of these communities don't have taxis. They don't have local transit. Many don't have ride share or community transportation options. That's why our government is proposing a framework to allow ride share services in the communities along the Northlander corridor. This will support passenger journeys from beginning to end by giving people a more reliable way to get to the Northlander stations and back home again. That is what our government is working to deliver.

Our government has also made significant progress on our GO Expansion program and the GO extensions, which will bring new and improved GO rail service to communities in Durham, in Kitchener-Waterloo, in Hamilton and Niagara. To date, we've invested \$14 billion to transform travel across the GO network.

We've reached several important milestones just in this last year. We broke ground on the Bowmanville extension that will add almost 19 kilometres of track to the Lakeshore East line, extending service into Durham region and supporting 17,000 daily trips, with 4.9 million annual boardings by 2041.

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We also reached an agreement in principle with CN Rail to acquire more than 20 kilometres of land within the Halton subdivision as we continue improving rail service between Kitchener and Toronto.

We've expanded transit options for people in east Hamilton and Stoney Creek by opening the Confederation GO station in Hamilton. We've also broken ground at the Caledonia GO station in Toronto, which will connect riders on the Barrie line to TTC bus services and the Eglinton Crosstown—it all comes around and is connected. As we complete upgrades at West Harbour GO station, that will save 250,000 commuters in Niagara Falls and St. Catharines 15 minutes per round trip. That's quite the savings.

We have done all of this while making sure that our investments in GO Transit also support good-paying jobs right here in Ontario. We've invested nearly \$500 million to refurbish GO Transit rail cars at Alstom's manufacturing plant in Thunder Bay and more than \$350 million to refurbish GO rail cars at Ontario Northland facilities in North Bay.

As we continue to expand the GO network our government also has plans to optimize new stations that are being built across the network. The cost of building new GO stations continues to rise. This is due to higher construction and material costs as well as projects becoming more and more complex, requiring extensive coordination.

As our province faces mounting economic uncertainty, our government is determined to keep construction costs reasonable and predictable. That's why we're proposing new measures to standardize the design of new GO stations and reduce construction costs. This would speed up timelines for new projects such as the Grimsby GO station.

GO expansion is a generational, multi-billion-dollar investment that will transform the way Ontarians travel for years and years and decades to come. By standardizing station design across the network, we can deliver better value for taxpayers while getting faster and better service for tens of thousands of Ontarians each and every day.

But we also need to be vigilant about some things, specifically about fare evasion. As of November 2025, Metrolinx's fare evasion rate averaged 5.1%, representing a loss of \$21 million, a loss to the revenue each and every year. That lost revenue puts added pressure on the system and effectively on the proper fare-paying riders. That's

why our government will work with Metrolinx to strengthen the enforcement and raise fines for fare evasion.

Metrolinx currently deploys 47 revenue protection officers, and those officers inspect approximately 2.4% of all rail boardings. As the GO network continues to grow, unfortunately, that's not enough. We will work with Metrolinx to hire more officers, improve the station infrastructure to help prevent fare evasion and focus enforcement on fare evasion hot spots. There is no excuse for fare evasion, and our government is taking action to crack down on it.

Speaker, our government takes road safety very, very seriously, and we have the track record to prove it. Our government has tabled several bills, including the Safer Roads and Communities Act, the Keeping Criminals Behind Bars Act, the Safer Streets, Stronger Communities Act and the Protect Ontario Through Safer Streets and Stronger Communities Act, to help ensure that Ontario roads remain among the safest in North America. We have introduced tougher penalties for impaired driving, for stunt driving and for dangerous driving. We have taken actions to crack down on car theft, and we continue to take steps to keep Ontario's roads among the safest in North America.

But our work does not stop there. We know that commercial vehicles, when driven unsafely, unfortunately cause tragedies on our roads. Last fall, when our government tabled the Fighting Delays, Building Faster Act, we committed to introducing a mandatory waiting period before class G licence holders could apply for a class A commercial licence. With this legislation, we are delivering on that commitment.

Our proposed regulatory amendments would establish a mandatory waiting period to ensure that all commercial drivers have significant on-road, real-life experience before operating large commercial vehicles. Speaker, this would apply to drivers with an Ontario G licence, as well as the equivalent licence from other provinces and from the United States. We believe this is a common-sense step that will help keep Ontario's roads safe.

The global economic uncertainty and geopolitical tensions are forcing us to rethink how we build, how we trade and how we grow our economy. It's why our government is focused on protecting Ontario and building a stronger, more resilient and more self-reliant economy.

The measures proposed in the Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act are part of that plan. This legislation will help us build faster, fight gridlock, keep Ontario workers on the job and deliver the infrastructure that Ontario needs to grow and will need for years to come.

By expanding the use of HOV lanes during off-peak hours, we're giving drivers more choice, supporting the movement of people and goods across Ontario and making better use of our existing highways, our existing infrastructure. By laying the groundwork for One Fare 2.0, we are making transit more convenient, more affordable and more connected across the GTHA. By standardizing the designs of GO stations, we will reduce cost and speed up

construction for new stations as we expand that network. By supporting a ride share framework along the Northlander corridor, we will improve access to the new passenger rail system serving northern Ontario. And by enhancing road safety requirements, we're helping keep Ontario's roads amongst the safest in North America. Altogether, Speaker, these measures will help keep people and goods moving. It will support economic growth and help build a stronger Ontario.

We've made significant progress, but there is more work to do. The Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act will help us deliver the homes, the transit and the infrastructure that Ontarians are counting on us to do. That work has never been more important.

I appreciate the opportunity to discuss these very important measures, Madam Speaker, and with that said, I'll turn it over to my colleague Minister McCarthy.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I recognize the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I rise today, and I do so as a privilege. I'm pleased to speak in support of Bill 98, the Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act.

I want to begin by thanking the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, both for his remarks earlier this afternoon and for taking this critical step by introducing legislation focused on getting more homes built in the province of Ontario. I also want to recognize the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation, the member for Hastings–Lennox and Addington, who just spoke now in detail about how this bill would help get people moving by improving transportation infrastructure.

At its core, Bill 98 is about something that matters deeply to the people of Ontario: It's about ensuring that Ontario will remain the best province in Canada, where people can work, live, raise a family and see a future for themselves in the community they call home.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing spoke to the scale of the challenge before us and to the urgency of the moment, and he is right. Ontario's housing challenge is real. It is being felt in large cities, in smaller communities, in rural Ontario and in fast-growing regions across our province. It is being felt by young professionals trying to live closer to where they work. It is being felt by young families trying to put down roots in the communities they love. It is being felt by our seniors looking to downsize and stay close to their children, their grandchildren and the services they rely on. And it is being felt by communities that wish to grow but need the right infrastructure in place to support that growth.

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If we are serious about changing that, then we need to fix not just one part of the system but the whole chain that turns a permit into a home. That includes planning, it includes approvals and it includes the infrastructure that makes growth possible in the first place.

Speaker, housing does not happen in isolation. If Ontario is going to build more homes, then Ontario must

also build and support the infrastructure that makes those homes possible. That includes the systems people often do not see or even think about but rely upon each and every single day—systems like the water and sewage pipes and the water treatment systems that keep communities clean and safe, or the electrical and natural gas connections that power our homes and our economy, or the roads and transit systems that connect people to work and to school and all other types of basic public infrastructure enabling communities to function. These things may not always be visible in the final sale of a home, but they are essential to whether or not that home can be built in the first place.

That is exactly why I would like to take a moment to speak to the components of this bill that relate to the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks specifically. My ministry has a straightforward responsibility in all of this: to protect public health, to protect Ontario's strong drinking water standards and to make sure the regulatory system can support growth instead of slowing it down.

That is what these proposed changes would do. If passed by this House, these proposals, I submit, would support home building, they would support infrastructure and they would preserve the safeguards Ontarians expect—safeguards built on prevention, science and on strong, local planning.

Under the Clean Water Act, communities protect drinking water sources through science-based, locally driven source protection plans all designed to guard against contamination or depletion. Across Ontario, that work supports nearly 440 municipal drinking water systems, covering source protection areas where more than 95% of Ontarians live. Under the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Health Protection and Promotion Act, Ontario's drinking water is carefully monitored through regular testing by certified operators and water-quality analysts who collect thousands of drinking water samples each and every year, evaluating those samples against 151 science-based standards that are reviewed regularly. That is the foundation we are building on: strong standards, strong oversight and a system that starts with prevention.

Speaker, I want to make this abundantly clear: Ontario's regulated drinking water systems are among the most rigorously protected in the entire world. That is not changing, and under our Ontario government, it never will.

Through this legislation, if passed, our Ontario government would implement two important changes. First, to support the implementation of the Water and Wastewater Public Corporations Act, passed in the fall of 2025 as part of Bill 60, we are proposing to amend the Safe Drinking Water Act to clarify that drinking water systems owned by water and waste water public corporations would be considered municipal drinking water systems under the act. While this has always been our intent, we are enshrining this in legislation to provide assurance to the people of Ontario that the same high standards for drinking water will continue to apply to these systems. It means these systems would be subject to the exact same public health and safety requirements that already apply to muni-

cipal drinking water systems across Ontario; the same requirements for permitting; the same requirements for licensing; the same requirements for treatment equipment; the same requirements for sampling, testing and operator qualifications; the same requirements that ensure that 99.9% of drinking water tests from municipal residential systems meet Ontario's drinking water quality standards. When in that rare occasion they do not, immediate action is taken.

Speaker, it has never been more apparent that municipalities need better tools to finance and deliver critical infrastructure. They need ways to support growth without simply passing more and more cost burden onto new homebuyers, and they need confidence that these new tools fit clearly within Ontario's existing health and safety framework. This proposed amendment provides that certainty.

Another important change we are putting forward as part of Bill 98 would make it easier to move forward with communal water and waste water systems. That matters especially in rural, remote and underserved parts of our province. In many of these areas, the issue is not whether people want housing; the issue is whether servicing is even available to support it.

Where traditional municipal systems are not yet in place, communal systems can help bridge the gap. They can support new housing; they can support new communities, and they can do so within a regulated framework. Similar systems are already successfully being used in many other jurisdictions, including across much of Europe, and these support homes until municipal infrastructure can catch up and they can be connected to the broader water systems.

To make it easier to establish communal water and waste water systems, we are therefore proposing changes to the Safe Drinking Water Act to address unnecessary duplication. Under the current legislation, a municipality must give consent once to a communal system under the Municipal Act. Then they are effectively required to provide the exact same consent under the Safe Drinking Water Act. That is redundant, I submit to this House. It's redundant, adds time, adds friction, and it does not add value or increase protection.

This bill would simplify that process. We propose that where municipal consent has already been granted under the Municipal Act, that consent would automatically apply under the Safe Drinking Water Act as well. That is the right change. It does not weaken oversight. It does not lower safety standards. It simply removes a duplicative step that holds projects back.

Speaker, the broader value of this bill is that it recognizes something fundamental: Housing supply depends on infrastructure. If the water system is not there, then housing stalls. If waste water servicing is delayed, housing stalls. If approvals stack on top of one another with no clear purpose, housing stalls. I think every member of this house can agree that delays have negative and unfortunate consequences.

When housing stalls, people pay the price. When housing stalls, costs rise. When costs rise, the consequences are quite visible. They are visible in long commutes to work, to school or to see our friends and families on weekends. They are visible in young people staying in living arrangements long after they have outgrown them, or in young families delaying the purchase of their first home because change is not something they can afford. That is why more housing supply matters indeed, and why our Ontario government will continue working hard to create the right conditions for more housing starts—housing starts that can be turned into complete new homes, with keys in the hands of people looking to stay in their communities, live closer to work and build their lives right here in Ontario.

The same logic applies beyond water and infrastructure. A growing province needs people and goods to be able to move efficiently. It needs communities that are connected and working together. It needs infrastructure that supports daily life in practical ways, whether that means getting to work, getting home or accessing services—just staying on the move without losing time to avoidable congestion and delay.

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I know my colleague the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation spoke more fully to these elements of the bill, but I'm going to go through some of the highlights again if I may, Speaker, because these are not separate conversations. Housing, transit, transportation and infrastructure all place pressure on one another. If one falls behind, the strain shows up everywhere else. That's why this bill proposes measures to make public transit more convenient, consistent and connected for customers and all users of transit in all its forms.

By simplifying fares, improving transit across municipal borders, it will make it easier to obtain technical and engineering reviews from municipalities for provincial transit projects, allowing transit projects to proceed faster. It will help, I submit, build new infrastructure by standardizing municipal road construction standards all across Ontario, replacing over 10,000 different municipal road construction standards which are currently in use. That just simply results in project time and cost savings due to improved efficiencies—if we can achieve it—streamlined procurement processes and faster project approvals. And it will allow single-occupant vehicles to use high-occupancy vehicle lanes during off-peak hours, making better use of existing highway infrastructure to help reduce gridlock and keep drivers moving on our provincial highways.

That is why I view this legislation as a measured and united approach to make sure Ontario is not just planning for growth but preparing for it. Speaker, that is how we will ensure this province remains the best place to live, work and to raise a family.

This legislation is a vital, critical step forward, because it helps us do two crucial things. First, it helps us build the housing and infrastructure that Ontario needs. And secondly, it helps us do that while maintaining the strong public safeguards that our fellow citizens and residents in Ontario expect and deserve.

For too long, our communities have been told they have to choose between a strong economy and a rigorously protected environment. Those two goals have always been presented as though they conflict with each other, as though hard-working professionals, young families, seniors, students, newcomers and the many other people calling our province home have to choose between building new homes, creating new jobs and preserving our natural spaces. Well, Speaker, I have said before many times, and I will say it again in this House: These goals do not require a choice. The reality is much simpler. The future of Ontario depends on our ability to do both, and to do so thoughtfully, responsibly and with purpose.

We are fortunate to have some of the most incredible forests, lakes and landscapes in the world right here in our own backyard. These natural spaces are not only part of who we are; they are the foundation of healthy communities, a high quality of life and, yes, a strong economy. At the same time, Ontario has always been a province of builders and innovators. Now more than ever, we must support communities, we must build homes and we need to encourage industries that provide well-paying jobs and drive innovation. We must do that while protecting our shared environment and ensuring that it can continue to be enjoyed for future generations.

To be clear: This legislation is not a silver bullet. Transformative change will require an all-hands-on-deck approach, a united approach, an approach dedicated to common causes. It will require hard work and real dedication from everyone involved at every level of government, as well as from our partners in the private sector. But through this legislation and through the great work of our Premier, our Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and our Minister of Transportation, I am confident that we can and will achieve transformative results.

For my part, Speaker, I want to be very clear: I am ready to support this work every step of the way. As Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, I am committed to upholding the strong public health and environmental standards Ontarians expect and deserve, while making sure our regulatory systems are clear, effective and able to support our growing province.

At the same time, as Acting Minister of Infrastructure, I am equally committed to supporting the long-term, practical infrastructure planning that our province needs if we are going to build complete communities and keep them functioning well as they grow.

It's not just supporting new infrastructure; it's upgrading existing infrastructure. Our plans have unlocked the ability to build as many as 800,000 new homes and support 375,000 existing homes. That is the work that is in front of us now and for the balance of this decade and beyond.

Going from permit to shovels in the ground on new starts to a young family stepping through the door of their new home for the very first time, excited to start a new chapter in their lives and their communities—this is the meaningful impact that this proposed legislation can bring about.

That journey is made easier when government does its job properly, because as we have said many times, government doesn't build the homes directly, but government can and must create the conditions to enable home building. That means investing in infrastructure—existing and new infrastructure.

When the standards are clear, when timelines are credible and manageable and when the system is focused on delivering outcomes and results, not just maintaining processes that add no value and do not make us any safer and do not protect our environment any better, those are the results that we believe we could achieve, if this House supports Bill 98, the Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act. I believe that it can and will achieve transformational results and outcomes. It will get us to the goals that we wish to achieve together. We can protect our precious and shared environment now and for future generations, and we can build the Ontario of tomorrow.

I submit, Madam Speaker, that this legislation is thoughtful. It is absolutely necessary, and it will help move Ontario in the right direction. I am honoured and proud to support it. I urge all members of this House to put partnership, common cause, the ability to do both—to build the Ontario of tomorrow and to protect our shared environment, to put that common cause over partisanship.

It has been done in this House before. I have had the privilege, with the support of the opposition members and members of the third party, to have introduced in this House and been able to see passed in this House four pieces of legislation when I was Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement. And there have been measures that have been introduced on the other side that have been supported, so it can be done.

I believe that when we act together in a non-partisan way for a cause that we can all get behind, whether co-operating with all levels of government, as we saw earlier this week, or with members of the opposition party, we will make our communities and those we serve in our communities proud of the work we do here. Let's come together.

I stand as Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks supporting this bill because it can and will protect the environment and our natural heritage and our natural places, and at the same time, we can build together.

I thank the House for their kind attention this afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this bill.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

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MPP Lise Vaugeois: The member from Hastings–Lennox and Addington repeated the claim we've heard repeatedly from the government side that our highways are the safest in the world. But clearly this member has not been listening to the people from northern Ontario, who are full of rage and despair about the refusal of this government to address the incredible lack of safety on Highways 11 and 17.

The member also inserted a comment about raising the requirements for commercial vehicle licences. There's no mention of this anywhere in Bill 98, but given that there are only eight people to inspect over 260 commercial driving schools and over 90% of trucking fleets have never been inspected, if indeed there are plans to increase licensing requirements, how does the government intend to enforce new rules when it has been unwilling to enforce the existing rules?

Mr. Ric Bresee: I do thank the member for the question and for the passion with which the members of the opposition and of this caucus take very seriously the safety of northern highways and of all highways here in this province.

Speaker, the safety of Ontario families is something that all of us, all of this government, has put a priority on. That's why we're investing nearly \$650 million through the northern highways program to improve safety, mobility and economic growth across the northern part of this province.

Directly to the member's question: We're doubling the number of transportation enforcement officers in northern Ontario and expanding enforcement blitzes along 11 and 17.

Again, this ministry, this government, takes road safety very, very seriously. We know there have been tragedies, and they are horrible. But we will continue our work to make it safer and safer every day.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

MPP Tyler Watt: My question is for the member from Durham. The schedule claims to prohibit private ownership of water and waste water services. So can the minister clearly explain what safeguards are in place to guarantee that there will be no privatization of our water system now or in the future and confirm whether there will be any exceptions to this rule?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I thank the member for the question. The plan is for municipal service corporations that are public, so this is not changing anything in terms of the rigorous standards for the protection of the water quality. What we are doing is removing unnecessary and needless duplication—I'm saying the same thing: "unnecessary and needless duplication," which—I've just duplicated a word.

I would say, simply, that when you have consent required in the Municipal Act and then the same consent has to be waited for under the Safe Drinking Water Act, that doesn't add any value, as I indicated. It doesn't make the protections any better, so we removed that duplication, but public municipal service corporations are what is being affirmed by this legislation, and we will continue in that regard.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I'm delighted to rise for, I think, the first time in this calendar year.

The member from Essex and the member from Chatham-Kent-Leamington and I share, effectively, a

county that has 10 sets of construction standards: seven municipalities, MTO, county and city. So it makes it very difficult for industry to be efficient, because they have to understand the very minor nuances that go into each development standard. Really, they've been asking for many, many years, why is it that you have to be different on the other side of the road when it's all the same weather, the same environment, same geology? Everything should be the same. So I'm delighted that the government is working with municipalities and industry partners to find the ways to standardize and streamline infrastructure.

So can the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation explain how harmonizing standards will help reduce costs, improve efficiency and support housing and infrastructure?

Mr. Ric Bresee: I thank the member for that question. I also recognize his long experience with these such municipal affairs in your previous careers.

Our government understands, first off, that the infrastructure and housing must be built together. It's the only way this works. Roads, transit, water and waste water all form the foundation so that we can get to the housing and grow our communities. If infrastructure is delayed, if it becomes too expensive, housing projects themselves fall behind.

Industrial partners have told us for a long time that one of the challenges they face is the inconsistency in municipal road construction standards. There are thousands of different standards. By moving towards harmonized road construction standards across all municipalities across the province, we create consistency, reduce duplication and improve procurement and construction timelines.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: My question is to any of the speakers who spoke today. It's pertaining to schedule 5 of the Metrolinx Act. It appears to exempt Metrolinx from the Ontario building code.

I remind the members that this is Metrolinx, which has as many VPs as there are members of provincial Parliament, and yet, under this government, has been unable to deliver any project on cost or on time. This is the same Metrolinx that, during the construction of the Finch West LRT in my area, collapsed a condominium garage, thankfully killing nobody; flooded a daycare of 100 kids because of a sewer rupture; that I've heard in many cases did not conduct pre-construction surveys and to this day is still rejecting claims based on damages that people are saying were done to their properties. And yet we're now exempting them from the building code. Could someone please explain the wisdom of this move?

Mr. Ric Bresee: Again, thank you to the to the member opposite with the question. What I think people fail to realize is just how big the expansion, the development program within the Ministry of Transportation, within Metrolinx, is. There are literally billions and billions and billions of dollars' worth of programs moving forward here.

Having standardized measures, building efficiencies into the system so we don't have duplication as we're going through the analysis, but ensuring that scientific and engineering technical details are still managed, is a way to bring efficiency, a way to move these programs faster and at better cost. It is good for the people that get the projects done, and it's good for the taxpayer to have them more efficient.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I'm not going to pretend to be an expert on municipal affairs or even construction, but I can clearly see that in this bill, we're centralizing power. We're actually stripping municipalities of their ability to plan their own community, whether it's for density and height or whether it's for environmental standards.

I'd like to think that municipalities know what they need in their communities, and so I'm wondering about the wisdom of this this new bill. Does the government think that Queen's Park knows better than local governments when it comes to building complete and livable communities?

Hon. Rob Flack: It's a very good question, but I would respectfully offer that we have 444 municipalities. Yes, there are nuances and differences throughout the province, but let's take the building code, for example. Why should the building code be different in Toronto than it is in Timmins? Why should official plans, how we put them together, be different in Pembroke than they are in Pickering? We need standardization.

There still is ample room within the provincial policy statement and what we do to have local input. For instance, in the building code, we're asking a review of it line by line or section by section. And in that review, we're asking outside people to come in. Give us your thoughts; give us your ideas. We're trying to speed up the time it takes to get infrastructure on the ground and housing built.

So I would say again, just to conclude on this matter, I understand where there's a concern, but where there can standardization, why do we need duplication? Time is money. We need to lower the cost to build a house.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Time for a quick question.

Mr. John Jordan: Just quickly, I'd like to give the opportunity to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks to duplicate again, but there are communities in my riding, as he well knows, that are dependent on their building for the communal water and sewage systems.

I'd like the minister to just comment on how this will speed up those programs.

1430

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I thank the thoughtful member for that question. Communal water and waste water systems are an essential—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): The government House leader has a point of order.

Hon. Steve Clark: One of our pages, Achilles, who is right here, from Brampton South—it's his birthday today. Let's wish Achilles a happy birthday.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Burch: It's a pleasure to rise today and offer some comments on Bill 98. I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Ottawa Centre and my colleague from Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas. I have some more general comments, but I'm sure my colleagues will be getting into the issues of housing and transportation in a little more detail.

We've been having these debates in this Legislature for over seven years now around housing, so there's obviously an ideological difference here between how we approach the problem of creating housing. We've said many times that we don't believe it can be done effectively by simply pressuring municipalities and changing municipal laws. We think that we actually need to put a stop to rampant speculation and to get more directly involved in the creation of housing. That's a difference we have in this House.

But there is no question that a lack of housing supply and affordable housing is a huge problem that municipalities have to deal every day. Increasing homelessness, growing demands for health and social services, an infrastructure repair backlog with demand for new roads, water systems, transit, hospitals and parks to support current and future growth: These are Olympic problems confronting municipalities across the province. They can't deal with them alone and it can't be dealt with simply by regulation.

Municipalities are doing the best they can with the revenue tools and external funding they have to solve these problems. They can and want to do more, but they are fiscally constrained by how much revenue they can raise and the lack of predictability and durability in provincial and federal transfer payments.

As AMO said two decades ago, changing economic conditions and demographics led to a review of municipal and provincial responsibilities and their funding. Ontario faces a similar pivotal moment today, with rapid population growth, a housing crisis, an infrastructure deficit and rising service costs that are putting unprecedented pressure on municipal finances.

I think they're doing the best they can. I think this government has been a little too quick to blame municipalities for the housing crisis. We've always argued that there needs to be a new deal for municipalities, a new agreement between the province and municipalities that's based more on respect and partnership.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the recent Build Communities Strong Fund and the \$8.8-billion announcement that was made. Obviously, we all believe that it's positive and I hope that the government will work with AMO on answering some of the questions that they have asked.

What is the extent of these DC reductions and what are the mechanisms for determining and applying them? What is the timing for both the DC reductions and the delivery

of offset funding? That's a very important question, Speaker, because we've had these debates in the past about the government making promises to make municipalities whole. According to AMO, municipalities and most experts, that has absolutely not happened. That's a promise that has been broken in the past, so I know we're going to be watching very, very closely that municipalities are made whole for lost DC revenue.

I would argue this is a classic example of a bill that needs to go to committee. The government has a majority. We don't see anything that's, on the face of it, really terrible in this bill. There are some things that could be very, very positive, but a lot of it has to do with the regulations and with how this bill will roll out.

The Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act moves forward with 14 pieces of legislative and regulatory amendments that were first introduced last year under Bill 17, the Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act, and Bill 60, the Fighting Delays, Building Faster Act. It's also proposing to consult on an additional 16 policy ideas, so a lot of things are going to be—the government stands up when they present the bill and they tell us how the bill is going to roll out, but a lot of those things aren't actually in the bill; it's going to depend on what comes out in regulation. A lot of it is going to depend also on the input that they get in committee, so that's very, very important.

I will say—and I would commend the minister—many of the adopted changes in this bill address recommendations that AMO raised in their submissions, including “ensuring municipal service corporation water systems remain under public ownership”—I'll talk about that a little bit more. I want to thank AMO for their advocacy around that, as well as the Canadian Union of Public Employees, who have raised concerns. I know the government, in their last bill, said that those would remain public, but it wasn't actually in the legislation, and with everything that has happened in the region of Peel, it's understandable that employees are stressed and the union is concerned after the attempted dissolution in that region and all the problems that flowed from that. So assurances were needed.

We're still looking at what's in this bill, but it appears on the face of it that there is a guarantee in the bill—we hope it's a guarantee—that public service corporations remain public, and there's also a reference to collective agreements being maintained, which is very, very important for the Canadian Union of Public Employees. So we will certainly be monitoring that as we move forward, and looking forward, when this bill is in committee, to hearing from CUPE. I hope the government allows them to come and give their opinions, as well as, of course, AMO.

Also, the government has taken some suggestions from AMO on “applying the same rigorous drinking water standards to private communal systems as those required for municipal systems,” which will ensure “uniform standards and avoids costly upgrades should a municipality ever assume responsibility for a private system.” That was actually the member from Newmarket–Aurora, I believe,

and the opposition actually supported that private member's bill by that member.

So those are things that it is good to see in this bill. Of course, we look forward to the committee hearings to discuss all of these things.

In terms of standardized official plans, a new simplified official plan format is in this bill that includes “a mandatory and standardized set of land use designations, and a common structure for table of contents and schedules.” There was a good piece written by John Michael McGrath yesterday on this bill that I thought was quite accurate in terms of—many of these things in the bill could be positive or they could be negative; it all depends how they roll out.

One of the biggest novel changes introduced in Bill 98 is standardizing official plans—which the minister mentioned—the core planning documents that municipalities use to both shape and legally justify their zoning bylaws and other planning rules. While official plans currently have to be approved by the government, municipalities have a lot of freedom in how they're written, obviously so long as they don't break either the province's Planning Act or other provincial policy. The new model, if Bill 98 passes, will be much more restrictive in allowing municipalities only 12 types of land use. So the devil will be in the details, as with many of these provisions, which is why we need to make sure that we have input from AMO, from municipalities and a full discussion of these things.

1440

With respect to site plan reforms and prohibiting enhanced development standards: Municipal standards beyond mandatory health and safety requirements, such as soil composition and landscaping, are prohibited, and the province says they will consult on a feedback process governing site plan controls.

This is often referred to as “a root-and-branch reform to the province's building code, saying that the current document is ‘overly complex’ and doesn't reflect the needs of 2026. The government will strike a task force to do the rewrite and present recommendations to the government. According to ministry staff, however, there's currently no deadline for when this will be implemented. It certainly won't be in time for the current building season, but its impacts could be substantial.” If it comes out in a way that is positive, it could make new types of housing more available and affordable. So that could be a very positive thing.

In terms of minimum lot sizes, there is a provincially mandated minimum lot size: “Currently, municipalities can impose limits on how small a parcel of land can be when building a home, with rules that have a long history of mandating sprawl and being used as a tool of exclusion in both Canada and the US. The province is proposing to force municipalities to allow lots as small as 175 square metres, or a bit over 1,800 square feet.”

McGrath, in his article, points out that “when Houston, Texas legalized those kinds of small lots, it set off a boom in townhouses in that city.” So this is another thing that could be very positive.

There could also be negative consequences in terms of site plan development, in design standards and other things. That's something that we'll be watching carefully and looking for feedback on.

The bill also talks about encumbered parkland. It introduces a new framework that would allow high-quality encumbered land to count towards a parkland dedication requirement, and the framework would include publicly available spaces, such as courtyards. That's going to be an interesting one.

I did a couple of terms as a city councillor in St. Catharines with my friend—who is sitting behind me—from the St. Catharines riding. We were in an area of the city—we were ward mates, actually—that was lots of former industrial land, so lots of brownfields and a lot of issues with respect to site plan development. It's often portrayed by the government as red tape, but if you're a city councillor in a place and you're actually trying to mediate between residents and developers, as we often did, those site plan controls can be a really valuable tool, both to help the developer get their development done in a more timely manner and also to address the concerns of residents in the area where the development is. Again, really, the devil is in the details.

Then there's a minor change with minister zoning orders. I won't get into that. The government knows we're not a big fan of these or how they've been used, certainly.

With respect to development charges: There's a very minor change for non-profit retirement homes which provide supportive housing for low-income seniors. It's obviously a positive thing—and some new disclosure requirements which are also positive.

As I mentioned earlier, with municipal service corporations: It's appreciated, I know, by AMO and by those that are concerned about the issue of privatization that there are some assurances in schedule 9 in the bill. I'll say again, as I said the last time we discussed this, I'm not exactly sure why the government is using municipal service corporations in this way. Aside from the privatization issue, these are usually used for a collection of small municipalities who want to pool their resources and be able to borrow more money for infrastructure. They set up one of these to hold the infrastructure in common, and they can borrow more money for new infrastructure. It's not typically something that saves money or that—certainly not—results in lower water rates. I don't think there's anyone who can point to that happening anywhere.

Actually, there's been a lot of concern expressed by AMO and by others about using this in a large region like Peel where, having failed to dissolve that region, they're now devolving it. They're taking things out of the bureaucracy. Obviously, they can't split that infrastructure up between Mississauga, Caledon and Peel, so they're creating this for that purpose. A lot of people think that's not really a model that's well served in a large regional municipality like that, so there actually could be water rate increases as a result of it.

These claims—that it somehow streamlines government, makes government smaller—there's absolutely

nothing to actually support that. I'm very, very skeptical about the claims. I think it's kind of like a political trend out there with municipalities. I certainly saw that in my travels, with the governance review committee folks coming out and local politicians wanting to say that to their constituents as a way to prove that they're somehow making government smaller, when it doesn't actually do that or make anything cheaper. It's kind of like the claim that amalgamations save money and reduce duplication, when we all know there's really no evidence for that. So I'm very, very skeptical of it.

But I do appreciate the minister listening to AMO and others and adding this to the bill. We'll see what AMO and CUPE think of the language that's been put into this bill when, hopefully, this goes to committee.

I mentioned the communal water and waste water systems. We've supported that in the past through the private member's bill that I referenced. There's a building code review. And I'm sure my colleague will be speaking about transit system integration and innovation, which I am not an expert on by any means, so I look forward to that.

I just want to add, in closing, that one-time programs are insufficient to close the municipal infrastructure funding gap, to keep existing infrastructure in a state of good repair and build new net infrastructure. There's a lot of pressure on municipalities. One of the things that I promised myself that I was always going to mention is this deficit that municipalities are facing due to increasing costs. Investments in infrastructure and housing lead to downward pressure on health and social services spending. All the evidence shows that. There's a direct correlation between access to affordable and secure housing and the utilization of health and social services.

Municipalities continue to subsidize the province. The province makes it seem as if municipalities are wasting money and they're out there saving it. But actually, municipalities subsidize the province for health and social services that are provincial responsibilities and should be—and they are, in the rest of Canada. As needs grow, driven by a host of factors, including cost-of-living challenges and access to affordable housing, so too do municipal subsidies. In 2024, municipalities funded provincial responsibilities by almost \$5.4 billion; that's 1.5 times greater than in 2019, when it was \$3.5 billion. Just think of that huge increase: Not only are municipalities paying for provincial responsibilities, but that is increasing at a very alarming rate.

So when the government says they're going to address the housing challenges by changing regulations or forcing municipalities to do this or that, keep in mind that what the province is actually doing is they're downloading constantly onto municipalities. The data is all there. That correlation between housing and health and social services—the more they pile on municipalities, the worse the housing crisis will get. They're not doing us any favours by simply sitting back and changing regulations and piling more and more and more onto municipalities.

1450

That's why we, as the official opposition, have called for a new deal for municipalities, and we'll continue to push for a new understanding that protects municipalities from this constant downloading from the provincial government.

Thank you for the time, Speaker, and I hand things over to my friend from Ottawa Centre.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I recognize the member for Ottawa Centre.

MPP Catherine McKenney: I'm very pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 98, the Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act, 2026—two things I agree with, building homes and improving transportation infrastructure. But I do want to begin just by putting this bill into the context of this week's budget bill and the other housing announcements from the minister.

In my riding of Ottawa Centre, I hear from constituents who are doing everything right and still cannot find stable housing. I hear from tenants working full-time, still spending more than half of their income on rent, trying to keep up as costs rise. I hear from renters facing above-guideline increases that they simply cannot afford in a system where the Landlord and Tenant Board backlog leaves them with nowhere to turn. I hear from young people, as I'm sure many of you do, who have given up on ever being able to buy a home in the city or the neighbourhood they grew up in. And I hear from people waiting years for affordable housing with no clear sense of when things will change. That is the reality that this week's housing announcements and Bill 98 must respond to.

Speaker, before we assess this bill, we need to understand the system that it is operating within, because the pressures we are seeing today did not appear overnight. Four years ago, this Premier stood in front of cameras and made a promise that his government would build 1.5 million homes by 2031. He said it at every campaign stop. He used it to justify overriding municipalities, rewriting the greenbelt rules, handing developers billions in fee relief and legislative shortcuts. But then, last week, the housing minister told reporters, "I don't wake up thinking about 1.5." So we are being asked to abandon the homes that are required in this province.

I just want to pick up on something that my colleague was referring to, because it is really important to understand the fiscal imbalances in this country and this province. For decades, successive provincial governments have shifted responsibility onto municipalities without providing the revenue tools to match. Municipalities have been asked to take on more responsibility for housing, for transit, for infrastructure, for social services, but they have not been given the fiscal tools or the capacity to deliver those responsibilities in a sustainable way.

There is a structural imbalance in this country between which level of government collects money and which level delivers services. The federal government collects about 44% of all tax revenues but only delivers 35% of government services. Provinces collect about 46% and deliver

about 48% of government services. In contrast, municipalities collect 10% of revenues but deliver 15% of all government services and are responsible for 60% of the public infrastructure. So they collect 10% of the revenues and they are responsible for 60%—that's the roads, the bridges, the water and waste water, the transit systems—and the difference is made up through transfers, mostly from federal to provincial governments and then from the province to municipalities.

We know that municipalities are being asked to do too much with too few resources. Their finances are at a breaking point, and they are asking for help. Cities control many of the key services that we rely on, but the level of service they can provide depends on whether they get their fair share from this province. Otherwise, they have limited tools. They have property taxes, they have fees for things like recreation, service charges for water and waste water and development charges.

Development charges, in particular, have become central to how municipalities finance growth. They are not arbitrary fees; they are how cities pay for the infrastructure that makes housing possible in the first place. They help to build the roads, the water and waste water systems, the transit, community services—these are all funded through development charges, because municipalities in this province have been left with few alternatives.

Speaker, we agree that development charges are part of the affordability problem and reducing costs on how we build housing is important. However, I must say that it is also worth noting that the 50% reduction that was announced earlier this week in development charges for three years is not in this bill, so it will be interesting to understand how that is going to be implemented.

But the question here is not whether costs should come down; the question is how, because if you remove that revenue from municipalities without replacing it in a stable and predictable way, you are not solving the problem. You are simply shifting it somewhere else in the system through higher property taxes, higher water and waste water rates, higher service fees. And that is where there is some concern. Reducing development charges will definitely make it easier for developers to finance new home construction, and that's a good thing, which should mean more projects will become economically viable. But this does not necessarily mean that home prices will come down, especially not when we rely on a profit-maximizing market alone to deliver new housing.

So the impact of the DC reductions is not clear. It will not mean mandatory cuts across the board, like we saw with Bill 23. Instead, the understanding, in reading this bill, is that the province will identify priority municipalities and negotiate or impose agreements on them in order to reduce their development charges.

I just want to read directly from the background: "Canada and Ontario will also agree on a list of priority municipalities where DCs are seen as cost-prohibitive and where growth is essential to support Ontario's future"—a good thing. "For these municipalities, Ontario would require a commitment of substantial residential" reduction

of DCs “(of between 30 to 50 per cent) for a duration of three years. Ontario will work to recognize municipalities that have already reduced their residential DCs provided they maintain the reductions for a minimum of a three-year period.”

So this could be a fair and reasonable reduction of DCs, or it could be imposing even more burdens on municipalities that are already at their breaking point after years and decades of provincial cuts, downloads and unfunded mandates. Either way, it is not a permanent solution to the broken provincial-municipal fiscal relationship, and as my colleague before me mentioned, we need and we call for a new deal for municipalities that ensures that they have the resources and the powers that they need to deliver essential services and infrastructure on a permanent basis. So while the intention may be to lower costs, the risk is that those costs do not disappear; they simply show up somewhere else.

1500

I also now want to turn to the budget earlier this year, and the implications there on housing, because at the same time that we have this bill in front of us, we’re seeing a reduction in provincial investment. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is being cut by \$347 million in the budget they released days ago, so municipalities, again, are being asked to do more with fewer tools and less support. That is not a coordinated housing strategy; it is a continuation of the very pattern that created these pressures in the first place.

This matters even more when we look at the current state of housing in Ontario, because the system is simply not keeping up. According to CMHC, Ontario recorded just 62,561 housing starts in 2025. That is fully a third lower than just three years ago, and the 2026 budget projects that it will get worse before it gets better, with 64,800 starts this year. That’s barely moving from last year’s floor. To stay on track for 1.5 million homes as promised, Ontario needs roughly 175,000 starts per year, and we are getting fewer than 65,000. That is 37% of what is needed.

Let’s be clear: This is a made-in-Ontario problem. Quebec is building housing. Nova Scotia is building. The prairie provinces, with a combined population of just five million people, are building nearly as many homes as we are. So something has gone catastrophically wrong in this province, and it happened under this government’s watch.

Speaker, I just want to be clear again: We do support reducing costs for homebuyers. Development charges and HST relief should absolutely be part of a broader housing strategy.

As my colleague mentioned and was reported, one very positive piece is removing the imposition of limits on how small a parcel of land can be for building a home. When we think about municipalities and existing infrastructure and ensuring that housing can continue to be built in areas that are already serviced—already have the roads, the water and waste water, the storm water management and the transit—we have got to start building infill. We cannot continue to sprawl. Not only does it cost far too much

initially, but years down the road, when that infrastructure has to be maintained and replaced, that is what is going to bankrupt municipalities in this province.

It does remain to be seen if this will actually be implemented, because we had, in 2022, the Ontario Housing Affordability Task Force, this government’s own experts. One of the key recommendations was to limit exclusionary zoning in municipalities and allow as-of-right residential housing up to four units and four storeys, but they didn’t do it. They didn’t do it. They listened to people who said, “Look, I live in a low-rise, single-family home and I don’t want four people living beside me.” Well, if we are going to build sustainable municipalities, if we are going to live in a province where people have housing, if we are going to live in a province where people can buy a home, if we are going to live in a province where people are not losing their housing or falling into homelessness, we have to get serious about how we allow development and where we allow development to happen. The measures in this bill, coupled with this week’s budget and other housing announcements, don’t necessarily guarantee that.

I also want to talk about the HST holiday, while I have five minutes left. Again, I questioned this the other day. The HST holiday, as you know, is a one-year measure, and the government has described it as a “sale.” Housing development operates on multi-year timelines, so this does not and cannot meaningfully support new construction. With one year on an HST holiday, what will happen is good news for the people who are going to buy a new home—whether it’s their first, second, third or fourth—in the next year. Good news for them; they’re not going to pay HST. But that does not spur new construction.

To get new homes built is a multi-year initiative, so this primarily helps move existing inventory. The issue here is not the idea of reducing costs. It is an approach that is designed to help developers off-load their existing inventory, mostly condos here in Toronto. What you’re doing with this HST holiday is you are actually putting in a floor for investors and developers so that their stock doesn’t tumble too much, not allowing that affordability that we continue to hear will happen with supply.

There is nothing in here for renters, nothing for people on wait-lists, nothing for those at risk of homelessness. I’m not exactly certain why the High Art Capital deal didn’t receive more attention. It’s actually a \$300-million deal to convert 2,200 unsold condos into long-term rentals, and, again, it is a bailout.

I just want to say also that I’m going to be sharing my time with the member from London North Centre.

This bill does not strengthen the non-market sector, and it does not recognize that housing is not just about how quickly we build but who we are building for. Speaker, we all agree that we need to build more homes. We agree that costs need to come down. But if those costs are not properly accounted for, they do not disappear. They are simply pushed somewhere else in the system.

And while the government was announcing its HST rebate in front of the cameras and DC reductions in their budget, something else was happening in these budget

documents. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing budget has been cut, again, by over \$344 million. The government attributes this to a reduction in what it calls time-limited investments, but that is budget language for housing programs.

We will have to wait for estimates to know exactly which programs are being cut, but programs, housing programs, are being cut during a housing crisis. We'll ask the questions at estimates. Last time I asked questions at estimates, I never got an answer, so this time I'll figure out how to get that answer out of the government, but it is really quite alarming that we have that kind of a budget cut happening.

We've got a bill here, Bill 98, that purports to build faster, hopefully. But we want to make sure that it builds smarter and it reduces costs, but that it doesn't shift those costs onto municipalities and onto taxpayers and that it doesn't continue to rely on a market that is already failing. Ontarians deserve a real plan. They deserve one that also invests in non-market housing and one that supports municipalities with stable funding.

1510

Because housing is not just an investment, Speaker. It is a home for people. Unless we understand that everyone in our province deserves to be housed—whether you are buying a home, whether you are renting, whether you are in a shelter today or living unhoused or unsheltered today, you deserve a home. It is a human right, and I do hope that we will continue to work to ensure that everyone has that home.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I recognize the member for London North Centre.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I rise today to speak on Bill 98, the Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act. This government claims that this bill is about building homes and improving transit, but in London North Centre and all across Ontario, the reality is really very different.

Families are struggling with mounting housing costs, rising rents and really, truly limited options. That falls at the feet of this government. Non-profit housing has been, for years, routinely ignored by this government. Rent control has not been restored. In fact, we've seen this government poking holes in the boat of affordability for Ontarians across this province ever since they first scrapped rent control. People have been struggling more and more and more.

Missing-middle homes would provide so much more affordability in established neighbourhoods. They're still not allowed in many areas.

For many people, including seniors, young families, people living with disabilities and renters in my riding, this bill does scarcely little to address what matters most to them, and that is the housing costs that they face every single day.

Transit, as well, is vital for communities, including my riding of London North Centre. As is always said, great cities need great transit. Many residents rely on public transit to go to work, to school or to medical appointments.

Everyone supports the idea of seamless, integrated transit, but this bill gives the minister the authority to impose fare models with no guarantee of affordability. People don't trust this government when it comes to affordability. Without accountability, there's nothing to prevent fare increases with service reductions.

The Ontario NDP has consistently called for the province to restore operational funding to transit so that it remains affordable for the people who will rely on it every single day. Even beyond my riding, these decisions matter. Transit agencies across the province, from Toronto to smaller municipalities, face the same challenges.

The Toronto Region Board of Trade has advocated for a zone-based fare system, but questions remain about how it will work for riders crossing municipal boundaries. Unionized transit workers, including ATU 113 and other ATU Canada locals, have expressed concern about their roles when vehicles travel between municipalities. These challenges show that fare integration is complex and must be done carefully to serve both riders and workers.

This government also chooses to hand more power to agencies like Metrolinx with minimal oversight. We've seen that granting unchecked authority to agencies often comes with little tangible benefit to communities. How many vice-presidents does one organization need?

While my riding, London North Centre, is not directly served by Metrolinx, the principle is the same: Giving unaccountable bureaucracies more control risks undermining the needs of the people. Ontarians deserve decisions that are transparent and accountable, not ones made behind closed doors with little input from those affected.

I'd like to take this House back to many big promises that were made prior to the 2022 election. This was from the PC website, dated May 12, 2022: "A re-elected PC government will" invest "an additional \$160 million to improve the speed and frequency of GO train service between London and Toronto."

Interestingly, this \$160 million never flowed; this promise was broken. This, by their actions, actually became untrue. And because that announcement was made on May 12, the PC government—surprise to all of us—was re-elected, and yet on July 2, just a short while after that ironclad promise from this government that is so transparent and so accountable, the CBC reports "GO Train Service Between London and Toronto Ending this Fall...." And the rest is history.

You see, this pilot project that the province set up was doomed to fail from the start. It was set upon tracks that were slow. The frequency was terrible. The time elapsed from London to Toronto was in the neighbourhood of four hours, and who wants to take a ride that's going to take twice the amount of time that it would normally take? It was doomed to fail.

That begs the question: Why did the province promise that they would provide funding to increase the speed and increase the frequency and then pull the rug out from transit riders after they were re-elected? They promised that if they were re-elected, they would do it, but then after they got through that door, suddenly the promise vanished.

This bill, as well, does not address the root of the housing crisis. No matter how many bills they claim are for workers and no matter how many bills they claim are about housing, this government's track record is abysmal when it comes to housing. This government continues to rely on the same failed approach, expecting the private market to solve a problem it cannot fix alone. Even private developers do not want the burden, do not want the responsibility of looking after the affordable housing market on their own. No private developer can build homes that are affordable for people experiencing homelessness or struggling with rent. There simply isn't the return on investment and there isn't the profit margin for them to deliver the affordable housing that people need.

Solving the housing crisis will require a strong government. It requires a strong governmental role and from this government we do not see strength. We do not see a stronghold. We do not see a backbone when it comes to the creation of affordable housing.

The Ontario NDP—and I was proud to introduce this legislation to get the government back into the business of building housing with Homes Ontario. I was also thrilled that my colleague the MPP from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas also brought this forward. We brought it forward another time as an official opposition day motion, yet this government has made so many ridiculous claims about that motion when it came forward.

That plan would partner the provincial government with non-profits, with municipalities, with co-ops—places where people want to live and that are permanently affordable. It was called such ridiculous things, like the death of the free market, and that it was going to destroy our economic system. The fearmongering and the ridiculousness that came from that side was really at a fever pitch. I've never heard such nonsense in all my life.

I think back to a Conservative Premier from London who built 90,000 permanently affordable units. Nobody would ever call that Conservative Premier a communist, but that's what this government was content to do. They were content to name-call, to peddle ridiculousness and to really not listen to what people across the province were actually looking for. The Premier in question was Peterson.

But what we've also seen is that we need to also consider the risks of private water and private sewage systems. Past developments have shown that this government has not learned from their own mistakes when it comes to when private systems operate without accountability. Luxury gated communities have claimed municipal services they do not provide, leaving residents and the public at risk. Similar issues have arisen in Nobleton, where amendments to York's official plan removed limits to private water hookups, opening the door to developments in sensitive greenbelt areas. These examples remind us why public oversight is so critical for protecting communities and the environment.

Local voices and environmental standards are under threat. Instead of acting as a partner, instead of acting as a leader, instead of acting as a collaborator, this bill centralizes decisions, taking away power from municipalities. It

weakens green building standards and it reduces local planning powers. Ontarians and residents in London North Centre, in particular, know their communities best. Stripping away municipal input risks not only long-term sustainability but the quality of life for everyone. While some measures, such as maintaining public ownership of water and waste water systems, are welcomed, they are not enough to counterbalance the risks created by this legislation.

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I also wanted to turn to an urgent ask of this government by Ark Aid street mission. They have recently released a letter to members of provincial Parliament as well as other levels of government calling upon this government to act, because in this bill that we have before us, with Bill 98, we don't see enough support for affordable housing, for shelters and for the housing that people really require right now.

This letter is from Sarah Campbell, who is the executive director of the Ark Aid street mission. It reads:

“A Critical Moment for London's Most Vulnerable

“I am writing to you at a defining moment for London's homelessness response system.

“Ark Aid street mission is winding down its emergency response of year-round life-saving services at 696 Dundas Street East. This follows the conclusion of cold weather response (CWR) operations across multiple sites and reflects the compounding impact of the loss of over \$1 million in core municipal funding effective April 1, 2026”—today. “Together, these changes represent the most significant reduction to London's community-based emergency services since 2020.

“For years, Ark Aid has operated as the only seven-day-a-week, open-door service inside of traditional business hours for all populations in London—meeting people where they are, without barriers, and providing the full continuum of emergency responsive care....

“Without these services operating in an integrated, year-round, low-barrier model, the connective tissue between street-level crisis and housing stability is severed.”

They look over what they have been able to deliver since April 2025 to March 2026: They served 309,630 meals. They were able to provide people with basic needs, without condition and without judgment. They provided 36,140 safe nights of rest, helping people stabilize and helping people who are in crisis. They have served 1,081 unique individuals who were assessed and served, and this was people who were connected to care within the community with different programs, with different supports. They also had 117 people successfully housed. They were able to provide them with that pathway towards true and real stability outside of the shelter system, helping them not only find employment but get on their own two feet and find their own permanent home. They had over 445,000 service interactions. This includes assessments, referrals, diversions and navigations.

The work that Ark Aid Mission does and has done is absolutely amazing. I've seen first-hand people who have graduated from this program. I've seen what they've been

able to do. But too often governments will look at these sorts of programs as ones that are only necessary during the cold winter months. What is supposed to happen to these people when the weather turns? Is there a magical day where suddenly all the weather all the time is better so it's okay for people to sleep rough? That makes no sense. We know that in Canada, we go back and forth with our weather, and it should never be okay for us to ever argue that just because the weather isn't cold, people don't need shelter, support and housing.

If the province does not act and does not provide emergency funding to Ark Aid Mission, this is what the effects will be: They will lose over 50 emergency resting spaces. They will lose 24-hour assessment, referral and stabilization access. They will lose a seven-day-a-week, 365-day-a-year point of contact. This is so incredibly important, to have this relationship-building organization to advocate and to support and to help people get their lives back on track.

All of us as human beings are the sum total of our relationships. We are made better by the company that we keep. And especially when people we are friends with, the people we welcome into our hearts, when their life experiences differ vastly from ours, it helps open our eyes. It helps open our hearts. It makes us better people, quite frankly, Speaker. And it's important that we recognize that the people providing these services are building relationships with these folks. They are helping them come back into the world that we all enjoy.

Too often, people who have lost their housing, people who struggle with mental health, people who struggle with addiction are marginalized. They are not vulnerable; they are marginalized. They are pushed to the margins of society because of the neglect of policy, because of the neglect of governments.

The letter goes on to say, "The consequences will be immediate and system-wide: increased emergency room visits; reduced ability for police and EMS to divert appropriately; greater pressure on encampments and public spaces; and, most critically, increased harm and instability for the over 2,000 known unsheltered individuals in our city."

It's important also that we recognize that there are 2,000 known unsheltered individuals. That doesn't necessarily comprise the entirety of the people who are unhoused right now.

The letter goes on: "The city of London's own homelessness online dashboard confirms that homelessness is complex, fluid and growing—with data capturing only those already connected to funded services. The full scope of need across encampments and hidden homelessness is greater still. Spring brings predictable increases in evictions and breakdowns of precarious housing arrangements. The transition is occurring at precisely the moment of greatest seasonal vulnerability."

Ark Aid is asking the province for short-term bridge funding. They're urgently requesting "bridge funding from all levels of government to stabilize critical emergency responsive services—particularly encampment

outreach, basic needs provision and overnight stabilization—while longer-term sustainable solutions are secured. Service continuity cannot wait."

They're also, quite logically, asking for predictable, sustained, multi-year operating funding. It's far too frequent that governments will provide funding that has a beginning date and an end date and they don't let organizations continue that funding year over year. It's important that we continue this funding, so that there's predictability so that people working within that space—who, quite frankly, Speaker, are not being paid nearly enough—are able to know where their job is going to be. "Front-line organizations," as the letter indicates, "require funding certainty that reflects the year-round, life-saving nature of this work."

"Ark Aid has ... a proven track record of delivering beyond what" they "are funded to do—leveraging community generosity to create impact that far exceeds investment." This moment requires more than them being resilient as an organization, it requires shared responsibility and system-level commitment.

The Ontario NDP will continue to push for improvements to Bill 98. We'll continue to advocate for measures that protect affordability, safeguard public services and make transit work for riders. We will support initiatives that help people like the One Fare plan, and we will continue to press the government to strengthen legislation so that it meets the needs of Ontarians.

Bill 98 focuses on speed and developer incentives over real solutions. It prioritizes political convenience over the needs of families, renters and transit users. If the government truly wants to build homes and improve transit, it must put people first. It has to put people at the centre of every decision it makes, and not just in words, but in the legislation, in the policy and in the actions. It must include public housing. It must restore real rent control, empower municipalities and fund transit properly. Anything less falls short of what communities need and what communities deserve.

It's important that despite all of the—not intentionally, but definitely through our observation—ironically-titled housing bills that this government has announced, their numbers are abysmal when it comes to actual housing starts. They have numbers that really are 1950s numbers.

I want to also just shout out some of the improvements that the Ontario NDP has brought forward to this government in a spirit of collegiality, collaboration and really meeting people where they are. That includes things like affordable home heating, our opposition motion to have a public agency known as Homes Ontario to work with non-profits, municipal partners and co-ops, who can stretch a nickel five ways from centre to actually deliver on the housing people need, and also the Rent Stabilization Act to plug the vacancy decontrol hole that the Liberals opened up and really destroyed numerous lives. It's frustrating for young families, for seniors, for people living with disabilities and so many more.

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Speaker, Ontarians deserve legislation that genuinely addresses the housing and transit challenges we face. The Ontario NDP will continue to advocate for solutions that make life more affordable, that make life sustainable and fair. We will carefully scrutinize this bill, champion policies that work and highlight areas where the government must do better.

I look forward to the time when we have a government that truly does listen to the opposition, that is wise, that is thoughtful, that is considerate, and when we have legislation such as this, Ontario will be a truly different place.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank all three speakers for their comments. Actually, my question is for the member for London North Centre.

It wasn't too long ago I was visiting—I think it might have been your riding, and I'm just reminded of the east-west, north-south connectivity. London doesn't have an expressway per se, and so I found it very difficult to get around, especially during drive times. So this bill invests in highway transportation and infrastructure. My community and many communities across the province have been able to benefit from some of those investments.

I wanted to get a better understanding as to how important traffic congestion is in London and whether the member opposite would support new investments in London, even if it meant a bit of a change to certain neighbourhoods.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Windsor–Tecumseh for the question. As I said, great cities have great transit. I will always support investments in greater transit infrastructure.

Once upon a time, there was an opportunity for London to move the railway lines outside of the city. Unfortunately, there was a lot of thought, a lot of dithering, and by the time city council acted upon that, the funding was no longer there. We have a city that is bisected, not only by a beautiful river but by a number of train lines.

It's important that we also make sure that cities and municipalities are provided with proper funding from transit so that they can make those investments back into transit. Unfortunately, we see a lot of times with this government, especially with the example of Metrolinx, allowing people to siphon money off which is actually not going to the transit projects that require it.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is for the member from Ottawa Centre.

Bill 98 fails to legalize more affordable, missing-middle housing options as of right in all neighbourhoods. We know that missing-middle housing, such as duplexes, townhouses, courtyard apartments, is crucial, and it bridges the gap between single-family homes and high-rise condos. It increases housing diversity, improves affordability, enables gentle density, fosters walkable communities, provides family-oriented units, and yet the government did

not embed it in the legislation, in the law. Do you think this government understands that Ontario is in a housing crisis at all?

MPP Catherine McKenney: Thank you for that question. I think it's one of the most important housing questions that we can answer in terms of how we develop and how we build our municipalities.

We can either build up, which is limited—the market is limited—or we can build out, continue to build out and sprawl, which costs far too much money and is not sustainable, or we can build in. We can build in that missing middle, gentle density, whether it's four storeys, whether it's eight, 10, 12 units that can be stacked, modular housing, using some of our own Canadian lumber. There are ways of providing housing that meets everyone's needs, that is sustainable and affordable for municipalities, for existing taxpayers, for future homeowners, for renters.

I thank you for the question. Absolutely, if this government does understand affordability and housing, both market and non-market, that is one of the first things they will do.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mme Lucille Collard: Thank you to my colleague and friend from Ottawa Centre, who knows a lot about municipal affairs. I think we see in this bill yet another big centralization of power here at Queen's Park, where the government is going to decide, basically, what's best for communities.

From your experience and your understanding, what is the biggest threat to municipalities' independence and ability to decide what's good for their communities in this bill?

MPP Catherine McKenney: Thank you for that question. Absolutely, I think my colleague here said it well. It's one thing to criticize municipalities and feel that they're not doing enough and you're frustrated with them, but they don't always have the tools and the capacity that they need. They are that level of government that is left with most of the responsibility for infrastructure and for services.

So it's one thing to ensure that things are streamlined—we all want that; nobody wants development to take forever. But it is another thing to take away local control from local governments who deal every day, on the street, one on one, with residents that we represent and that city councils and mayors represent. We have to be very careful about that.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Brian Riddell: To the member of Ottawa Centre: Our government is working to standardize and streamline infrastructure approval so municipalities can build roads, transit connections and house-supporting infrastructure faster and more efficiently.

Can the opposition explain why they're standing in the way of measures that would reduce delays and lower costs for municipalities and taxpayers?

MPP Catherine McKenney: Thank you for that question. Actually, I don't disagree with you that we shouldn't streamline processes and that we shouldn't make development happen faster. But we also have to know—and I'm sure you do—that municipalities are strapped for cash. Municipalities do not have the capacity, they do not have the resources that are required to build the bridges, to build the roads, to build the water and waste water systems, to build the recreation infrastructure—everything that they need so that we have healthy and functioning municipalities.

So DC reductions are great; streamlining is great; we agree with it. But we have to ensure that we don't just pass the buck onto municipalities, and onto residents in those municipalities, to pay for that.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Chris Glover: My question is to the member for Ottawa Centre. We've been talking about housing, and the government just announced that they're going to be buying \$1.5 billion worth of housing. Is this actually going to build new housing, or is this a corporate bailout?

MPP Catherine McKenney: Thank you for that question. No, that High Art Capital is shocking, actually. It is simply a bailout. We have got, apparently, 2,200 condos that cannot be moved. We've got an oversupply of condos, where investors made a bet on them—didn't turn out, as the price is falling on them. Rather than let that market solve itself, as this government likes to do, they are bailing out those developers. So it is a \$300-million direct bailout to this equity firm.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Ted Hsu: I once remember renting in an old house that was pretty leaky. The furnace wasn't working very well. It would be too hot, and you would have to open the windows in the middle of winter.

I want to ask, Speaker, is there any evidence that green building standards make housing more expensive?

MPP Catherine McKenney: Green building standards: We know that we are in climate crisis as well. I know it's lower down on the priority list of this government right now, but we are in a climate crisis. We do have to adapt the way we live; that includes our housing. The biggest draw on our energy is both transportation and our buildings, so the more we do today to ensure that we've got high building standards, that we've got good building standards, the less it's going to cost homeowners who are your children, grandchildren, in the future. Those of us who own homes today, the less it will cost in the future to actually make that adaptation to our housing.

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The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Ms. Laura Smith: This bill is about affordability, and our government believes that Ontario should be a place where young people can afford to buy a home and families could live closer to where they work. And that requires

building more homes and building infrastructure to support these homes.

We've talked about streamlining processes and we've talked about reducing delays and specifically costs so we can get these housing projects with shovels in the ground. So will the member support this bill so that we can provide the dream of home ownership to more of our community members?

MPP Catherine McKenney: What the heck—am I allowed to say “heck?” Too late; I take it back.

Thank you for the question. We all want more homes. We all want everyone to have a home that—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 9(h), the Clerk has received written notice from the government House leader indicating that a temporary change in the weekly meeting schedule of the House is required. Therefore, the House shall commence at 9 a.m. on Monday, April 13, 2026, for the proceeding orders of the day.

I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 9(g), the Clerk has received written notice from the government House leader indicating that a temporary change in the weekly meeting schedule of the House is required. Therefore, the afternoon routine on Wednesday, April 15, 2026, shall commence at 1 p.m.

Further debate?

Mr. Adil Shamji: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As always, it's a pleasure to see you in the Chair. You're doing a phenomenal job, just like my colleague the member of provincial Parliament for Beaches–East York, who does a phenomenal job for her constituents every single day, and with whom I'm proud to be sharing my time.

I'm pleased to rise today to debate this latest legislation, Bill 98, the so-called Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act, 2026.

I'd like to begin by dedicating my remarks both to my exceptional constituents in Don Valley East, but also to the memory of 1.5 million homes, because, for the last couple of years, it has been apparent that we're falling farther and farther away from hitting that target. But what is truly remarkable is that with this most recent budget—and certainly with this legislation—it is evident that the government has given up all hope of reaching 1.5 million homes by 2031. There's no intention, no ambition to achieve that target and, in fact, it's no longer being uttered anymore in the hopes that all of the members on this side of the House and all the constituents across Ontario will forget that this government promised to build 150,000 homes a year, every year, for 10 years, culminating in 1.5 million homes by 2031.

Which brings me to what I find to be a unique peculiarity of this housing bill's title, because if you look back at successive housing bills under this government, the short titles have usually had one of two phrases: “building more homes” or “building homes faster.” Every successive piece of legislation has failed to do that; every successive year has shown this government creating fewer homes than the last one. But what really strikes me as this gov-

ernment truly waving the white flag on 1.5 million homes is that they're no longer talking about building more homes or building any homes faster. Both those adjectives have now disappeared from the title. Now they're just talking about building some homes. If they build one home, they will be able to call that a success.

And it is this exact lack of ambition, lack of seriousness, which—I'm being a little bit facetious around pointing out the uniqueness of this title. It is this lack of ambition and seriousness that is the reason we continue to see this government stray farther and farther from the goal of 1.5 million homes. In fact, it's not lost upon me that this government repeatedly says that they're going to get more shovels in the ground, and yet the only thing that we have seen them dig has been a crater in the state of our housing sector, and this bill will do nothing to reverse that trend.

Let's reflect a little bit on the state of housing because that obviously lays the groundwork for what this bill intends to do. Successive years of seeing fewer homes started and built—in 2025 alone, we know that there were roughly 62,000 homes that were built. That was less than the year before and less than the year before that—well below the 150,000 homes. And every successive budget that has come along has consistently updated its projections to say that the government will build fewer homes than they promised that they would in the year before.

As we look around the province, we see rampant homelessness, and we see people seeing their hope of home ownership go farther and farther out of reach. We also see a situation in which there is desperation for Ontarians to be able to get into a home, and there is desperation on the part of builders and developers to get the homes that they have built or are almost about to have finished building actually sold and transferred on to potential home buyers. It's what I think economics would consider to be a market failure, because the demand lines and the supply lines simply don't intersect. People can't afford to purchase the homes that are available on the market, and we have homes that are sitting on the market that cannot get sold because the builders and developers are not even able to recoup the costs that they put into building those properties in the first place.

So what I was hoping for when I heard that there was going to be a new piece of legislation is that we would have legislation that would really strike at the core challenges that people are facing in the housing sector. I hoped that it would reverse some of the policy chaos that we're seeing. I hoped that, rather than tinkering around the edges, it would make real, meaningful, serious changes that would signal both to potential homebuyers as well as to the people who we count on to build and develop homes—I hoped that it would offer some modicum of hope to them. Regrettably, I don't see any of that in Bill 98, which is before us.

Some of the members across the aisle might say, "Well, everything that has been done isn't actually in Bill 98." There are other things that the government purports they have done that could have an impact on the housing sector, so let's take a little bit of a look at those.

Without a doubt, to great fanfare, the government announced that they are going to, first, eliminate the HST off of new primary residences for first-time homebuyers. Okay. That was a step in the right direction. For an extended period of time—for many months now—I and the Ontario Liberals have been calling for the government to go much, much farther than that, to actually say that they will eliminate the HST for all homebuyers on new primary residences. Finally, they acquiesced to that, and I'm pleased to see that.

But this kind of laissez-faire attitude where important policy ideas sit and stagnate for extended periods of time, and then only at the very last minute the government comes through and says, "Yes, the Ontario Liberals were right. We're going to copy their idea"—it can't be like that. I've put forward—we have put forward important ideas, ambitious ideas, and we need to see some movement on these kinds of things faster. That's the only way that you will actually build more homes faster.

The most recent and exciting announcement from this week is that the government is proposing—through a bailout by Prime Minister Carney and the federal Liberals—to reduce development charges by 50% over the next three years. Again, it's a move in the right direction. Ontario Liberals have been calling for cutting development charges for over a year. In fact, it was one of our flagship commitments in the last Ontario election.

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The Premier joked earlier this week that he was worried if he drank some water, he'd turn Liberal. Well, the reality is, drinking water will not make you a Liberal. However, copying our ideas will make you a Liberal, okay?

So while it is a good idea to cut development charges, there are five fundamental risks with the government's announcement that need to be considered if that policy is going to be successful.

The first thing is that we need to make sure when development charges are cut, municipalities do not impose or raise other fees that could offset that DC reduction. I don't see that anywhere in Bill 98. And if that does happen, that will eliminate the purpose of that DC reduction in the first place.

The next thing is that we need to make sure that there is a long-term solution for municipal funding, to lower the burden of property tax on taxpayers and new homebuyers. While this government loves to say that they've never raised a tax on Ontarians, their underfunding of municipalities, of their social services, of the infrastructure that they desperately require, has led municipalities across the province to ask for record increases in their property taxes. The blame for that falls squarely with every single member on the opposite side of this House.

The next thing: If this 50% DC cut for the next three years is to be successful, then we need to ensure that the provincial funding is net new and not simply reallocated from other sources. We all know, for example, this government loves to remind us that they have a municipal housing infrastructure program. Well, if all they do is just reallocate some funds from that so that they're not actually

spending additional new money for the 50% DC cut—again, it will defeat the purpose. It will just be smoke and mirrors to make it look as though they are doing something but actually accomplishing nothing.

We've seen no shortage under this government of pet projects, of things that are done to reward friends and donors. So if indeed these DC cuts are to actually help build more homes, then there needs to be a guarantee that any projects funded under that program will address municipal priorities—Ontarians' priorities—and not provincial pet projects that only help the Premier's friends and donors.

Finally, because of the way it seems as though this program is going to be structured, it's essential that if municipalities apply for that funding so that they can cut their DCs by 50%, it isn't so onerous and doesn't come with so much red tape that it actually slows down the process of building homes.

You can see, even with this most recent announcement—an attempt to copy the homework of the Ontario Liberals—there are potentially fundamental flaws if it is not executed properly. Bill 98 represented an exceptional opportunity to implement some of the protections that could make that DC cut plan a success, but none of that is in here. Without any of those kinds of measures, then we on this side of the House have very little confidence that the members on that side of the House will actually, as they say, get it done.

Bill 98 is yet another step in the centralization of power under this government. It's centralization with a government that has not earned the trust of those of us on this side of the House and of Ontarians. That process of centralization is evident in many different ways.

We see it in the amalgamation of local public health units. That threatened the autonomy of a locally contextualized public health response in public health emergencies and in addressing fundamental health promotion needs.

We're seeing that centralization of power in the government's efforts to potentially eliminate school trustees and to place school boards under supervision.

And now, we see it here with Bill 98, in which the province is now proposing to come in and overstep the powers of municipalities to set some of their own standards, particularly as it relates to the environment.

So you will forgive me if I am concerned with the fact that this government seems to think that they can control the entire province—micromanage the entire province—from their ivory towers in the cabinet office just down the hall from here. And I could see perhaps why they think that it is worthwhile to try doing it from the cabinet office. This is the Premier's office that is the most well funded, the most expensive, the most onerous on Ontario taxpayers in provincial history. But just because you pay a lot for something doesn't mean you actually get a quality product, and the Premier's office is a fantastic example of that.

I want to start digging into a few of the details around Bill 98 and share my perspective. But again, I will reiterate

the fact that this bill strikes me as merely tinkering around the edges and coming nowhere near the degree of seriousness that we need to see if we fully appreciate the scale of the housing crisis that we face right now.

The first thing I want to start by highlighting is the fact that it completely eviscerates any ability of municipalities to incorporate any kind of environmental standards. And to some degree, what is so shocking about this is this is actually counterproductive, even to some of the government's stated goals, because on the one hand, they seem to talk about wanting to make electric vehicles more accessible, more easily rechargeable, our province more electrified. And yet, by eliminating municipal powers to incorporate any form of green standards whatsoever, it means it will be more difficult to get electric vehicle chargers into new homes. It means that it will be more difficult to target stronger environmental standards or to address the looming and growing spectre of climate change that we face in our midst. And for all the government says they do about trying to address forest fires and trying to make the north safer, if we don't have the ability to implement important environmental standards which enable us to fight climate change, we will only make extreme climate changes, extremes in weather and the risk of climate change greater in our province.

And even if there were enough fundamental changes here that could justify, enough fundamental changes that would allow us to get more homes built faster—which even the title doesn't promise to do, but even if it was there, an important point that needs to be reiterated is that the ends do not justify the means. We cannot just say we will build more homes faster at all costs, environment be damned. We must be balanced, and this legislation doesn't allow us to achieve that.

There are a number of other things that particularly stand out, and I'm going to highlight some things that actually may be somewhat beneficial. For example, there is a schedule here that allows for the elimination of minimum lot sizes, and I think that there can be value in that. I think one thing that's very important is that we work towards achieving greater density. This is a good thing. In many cases, as we look at communities across the province, many of our cities actually have lower density than they had when they were first constructed. In my community of Don Valley East, there are residential communities where there are homes upon homes upon homes that are currently occupied by elderly couples or even widowers. These were homes that were once occupied by full nuclear families: a mom and a dad, a couple of children. The children have grown up and moved out. In fact, the infrastructure is already in place to support more people in that area. As we look around and people look to move into new homes, as we look to renovate homes, build new homes, there is value in easing the restrictions on minimum lot sizes to help us get to more homes, to accessory dwelling units, to larger homes that can accommodate triplexes and fourplexes, in some cases, but possibly even more than that. So that is potentially a good move.

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Another move that I can get behind is the elimination of development charges for the construction of not-for-profit retirement homes. Again, no one can deny the fact that, under this government, over the past eight long, painful, expensive years, development charges have skyrocketed. In fact, I'll point out the fact that the most recent announcement to cut development charges by 50% really only takes them back to 2018 levels. So any opportunity that I can find that will eliminate development charges that pass costs on to new homebuyers, that pass costs on to people who are just desperate to find appropriate, right-sized, dignified homes, is a good thing. I applaud, in particular, the fact that it's focused on retirement homes to help our seniors who hope to age with dignity and in the right place, and particularly on retirement homes that are in a not-for-profit environment. I can get behind that.

Other things that I find in this legislation that I think have the potential to be a good thing: I understand that the Ministry of Transportation will now assume greater powers and control to have the ability to have more direction in the frequency of public transit and the fares that are paid for public transit. Under a government that has become more expensive than ever before—whether you're looking at rent, whether you're looking at grocery prices, whether you're looking at the cost of a home—any effort that could allow intervention to prevent public transit prices from going up too high is going to be welcome, especially if it can help to make it more seamless for my constituents to be able to transfer between different kinds of municipal public transit systems. I do believe that there is value in introducing something like that, as long as—and this is the big asterisk and caveat that always comes with this government—that is used to genuinely benefit Ontarians and my constituents and not to benefit friends and donors.

I want to spend a little bit of time focusing on some of the proposed changes to the Planning Act, in which it would become possible to have standardized official plans. Again, that could make sense. It is possible to get behind that. But the question that I have to ask is: Is the lack of standardization in official plans the reason that we're in the dire housing crisis that we face right now? I'm not sure that it is. And so, again, we've got this preoccupation with certain elements of housing policy that really represent just tinkering around the edges and not really that substantive, ambitious kind of change that my constituents are looking for.

So I think it's fair to ask—I made mention multiple times that there are major things that are missing from this legislation. What could they possibly be? Well, certainly, I have already highlighted the fact that there are certain elements that need to be in Bill 98 in order to ensure that that 50% DC cut announced only this week will actually be a success. I am looking for those specifically in this legislation.

I'm disappointed to see the environmental changes—or rather the elimination of municipal abilities to set environ-

mental standards and climate change goals. That needs to be reversed.

I'm not seeing more protections for renters, and regrettably, in the last piece of housing legislation that was introduced—that was Bill 60—we saw many of those protections actually get eviscerated. We even saw this government, in a most sinister and, frankly, offensive way, attempt to go after the right of security of tenure for many of my constituents and for renters across the province. And while against enormous pressure the government finally backed off, we all know that that was a temporary reprieve, because when the Minister of Housing came out to announce he was walking that back, he said, "We will not be looking at consulting on that, for now."

I'd like to see more of those protections in this legislation. We don't see the protections against that. We don't see more protections for renters. We don't see something that could be a source of protection both for renters as well as landlords, and that is, important reforms at the Landlord and Tenant Board. Again, we saw some tinkering around the edges in Bill 60 that really just pointed the finger at tenants and didn't get to some of the root causes of why the Landlord and Tenant Board is not able to meet the massive demand that it faces right now. We don't have enough adjudicators. We continue to persist in offering only virtual cases as the only option, as opposed to allowing the tribunal to meet with landlords and tenants in an in-person format.

Historically, when that has been permitted to happen, what has usually occurred is that in many cases conflicts are solved in the hallway outside of the tribunal courtroom because people can come together and more amicably, in a less confrontational way, settle their cases amongst themselves. What I've learned from many people who've been involved in the Landlord and Tenant Board is that this typically meant that many, many more cases could be addressed in a single day than just having everything available only in a virtual format. To be clear, my advocacy is for both a virtual and an in-person format to be available.

For as long as we don't consider any of these things, for as long as we consider leaving major potential reforms on the table, what we will continue to see is more of the same: every successive budget showing less confidence in next year's housing starts and every year this government falling further and further and further away from reaching its goal of 1.5 million homes by 2031. Every single year for the next five years, I believe, this government was supposed to build 175,000 homes in the hopes of getting caught up. That's never going happen. That's never going happen.

There seems to be no hope whatsoever, and it certainly seems as though this government has just thrown up its hands, washed its hands of a 1.5-million-home goal; does not care about making sure that renters can live with dignity in affordable homes; does not care about landlords and tenants being able to seek and actually receive justice at the Landlord and Tenant Board; does not actually care either about building more homes or building them faster;

and thinks that this haphazard approach of minor changes can produce enough smoke and mirrors to convince tenants, landlords, builders and developers alike that they are serious about protecting Ontarians by building and providing the homes that they require.

It saddens me to say this because I am convinced that our success in the House is all of Ontarians' success across the province. I want this government to succeed. I want them to steal more of my ideas. I want them to cut DCs altogether. I'll say it now: I want them to continue eliminating HST on new primary residences for all homebuyers.

I want to remind them that they also stole the Ontario Liberal plan to get every single person a family doctor or primary care across the province by 2029—another one of our flagship promises. Keep stealing our ideas. Keep listening. I welcome the fact that you do so.

So I hope you're all listening very carefully, even though I have a feeling that, at least when we take this bill to a vote in the House, we will not see my recommendations reflected in that final version of the bill. Continue taking our advice, and we'll look forward to finding our recommendations in the next piece of legislation.

Interjection.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I'm used to that.

1610

In any case, I'd like to turn it over to my outstanding colleague, but first I'll turn it over to the Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): The member for Beaches—East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I'm happy to rise in this House, as always, to represent beautiful Beaches—East York. Good afternoon, everyone. I'm happy to share my thoughts.

I'm not happy about this bill, Bill 98. I never thought eight hours of debate would seem like such a short period of time in my former life, but it actually is a short period of time for my colleagues and I to deliberate over all the—what should I say?—horrific things in this bill. There are nine schedules, as you know, proposing major changes to everything from green standards to public reporting, MZOs, municipal governance, transit and waste water.

Schedule 1 amends the Building Code Act. It stipulates that the Building Code Act's ability to supersede all municipal bylaws regarding construction or demolition does apply to bylaws for the protection or conservation of the environment. Additionally, it repeals parts of the City of Toronto Act, 2006, and the Municipal Act, 2001, which bestow the city the power to set environmental standards for the construction of buildings. Wow. People around the world must be just keeling over with how far into the Dark Ages we're moving backwards. It removes the ability of the minister to set regulations regarding municipal environmental standards, consequential to the revocation of that municipal power.

Schedule 2 specifically addresses the City of Toronto Act, revokes the authority of the city to regulate the minimum area of a parcel of land and to regulate the minimum and maximum density and the minimum and maximum height of development, and removes sustain-

able design as a criterion by which site plan control can impact highways under the city's control.

As well, it prohibits the city from requiring that land-owners provide electric vehicle supply equipment. I'm actually almost laughing over this, because all I hear from you guys—your number one and only way to solve, in your mind, the climate crisis—is EVs, and now you're not even requiring developers to put in the infrastructure that you need. It just defies logic.

Additionally, this section gives the minister regulatory power over banning other issues from plan approval requirements. I wonder how many of you over there have an urban planning degree.

Interjection.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Yes. But then, that's facts. I'm thinking logically. I've got to stop doing that in this chamber.

Schedule 3 amends the Development Charges Act. Specifically, the provision exempts non-profit retirement homes from development charges. Okay, I like that. Wow. It's long overdue, but better late than ever: one teensy, tiny good thing.

Schedule 4 introduces the Fare Alignment and Seamless Transit Act. It establishes a new act entitled the Fare Alignment and Seamless Transit Act, 2026. I also question how much experience the government has in building transit, running transit, maintaining transit, even taking transit. I wonder how many of the government MPPs take transit. Municipalities or municipal agencies prescribed by the act must ensure that their transit systems are compliant. The prescribed systems are any within the following municipal transit areas: the city of Toronto, the city of Hamilton, Durham, Halton, Peel, York and any other region prescribed by the Lieutenant Governor.

This gives the minister regulatory power over setting fare prices—that's not the homonym, but F-A-R-E, for those of you paying attention—defining fare categories, types and eligibility requirements; establishing fare discount policies; and establishing transfer policies for travel between a prescribed transit system and any other systems. It mandates that when the minister sets a time frame, all the prescribed systems will be part of a unified fare payment system. The minister has the power to set certain zones where fares may differ.

It gives the minister power to designate priority routes, which can have frequency/service standard requirements and certain integration requirements between transit systems. It gives the minister—it's almost like the emperor, not the minister, to have this much power, wow—to set a requirement that specialized transit systems transport a person a prescribed distance outside their primary service area, upon request. And it gives the minister power to require reports regarding a service's compliance with the act.

Schedule 5 amends the Metrolinx Act. Well, I think we'd all have some things to say to add to anything to deal with Metrolinx. It allows Metrolinx to notify municipal officials of plans to construct or demolish a building associated with a provincial transit project—whether they own the building or the land—who must then assist in

providing a report on how the plan complies with the Building Code Act, 1992. Well, we know Metrolinx is just top-notch in communications, so this will be even better.

All right, schedule 6—in schedule 6, the Municipal Act is amended. It allows the Lieutenant Governor in Council to prescribe certain conditions where a municipality must provide consent for a non-municipally-run water and sewage public utility to be constructed. We will have more on that later.

Schedule 7 sets the specific content requirements of a municipal official plan and must follow directives from the minister if deemed non-compliant. The plans must be laid out in the exact configuration prescribed. The bill adds a new schedule to the Planning Act that details every heading a municipal planning act must include—wow, we are really veering out of our lane: not just the city of Toronto, but every municipality. Major municipalities must make the change by January 1, 2028, with all others by 2029.

It removes the requirement that official plans contain to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions—because why would we care about greenhouse gas emissions, really?—and the changing climate. It shifts which lower-tier municipalities the county of Simcoe has planning responsibilities over, depending on an order from the LG. It clarifies how the minister can order that a lower-tier municipality's approval be recognized instead of an upper-tier municipality's. Regulations can prescribe certain lower-tier municipalities who prevail when official plans conflict with upper-tier municipalities. Boy, this is going to get into some serious refereeing.

As in schedule 2, it revokes municipal authority to regulate the minimum area of the parcel of land and to regulate the minimum and maximum density and the minimum and maximum height of development; removes sustainable design as a criteria, which we mentioned before; prohibits the city from requiring that landowners provide electric vehicle supply equipment in off-street parking facilities as a condition of the plan approval, and on and on; and removes the requirement that the minister give notice if they amend or revoke an MZO.

Schedule 8 addresses the Safe Drinking Water Act. It adds definitions to accommodate the Water and Wastewater Public Corporations Act, 2025. If a municipality is compelled to accept a non-municipal drinking water system under schedule 6, it is deemed as municipal consent for the purposes of the Safe Drinking Water Act, 2002. Limitations placed by the municipality to ensure water safety are maintained—bloody right. We don't want another Walkerton.

Schedule 9 concerns the Water and Wastewater Public Corporations Act:

—mandates that the shares of any corporation designated under the act to provide water and waste water services to a municipality be held only by a municipality, the province of Ontario, the government of Canada or an agent of any of them;

—limits the sale of water service assets after the board of the corporation has passed a resolution declaring the assets no longer needed for service provision;

—clarifies how municipalities must comply with an order to permit a corporation to provide services, including how infrastructure and personnel are to be passed seamlessly to the new corporation; and

—clarifies that a municipality may not pass debt down with the infrastructure and personnel they are required to invest in the new corporation.

1620

These omnibus bills were meant to overload us with information, as we know, but all of these bills that are being flung at us from here, there and everywhere are meant to do that and to confuse the public, and that is how the government continues to skirt accountability.

I'm going to only deal with a few of the schedules: schedules 1 and 2. Where do we start with these? As someone said to me yesterday, "Wow, I didn't think there was anything left to kill in the environmental sector," but lo and behold, we're picking the meat off the bones of the sector.

People have written in already: "This takes a flame-thrower to green development." It's "indefensible." These provisions "lock in future vulnerability" for all Ontarians.

I would just say that, in Toronto and across Ontario, there's a very famous public works commissioner named R.C. Harris who had the foresight to put the rail bridge under the Prince Edward Viaduct before there was a rail system there, as in the subway. He had the foresight to do that. He had the foresight to build R.C. Harris water filtration plant, the palace of purity. If you've not been there, you should. It's near Victoria Park, right beside Beaches—East York, on the Scarborough border. He had the foresight to build that, and on extensive grounds—he was predicting the future population growth in Toronto—so that the plant could expand and provide good, clean water for Torontonians.

R.C. Harris: I want you to think about that, possibly study him and kind of channel your inner R.C. Harris to think for the future and not think of the here and now. Think of our future generations and, as I said, your kids, your grandkids, your great grandkids.

The green standards: Reading this bill gives me the horrible flashbacks to Bill 17, which, now that I think about it, Bill 17 was your dress rehearsal for environmental destruction. You actually didn't get that right, because you never sit down and thoughtfully process and figure things out. Bill 17, after you did it, it didn't go far enough for the environmental destruction, so now you have Bill 98. You need that to really put the nails in the coffin.

Yes, as I said, Bill 17 was a dress rehearsal for the horror show of Bill 98, which disincentivizes developers from using innovative materials that would usher in costs and energy savings, shifted power around the municipal official plans to the minister and proscribed which studies municipalities were permitted to request for buildings in their jurisdictions.

We don't even talk about the municipal meddling, because you just cannot stay in your lane. You're doing all this under the guise of hitting the housing targets, not clashing with the building code. I have to say that the Minister of Housing said this morning to my colleague—slammed my colleague with the line, “Facts don't drive his narrative.” And do you know what? Your narrative of the green development standards slowing down housing is not based on fact. I don't know what I can say in this House, because I've used words that were unparliamentary, but it's simply false. I would like to use other words, but I will not. But it's actually not based on facts. Green development standards do not hold up housing. They do not delay housing starts. Look at the stats and facts for the city of Toronto, all the housing that's been built in Toronto in the last 10 years, which is a lot. At one point, we had more cranes than the four major US cities combined, and all that housing that was built was built with green development standards. So let that sink in, because it's just simply not true. And when your horrendous bill—this horrible bill—passes, we will monitor the stats. We will wait with bated breath, eating popcorn, to see the housing just go through the roof now that you've removed it.

Based on the legislation this government proposes, it does not seem that they actually understand green standards or what is truly causing the red tape in this province. It does certainly confirm that they are beholden to a few companies that have a specific narrative that they would like to advance.

Let's review what green development standards actually are: They are optional standards that guide and complement various desired outcomes with flexible methods and implementations. I will also say that huge, successful, credible, reputable developers like them: EllisDon, BILD, Minto. Even your favourite developer, RESCON, who's actually the de facto chief planner for Ontario, if truth be known, liked the green development standards, a few items in it which—they liked the removing the parking minimums. So speak to your stakeholders, not just one stakeholder, please.

Notably, green standards build climate-resilient structures; that is, structures that are protected against extreme storms, winds, floods—because we're not having any of those lately, right? They improve our air quality. They improve our quality of water that flows into our watersheds, that we drink and wash our hands with. They reduce landfill waste. As you know, we are running out of landfill space. This should be a priority. For example, homes built with energy efficient appliances can reduce energy use by 25% and water use by 33%. I think Waterloo would like that right now. Roofs built with energy-efficient standards in mind can save consumers 10% to 50% on their heating bills. Who doesn't want to be comfortable in your home? This is just a win-win all around with green development standards. I really think you don't understand them. Then home heating systems in line with energy-efficient standards use 70% less energy.

All of that should be music your ears, but this government only focuses on how much energy-efficient buildings

will cost developers. It is essentially a 2% to 4% markup initially. You know if you're going to pay for something that has better quality and will last longer it's a little bit more upfront because you save it over the length of time you have that product. You know that.

These costs will continue to fall as technology progresses, which we know it is, and innovative materials and practices are standardized for a lifetime of tens of thousands of savings for consumers.

People want energy-efficient homes, and people want affordability. Reflect back on every energy-efficient retrofit program: Almost immediately, it was oversubscribed because there was so much appetite. Now, think what would happen if, instead of the government having to shell out money to subsidize these programs and homeowners needing to front these costs later in life, it was the standard for homes to be built to withstand flood, extreme heat—that's coming—emit fewer greenhouse gases and demand less energy.

1630

Today, the Minister of the Environment said that when housing starts are delayed, people pay. The minister is certainly right. Let's talk about what causes those delays. Just one month ago, commercial water-taking permits had to be paused after the region of Waterloo hit a capacity limit so grave that new development had to be halted. I remember Collingwood, my hometown, had a moratorium as well on builds because of water issues. When we think long-term about the environment and plan sustainably, we avoid delays just like this.

The Financial Accountability Officer has told us many times of the high cost of inaction, and how for every dollar invested in climate action, it's a \$3 to \$8 savings in cost avoidance. This government is supposed to be the fiscally responsible side of the House, and yet we are, over here in the opposition. It's a bit of a Freaky Friday, I guess.

So one major consideration in green standards is climate-resilient infrastructure—for example, buildings that are protected against flood, heat and storms. We know that flooding is the most common and costly natural disaster in Canada—even though you didn't support my private member's bill, it was introduced twice on that. Floods cost Canadian homes an annual \$2.9 billion in total and approximately \$40,000—\$43,000, actually—for any one individual home. Some of you told me, back when I was schmoozing you to get my private member's bill passed, that you had basement floods, so you knew about the \$43,000 price tag.

You want to talk about hidden costs when buying a home? Insurers raise premiums and reduce coverage in high-risk areas due to vulnerability to natural disasters. In fact, currently, 10% of Canada and Ontario's housing markets are uninsurable for flood risk—10%.

Just last night, all of us, here in Toronto, were impacted by the flooding caused by heavy rains. How many streets flooded? Mine certainly was flooding. Two vehicles collided due to pooling on the 401 highway. Flooding reported on various roads caused several transit detours. The Canada versus Tunisia game was delayed. Subways

could not stop at Museum station due to flooding. This all took place over just a couple of hours. People's safety was seriously impacted. These are all things that can be addressed through green development standards—for example, green roofs and soft landscaping. Why is this government willing to risk flooding—which we know is set to increase and intensify because of the worsening climate emergency—and, consequently, the lives and livelihoods of Ontarians?

Flooding is one thing, but the heat domes—just wait for that. This government's refusal to take climate action, as demonstrated by their removal of the requirement to create a climate change plan and report on it, and now their rejection of green standards that would bolster climate resiliency, amongst other things, leave Ontario vulnerable to a heat dome.

A heat dome refers to oppressive, high-pressure atmospheric systems that cause hot air to rise and rest for a prolonged period of time. This results in extreme heat, resulting in 900 associated deaths between 2000 and 2020; wildfires, which burned 597,000 or more hectares in 2025; and drought, impacting our growing ability—which will worsen the affordability crisis if we can't grow food.

But the difference between the floods we're having and how much they would affect your residents' pocketbook to have a basement flood and their physical and mental well-being to suffer all that hardship unnecessarily, because we didn't protect them properly—the difference between flooding and a heat dome is massive fatalities. The scientists have done the modelling, and there will be a heat dome in southern Ontario, and thousands of people will not survive. For us to remove the green development standards is beyond negligent.

Now, we'll go to your favourite topic of all time, the one massive thing, in your opinion, that will solve the climate emergency: electric vehicles. And you know what, I'm not against electric vehicles; I'm absolutely supportive of them. But build the proper infrastructure, right?

When I was at Toronto city council—it's very difficult at Toronto city council to get a parking pad, of course, because we're worried about hard surface and floods and whatnot. So, people who got electric vehicles—some of them plugged into their house and had their plugs all the way down the street, on the road, trying to plug in their vehicles.

What's the point of getting an electric vehicle if you don't have the charging station or the infrastructure in your new condo? It's not mandated. And actually, you don't even have to mandate it, because smart developers, which we know—EllisDon, BILD, Minto, even ResCon, probably—would want to put that in, because otherwise it defeats the purpose of having electric vehicles.

If these schedules have not done enough damage, they also prohibit the city from requiring landowners, as you know, to provide EV charging stations. And just yesterday, Electric Mobility—yes, who went to that reception? Electric Mobility Canada was here. They had a reception. I think the government even spoke at it to champion

electric vehicles. So, how can you be there and supporting them when you're not putting in the infrastructure?

I'm just going to leave that there, and I'm going to talk about a couple of other things in my short four minutes left, and that is: I know you care about Ontarians being employed in jobs. In 2018, the green infrastructure sector employed five times more people than pharmaceutical and medicine manufacturing, and three times more people than computer and electronic product manufacturing. It was a big, big employer. So, why would we want to get rid of those jobs? There's the green economy. World-class cities and countries around the world are investing in the green economy. It's forward-thinking. It's foresight. Why would we be going backwards?

The other thing is that when the Premier and I were at Toronto city council for those lively, wonderful times together—four years of fun—the Premier voted for the Toronto Green Standard. He was a supporter. I know the Premier likes to be a man of his word. I would just encourage him to remember that vote and remember why he wanted to stand behind environmental stewardship, energy-efficient buildings and the Toronto Green Standard.

You have people writing in. Landscape Ontario represents 2,600 professional members and 80,000 people, and they're deeply committed to environmental stewardship and the advancement of sustainable landscape horticulture, which we know is stormwater management. And it's done through professional design, construction and maintenance. Those are more jobs.

1640

The Toronto Atmospheric Fund says, “We are concerned that Bill 98 undermines municipalities' abilities to manage growth in a sustainable way, or to protect energy affordability, public health, and climate objectives. Proposed changes to municipal authorities for green development standards risk setting back progress towards sustainable buildings by a decade. This would do little if anything to accelerate housing development, while potentially leaving homebuyers with substandard housing and higher utility bills.”

It's only transferring the costs. As we said, this doesn't eliminate the risk. The risk is not reduced, it's just transferred, and it's transferred to the homeowners and to renters and to insurers and to taxpayers.

But we are here—the government—to lead, to think for the future and the next generations; as the Indigenous thinking knowledge is, the next seven generations. Why are we just thinking here and now to save a quick buck? For what? That's just not the way to build a province and to build housing. Short-term savings are replaced by long-term costs and vulnerability increases at a time when Ontarians can least afford it.

I will not be supporting this bill.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: To either of the members who spoke, I'll just throw out an easy one there and look for their comments or observations on this particular piece of schedule 6.

It says, “Except as otherwise provided, no person shall construct, maintain or operate a water or sewage public utility in any area of a municipality without first applying for and obtaining the consent of the municipality.” And also: “The shares of the water and waste water public corporation shall not be issued to any person other than a municipality, the province of Ontario, the government of Canada or an agent” thereof.

I just invite either of you to—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Response?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much to the fine member from Essex.

I mean, I wasn't here in the chamber—many of us weren't—for the horrible situation that happened in Walkerton. So we know how valuable water is—fresh water, clean water, drinking water—and we know it is our duty to keep everyone safe, all Ontarians. So we can't play games with our water supply, with our drinking water, and I mentioned that to you with the example of R.C. Harris, the public works commissioner. So I would just be very careful about what we do with water in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

M^{me} France Gélinas: So the bill is called “building homes.” I would like to ask the members, do you really think that this bill is about building more homes? Do you see real solutions that will bring us more non-profit housing? Do you see solutions such as rent control in that bill? Do you see solutions to legalize the missing-middle homes? Do you see solutions for families that are paying so much in rent that they can't afford to stay where they live? Do you really see this as a bill that will help Ontario build more homes?

Mr. Adil Shamji: Thank you to the member for Nickel Belt for that astute question. I'll begin by just reflecting on that title, “building homes,” not building more homes, not building them faster. At least previous titles pretended to want to achieve that ambition; this one doesn't even make an effort.

In regard to the latter part of your question, does it address the real and meaningful reform that we're looking for in the housing sector? No, it does not. I don't see protections for renters. I don't see many of the major changes that I'd like to see.

I will say, in the interest of fairness to the government—and this is not a veiled insult or anything like that—as it relates to missing-middle housing, this business about eliminating minimum lot sizes could have the potential to help with missing-middle housing, possibly. I have no confidence that this government will see this as an opportunity to actually deliver that kind of housing, however.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. John Jordan: One of the things in this bill that I'm really excited about is the changes to the water act, because in my riding, which is a rural riding—and many of the places in my riding do not have access to a municipal water and sewage system. The current process

takes years for a communal water and sewage system to get approved. This clears up, streamlines that process so that these villages and towns in our rural areas can have access to water and sewage and have higher density builds within their communities. It's good for the environment, it's good for the community growth and I'm very happy to see this in here.

Would the member—either member—agree that developing this process is the right thing to do for housing in Ontario?

Mr. Adil Shamji: I have a two-part answer to that question. First, to answer directly: I think it is a step in the right direction.

The second part of my answer is to acknowledge why you might be so excited to see this: Because under this government, we've seen the elimination of public testing for well water, for example; we have seen the elimination of waste water testing, all of which are fundamental things that actually function to keep people safer, to protect our water and which have been eroded under this Premier and the people who sit on this side of the aisle. And so, I completely understand and sympathize with you and your constituents, who under this government have seen the safety of their water eroded more than ever before. I congratulate them that they'll have, potentially, if you can deliver, a solution to that.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Questions?

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank both the members for speaking. I'll address my question to my colleague from the Legiskaters.

I heard the member opposite, the Conservative member, talking about the need to get sewage and water into smaller communities where it's certainly not available—they're dependent on wells and septic systems—and he says this system will streamline it. Is it not possible to keep our water treatment and water systems under democratic municipal control and get them into the communities where they're needed without having to put them out to these arm's length corporations, which, the fear has been, will eventually be privatized?

Mr. Adil Shamji: Thank you to my fellow colleague from the Legiskaters. He raises an important and interesting point, that as we look to ensure that safe, clean drinking water is available to every single citizen across our great province, there can be a few ways to do this.

And if there's one thing that I've learned about this government, it's that even on the rare occasions that they actually follow through on what they say, they usually manage to do it in the worst possible way. So you are right to be suspicious about the ulterior motives here—or sometimes it's not even ulterior; sometimes it's just sheer incompetence.

So thank you for raising that. I think it's a very important consideration.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question? I recognize the member for Ottawa–Vanier.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wasn't sure if you were looking past me or at me. Thank you for the opportunity to ask a question.

I'd like to ask the member for Beaches–East York, because she's obviously very passionate about the environment, and this bill clearly removed municipal authority to require green building standards and eliminate climate requirements from official plans—now, I suspect this will have some negative impact and that will also deprive our province of some benefits. Can you speak to that? Because I think you did mention during your speech there was also some job creation from that, so we're moving away from that. What's going to be the negative impact of this measure?

1650

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much to my incredible colleague from Ottawa–Vanier.

Yes, Ontario always was a global leader in environmental initiatives—a great green global leader—and now you see we are lagging behind. I've used the term dinosaurs, cavemen, Neanderthals, you name it, but we're going back to the Dark Ages.

So our kids who—you know, the jobs—people are being reskilled from gasfitters to heat pumps. Everyone's getting heat pumps now because they're more efficient, you save money and they add more comfort to your house. So things like that, we need to be skilling our future generations in the energy-efficient infrastructure, which the rest of the world is doing. But no, we're going back to the Dark Ages, and so we will lose jobs and we will lose reputation and we will lose energy efficiency.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Brian Riddell: Speaker, our government believes Ontario should be a place where young people can afford to buy a home and families can live closer to where they work. That requires building more homes, building infrastructure to support those homes.

Can the opposition—and I put my question to the member for Don Valley East—explain to me why they oppose all these policies that are making it easier and more affordable for young people to buy—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Further debate?

Ms. Laura Smith: I'm very pleased to rise today to speak to this legislation and to the work our government is doing to build more homes, to support growing communities and to make it easier and faster to get housing built across Ontario.

I'm also proud to speak in my role as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, where I've had an opportunity to work closely on the policies and the programs that are helping to address one of the most important challenges facing our province today: housing supply.

Speaker, the minister has been very clear from the very beginning: It takes too long and it costs too much to build housing in Ontario, and we are taking action to fix that. This has been the guiding principle behind our housing

legislation, our infrastructure investments and our planning reforms over the past year. We've already taken significant steps to reduce red tape, streamline approvals and create the conditions for more housing to be built faster, and this legislation builds on that progress.

This bill does not stand alone. We've been very busy over the course of the last year or so, and it builds on the success of our previous legislation that reduced red tape, streamlined planning approvals and made it easier to get shovels in the ground.

Those earlier reforms were about modernizing a planning and development system that had become too slow, too complex and too unpredictable. Municipalities, builders and families all told us the same thing: The system was taking too long, approvals were too complicated and the costs kept rising before construction even started. We listened and we acted.

Because of those earlier reforms, we've already made important progress in reducing delays, clarifying planning rules and making the approvals process more predictable. We've removed unneeded studies; we've reduced development charges and we've clarified that the code is king. I want to clarify that as well. It has been something that I've spoken to so many of the constituents in my riding about. They understand the necessity for building, and I've heard them quote the minister over and over again: "The code is king." It should be king.

But we also know there's more work to do. Ontario is growing quickly. People want to live, work and raise families here. Our economy continues to grow, and with that growth comes the need for more housing, more infrastructure and more complete communities. We cannot rely on the systems and processes of the past if we want to meet the housing needs of the future. We always have to keep moving forward.

That's why this legislation continues our work to reduce unnecessary barriers, streamline processes and make it easier to build housing and the infrastructure that supports it. At its core—

Interjections.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you. At its core, this legislation is about one thing: creating the conditions to build more homes faster and at lower cost.

One of the biggest challenges facing housing construction today is uncertainty. When rules are unclear, when requirements change from municipality to municipality, and when the approval time takes too long—it takes years instead of months—projects become more expensive and fewer homes get built. Those costs do not disappear. They are passed on to homebuyers and renters. If we're serious about affordability, we have to be serious about reducing the delays and reducing the costs in the development process.

This legislation includes measures that continue to streamline planning processes, improve coordination between infrastructure and housing, and reduce duplication in approvals. It also continues to work to ensure that municipalities have the tools they need to support that

growth, while also ensuring that infrastructure can be built alongside housing.

Speaker, housing does not get built in isolation. Homes require roads, water, waste water, transit, parks and community services. That's why our government has also focused on housing-enabling water infrastructure. We've made historic investments in infrastructure programs that help municipalities build the pipes, the roads and the services needed to support new housing.

Earlier today, I talked to the Acting Minister of Infrastructure on those important initiatives. I'm very fortunate. In the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, we have a great growing community, and we needed those infrastructure investments so that we could get water systems going in this new development. He showed up. I was grateful for his support, and we were able to contribute several million dollars into a new water infrastructure system that will help countless people, countless new residents in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, so that those in the next generation and this generation can get a home. That's what it's all about: getting a home for the next generation and the ones that are truly looking for a house right now. Infrastructure and housing simply cannot be built without that water infrastructure.

We've also heard very clearly from our builders and our municipalities about the impact of development charges and taxes on housing affordability development charges that are used to fund important infrastructure. We also have to recognize that they are a significant upfront cost on housing. When those costs are too high, they can delay projects or make housing more expensive for families.

That's why our government has taken steps to reduce and defer development charges in certain cases, particularly for purpose-built rental housing and other priority housing types. These changes are designed to encourage more rental housing construction, support affordability and ensure that important housing projects can move forward.

We have also worked with our federal partners on measures like the removal of the HST from new purpose-built rental housing, which is another important step in making rental construction more financially viable, and encouraging more rental units to be built across our province. These measures are important because they directly affect whether a housing project moves forward or not. When costs are too high at the beginning of a project, some projects simply do not get built. By reducing upfront costs and improving financial viability, we are helping more housing projects move from the planning stage to the construction stage.

Speaker, another important theme of this legislation and our broader housing strategy is predictability. Builders, municipalities and infrastructure providers all need a system that is clear and predictable. When the rules are clear and timelines are predictable, projects move faster, financing is easier to secure and construction can begin sooner. Predictability reduces risk, and when risk is reduced, costs are reduced as well.

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We're also continuing to work with municipalities to streamline processes like site plan approvals, standardize certain engineering and infrastructure standards where appropriate and reduce duplication between different levels of planning approvals. None of this is about removing planning or removing environmental protections. It's about making the system work better, work faster and focus on the things that actually matter for safe, sustainable and well-planned communities.

We can build more homes while still protecting the environment, while still building parks and while still ensuring that communities are complete and livable. This is not an either/or choice. We can do both, but we need a system that is efficient and focused.

Speaker, I also want to briefly touch on transportation and infrastructure because housing and transportation are closely connected. People need to be able to get to work, to school and services. Communities need roads, transit and infrastructure to function. While the primary focus of this legislation is housing and planning, we also recognize that transportation infrastructure plays a key role in supporting growth and ensuring that communities function well, as well as growth.

Our government's broader approach has been to coordinate housing, infrastructure and transportation planning so that communities grow in a coordinated and planned way. That means building infrastructure to support housing and planning housing in areas where infrastructure can be supported efficiently.

At the end of the day, this legislation is about people. It's about young people trying to buy their first home, like the young people who are hopefully going to buy in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. It's about families looking for more space, it's about seniors looking to downsize and find housing in their own community, it's about workers who want to live near their jobs and it's about ensuring that our communities continue to grow, remain strong and remain affordable.

We all know there's no single solution to this housing challenge. We need more supply. We need faster approvals. We need infrastructure. We need financing tools. We need coordination between all levels of government. That is why our government's housing strategy includes legislation, infrastructure funding, tax measures, planning reform and partnerships with municipalities and the federal government.

This legislation is another step of that broader plan. It builds on the work we have already done to reduce red tape and streamline approvals, it continues our work to lower costs and improve predictability, and it supports our goal of building more homes faster across Ontario.

Speaker, our government understands that housing affordability and housing supply are amongst the most important issues facing Ontarians today. As a mother that has two almost-adult children who are living in my home, I want to see them someday find a home not too far away from their mom and dad—I want to see that. The next generation deserves this opportunity.

We also understand that the solution is not one single policy or one single bill. It requires sustained effort, coordination and a willingness to modernize systems that have not kept pace with Ontario's growth. We're taking action. We're reducing delays. We're investing in infrastructure. We are working with municipalities, we are supporting rental construction, and we are continuing to modernize the planning and development system so that it's faster, clearer and more predictable. Because at the end of the day, if we want housing to be more affordable, we have to build more homes. If we want to build more homes, we have to make it easier, faster and more predictable to get housing built.

I would like to continue to speak about the broader context in which this legislation sits because it's important to understand that housing policy is not just about planning rules or approval timelines. Housing policy is about economic growth, labour mobility, infrastructure investment and long-term competitiveness of our province.

Ontario is growing. People are moving here, businesses are expanding here and families want to build their futures here. That growth is a positive thing, but it also means that we must ensure that housing supply keeps pace with population and economic growth. If housing supply does not keep up, prices rise—rent rises too—and it becomes harder for young people, families and workers to live in the communities where they work.

For far too long, the housing system in Ontario was constrained by slow approvals, unclear rules, duplication between levels of government and infrastructure that was not always aligned with growth. The result was predictable: Not enough housing was built. Projects took too long, and costs increased year after year. That's why, over the past several years and last year in particular, we have introduced multiple pieces of legislation focused on streamlining planning, reducing unnecessary studies and duplicative processes and making it easier to move projects from application to construction.

Those earlier changes were not always easy. They required difficult decisions, but they were absolutely necessary. And importantly, they're already making a difference in how quickly projects can move through the system.

This legislation continues that work. It's another step in the same direction: faster approvals, clear rules, lower costs and more housing supply.

I also want to speak about the importance of certainty in the housing market. One of the things we hear consistently from builders, municipalities and investors is that uncertainty is one of the biggest barriers to building housing. When rules change frequently, when timelines are unpredictable and when costs are unclear at the beginning of a project, it becomes very difficult to plan and finance housing construction.

Housing projects are large, complex and expensive. They require financing, engineering, planning approvals, infrastructure coordination and a long construction timeline. If there's too much uncertainty in this process, some projects simply do not move forward, and that means

fewer homes get built. By making planning rules clearer, by standardizing certain requirements where appropriate and by streamlining approval processes, we are helping to create a more predictable environment for housing construction. Predictability leads to investment, investment leads to construction and construction leads to more housing supply.

Speaker, I also want to return to the issue of cost because cost is one of the biggest barriers to housing affordability today. Construction costs, financing costs, land costs, taxes and development charges all contribute to that final cost of housing.

Government cannot control every cost in the system, but we can control the rules, the approval processes and some of the upfront costs that affect whether projects move forward or not. That is why measures like development charge reductions and deferrals for certain types of housing are important, and that's why removing HST from new purpose-built rental housing is important. These measures improve the financial viability of housing projects and encourage more construction, particularly rental construction, which is critically needed across this province.

Encouraging purpose-built rental housing is especially important. For many people, renting is the most realistic housing option, especially early in their careers or when they're new to a community. For many years, very little purpose-built rental housing was constructed, and that is one of the reasons why rental vacancy rates are low and rents have increased. By improving the financial viability of rental construction, we are helping increase rental supply and improve affordability in the rental market.

Another important principle behind this legislation and our broader housing strategy is that growth should pay for growth, but growth must also be possible. We need infrastructure to support new housing, but we also need housing to support economic growth and strong communities. The system must balance these two realities. If the costs placed on new housing are too high, housing does not get built. If infrastructure is not built, communities cannot grow.

The solution is better coordination, better planning and smarter infrastructure investment. This legislation is part of that broader effort to better align infrastructure, planning and housing construction so that communities can grow in a sustainable and affordable way.

I also want to emphasize that building housing is not just about numbers; it's about building complete communities. Communities need parks. Communities need schools. They need roads, they need transit and they also need community services. They need places for families to live, seniors to downsize and young people to start their lives. Good planning still matters, environmental protection still matters and community design still matters, but the system must also be efficient and must allow housing to be built in a timely way. We are modernizing planning so that it reflects today's growth pressures, today's housing needs and today's economic realities. Planning systems must evolve as provinces and cities grow, and the system that

worked decades ago is not always the system that works today.

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Speaker, this legislation reflects a simple, but important, idea: If we want housing to be more affordable and more available, we have to build more homes, and we have to make it easier to build those homes. That means reducing unnecessary delays, reducing duplication, improving coordination between infrastructure and housing, and creating a system that is faster, clearer and more predictable.

This legislation builds on the progress that we've already made in reducing red tape and streamlining approvals. It continues our work in lowering costs and improving predictability. It supports municipalities in planning for growth, and it supports our broader goal of building more homes faster across Ontario.

There is still so much work to do. Housing supply challenges did not appear overnight and they will not be solved overnight, but our government is taking consistent, deliberate steps to address the problem at its roots by fixing the systems that control how housing gets built. We are modernizing planning. We are investing in infrastructure. We are reducing red tape. We're supporting rental housing, and we are working with municipalities and the federal government. We are continuing to take action to make it easier to build housing across Ontario.

What we're doing right now is resetting the system. We are returning to a model that recognizes a simple truth: If we want housing to be affordable, we must make it possible to build homes faster, more efficiently and at scale, because at the end of the day, it's about people. It's about the young couple who's saving for their first home. It's about the family looking for more space. That's why, at the end of the day, it's about opportunity. It's about giving people the opportunity to live near their jobs, raise their families, start a business and build their future.

Thank you, Speaker. This is what this legislation does and this is what our broader housing plan does, and that's why I'm proud to support this bill today.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member from Thornhill for her comments today. She was mentioning that she has got children, and she hopes those children will be able to buy a home one day. She also mentioned that this government has passed six pieces of legislation to build housing faster. They have given \$5 billion in development charges, largely paid for by municipal taxpayers, to developers. They just recently announced they're going to be buying up \$1.5 billion of unsold stock from developers. And they've stripped us of our environmental protections.

But under this government, the cost of buying a house is up 40%, the cost of rent is up 40% and your record is that you have the lowest level of housing starts of any province in the country. So will you admit that the only way your children or my children are ever going to be able to afford to buy a home in Ontario is if they elect an NDP

government that actually will build not-for-profit housing, so everybody has a home that they can afford?

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to thank the member opposite for his statement.

It is true: I am a mother of two children, and although they're of youth age, we are hoping that they will reach adulthood and they will be able to move. And we're hoping that when they do move, they move closer to mom and dad. That's why we're resetting the system. That's why we're returning to a model that recognizes this truth, and we want housing to be more affordable. With the actions we've taken, including removing the HST from all new homes, and also some of the streamlining of the approval process that we've talked about today and the measures that we've done over the course of the last week, we're giving these kids a shot.

This is going to be something that I'm looking forward to, not just for the members of Thornhill or Ontario, but for everyone, that they can have that opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Adil Shamji: My question to the member for Thornhill—thank you for your thoughtful remarks. I'm wondering, do you think that your government will build 1.5 million homes by 2031?

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to thank the member opposite for his remarks.

We are in uncharted territory and global economic issues, including what's happening down south, along with so many other things that are happening in this world today, have changed. The cost of buying goods is changing. The cost of buying homes is changing, and we have to streamline the processes so that we can make it easier for this new generation—not only that, but the newcomers that are here. We have seen the most dramatic changes in the Canadian population in history. We have lived through inflationary shocks and rate hikes and the chaos to the south. People have hit the pause button. Our housing sector has been hit very, very hard.

At its core, it takes too long and it costs too much to build a house and it's our duty to fix that.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I recognize the Minister of Long-Term Care.

Hon. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: The member spoke about making it easier and more affordable to build homes and, as Minister of Long-Term Care, I firmly believe that long-term-care homes are also homes. That is why I was so proud when this government got rid of development charges on any long-term-care builds, which has helped us unlock dozens of new projects.

But there is more good news in this particular bill. We are also getting rid of development charges for retirement homes. Can the member tell us why this is such an important initiative so that our seniors can have an affordable place to call home?

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to thank the member for her question, and I know we share a very strong passion for our community members, especially our most vulnerable community members. I will give a shameless shout-out to

the fact that we brought the first private member's bill that dealt with dementia and the elderly to hit this House in over a decade.

I know her question is genuine and I know that her heart is in the right place when she asks this. Yes, we're removing those DC fees from the most vulnerable citizens, and I think that just is proof positive of the positive motion and the forward motion that our government is taking, by not only streamlining but removing those DCs from our most vulnerable, which is their housing.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I recognize the member for Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I hear the member from Thornhill talk passionately about how desperately we need housing, but every time this government says "streamline" or "modernize," they literally slow down housing from being built in Ontario.

You have left a really good solution, which is the missing-middle housing, on the table. We know that missing-middle housing increases affordability and choice. It's gentle density in neighbourhoods. It reduces environmental impact. It's efficient infrastructure use. But you haven't embedded it in this legislation. After eight years, what is it going to take for you to legalize more affordable missing-middle housing options as of right in all neighbourhoods?

Everything should be on the table. Can the member from Thornhill give us any good reason why this legislation is not truly addressing this missing-middle housing in the province of Ontario so people can actually find homes?

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to thank the member opposite. One of the things that this bill does specifically is it deals with minimum lot sizes. Ontario is growing quickly, and we need to make better use of the land that is already serviced and already planned for growth. But we've been finding in many communities that minimum-lot-size requirements were established decades ago and under very different growth assumptions and housing needs.

So, we're changing the dynamics of that. Today, those rules can sometimes limit the ability to build more affordable homes and different types of housing in areas that are already fully serviced with roads, water, waste water and transit. Our approach is about ensuring that municipalities have the tools and flexibility to support gentle density and a wider range of housing types, including smaller homes, townhomes and other ground-related housing that can be more affordable to families and seniors and first-time buyers.

This is not imposing the same solution everywhere in the province; it's about making sure outdated planning rules do not prevent communities from adding housing in appropriate places.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I recognize the member for Cambridge.

Mr. Brian Riddell: Official plans are meant to guide growth and development in our communities, but over time they've become longer, more complex and more difficult to navigate for both municipalities and home

builders. Could the member from Thornhill talk a little bit about this and just inform us?

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Ms. Laura Smith: I want to thank the member opposite. Official plans, just like site plan control, are important tools, but over time, the process has become so much longer and more complicated and, in many cases, focused on issues that go far beyond what a site plan was originally intended—or another plan intended to address.

There are differences between each municipality when it gets to these plans and these site plans. They can take much longer in one municipality, shorter in another.

We need to remember what the minister talked about in his speech earlier today. He talked about the code being king. What works in one part of the province should also work in another area of the province.

Our government is taking steps to streamline these plans and requirements because we know that it's important, not just for the person who's building the home but who's buying the home, because it's going to make things cheaper—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you again to the great member from Thornhill for your speech.

In 2023, Toronto exceeded its housing targets by 51%, and that is with the Toronto Green Standard. So I just wonder if you can give me an example: Since this government claims that housing is delayed by green development standards, could you give me an example of how the green development standards have delayed housing?

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to thank the member opposite for her question. One of the things that we've talked about is the green standard. There's absolutely no reason why a builder can't use that green standard, and there's no reason why it should also delay the process of building a home. Green standards are effective, but the problem is there's so many delays.

We're not going to take away from any of the green standards. Green standards are available to the construction industry; they're available to the people who are building. We're going to continue to move in a path—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Further debate?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: So, 5:30 on a Wednesday: Let's get right into it, shall we, Speaker?

I've got to say: How many bills on housing do we have to see? How much time does this government need? You've had eight years. You have the worst housing record in history in the province since they've been collecting data. We've had six bills. You've given about \$5 billion in development holidays to developers.

You have introduced bill after bill after bill, and really, what have you done in all that time? You've juiced the system for developers—that's it—and you haven't built any housing. So, come on. You have to understand why it's really tiresome for us on this side of the House to hear you say things like, "We're going to streamline, we're going to modernize, we're going to speed up. We're going

to build housing in a timely way.” Timely way? Is eight years a timely way? I don’t think so.

It’s been eight years, and we are just moving backwards. We are not building any—any—housing in this province, never mind the kind of homes that this government likes to build: big, sprawl homes. Those aren’t being built. Missing-middle homes—nothing. Affordable housing—nothing. Your record on housing is abysmal.

So let me just say, I hope that this works. I hope this works because the people of Ontario need you to get something right. But I am not holding out much hope with this bill.

Can we just go back to the biggest juice-the-system event that we have had, probably, in the history of Ontario; the first time we’ve had an RCMP investigation in the history of Ontario? That is the greenbelt scandal: \$8 billion that went to investors so that they could build on the greenbelt. We know how that went. We spent years putting forward a bill, years bringing it back—all that time that was wasted on building housing in the right place, the right kind of housing. So much time was wasted. The reputation of the government is in tatters. The kind of cynicism of people not trusting the government is at an all-time high, and it started, I would say, with the greenbelt scandal.

But you know, we had the Premier, after all of that ugliness—the Premier did withdraw the bill. He rolled it back, and he said that all land that is currently within the greenbelt will be protected forever and will not be developed for housing and commercial-development purposes. But I’ve got news for you. Everyone thinks that the government is keeping its promise when it comes to the greenbelt, but, apparently, appeals to build on the greenbelt are being heard at the Ontario Land Tribunal.

Interjections.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Imagine that—yeah. So they may think that’s happening, but it’s not—

Mr. Chris Glover: But they promised.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: But they promised—I know.

Interjection: They said sorry.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: They did say sorry.

Again, we’re hearing ways in which this government is allowing the further erosion of competent land use planning. We heard this member here say that the plan is king. Well, we are eroding the king, with the government allowing people to appeal some of the greenbelt applications.

Happening right now in my riding, in Ancaster, is an appeal to build on not only the greenbelt, but an urban boundary expansion area of Hamilton. What was also part of the rollback was that they promised not to have an urban boundary expansion forced on municipalities. But what we are seeing now is that the Ontario Land Tribunal will be hearing an expansion appeal to build a low-density home, aka a monster home, in a very—let’s just say a high-income neighbourhood, and it’s on the greenbelt, and it’s part of the urban boundary expansion.

These little reviews at the OLT are a small way the greenbelt parcels are going to slip through the cracks, and

we’re going to start to normalize small infringements. This is brought to you directly from another one of your housing bills, which was called Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act, Bill 185. It’s a backdoor way—the government’s favourite way, through the Premier’s office or through the back door—to expand building on the greenbelt.

Let me just say that this developer’s pitch to build on the greenbelt, the urban boundary expansion in Ancaster, was turned down by the municipality. The municipality’s planning staff said that they would like the developer to withdraw the application, but the developer is appealing to the OLT. The question is why, if we are not allowed to build on the greenbelt, was this not thrown out right away? Why is this government allowing the OLT to even consider this application?

I think it’s really important to understand that people think that the greenbelt is off-limits to development, but the government’s flip-flopping on Ontario’s \$2-million acre greenbelt—protected, natural farmland—is still happening, but it’s happening in small dribs and drabs behind closed doors.

As I said, the city planning staff opposed the application. They asked the developer to withdraw the application. As usual, in this world where developers think that this is the case, they skip formal consultation with planning staff, which would have been a way to easily work this out, and went directly to the OLT, where, let’s be honest—straight talk—developers usually have a really fun experience at the OLT, and landlords generally have—

Mr. Chris Glover: What is it—98% in favour of developers?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Yes—98%. If I were rolling the dice, that’s where I would take it, straight to the OLT.

Bill 185 allows developers to appeal council non-decisions or rejections of urban boundary expansions to the Ontario Land Tribunal. This one is also on the greenbelt. This clears the way for urban boundary expansion applications at any time, and with no limit on size.

This is what Hamilton city planners have pointed out. One of the councillors said, “We didn’t create these problems, but we have to deal with them.” You’ve landed your mess at the feet of competent municipal planners, councillors and municipalities that continue to be cash-strapped because of the decisions that your government is making when it comes to downloading costs to the province.

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To finish this, I would say that the city solicitor argues that the case has no merit and should be dismissed because appeals of greenbelt denial aren’t appealable to the OLT, but there it is.

Finally, we have Environmental Defence who pays attention to this and is still concerned with the environment and with the natural environment and our species at risk and the piping plover and the redbreasted dace. People still care about these things. They said, “Bill 185 effectively ends meaningful, independent oversight of development

approvals outside existing built-up areas.... Any government that is serious about solving the housing shortage and restoring Ontario's reputation for clean government will need to start by revoking any approvals for settlement boundary" or greenbelt "expansion, low-density sprawl development or habitat destruction...."

With Bill 185, we really need to see a revision to that—which we never will, but we need to prevent developer-initiated settlement boundary appeals at the OLT.

Again, how much time has this government wasted in this House on the greenbelt scandal? Believe me, these developer friends of the government are not going away easily. They have found a loophole; they're going to use it. I know that there's no way on God's green earth that this government doesn't know that this is how Bill 185 is being used. It's really—I guess I can't say "disingenuous," can I? It's really hard to swallow that they stand here and talk about the timely building of homes and streamlines of approvals and so forth when, under their watch, this is happening at the OLT and we're moving backwards when it comes to building the right homes in the right place.

I have to be clear that the Ontario NDP support any realistic plans that this government will have to build housing. We've put forward our solutions many, many times. We've put forward our Homes Ontario, which was a very robust plan to get the home building that we need here. We've talked about options to include rent control for all tenants in Ontario, not just the tenants that—because of the loopholes that you've managed to have when it comes to rent control. We talked about rent stabilization and vacancy controls.

You can build homes, but boy, oh boy, can you chew gum and walk at the same time? Because it would be nice to see you not only building homes, but trying to protect people that already have homes that they live in and that they can afford instead of watching people be evicted, be re-evicted and watching the kind of housing and homelessness chaos that we are seeing on the streets of all of our ridings.

Please, please, do something different. You're doing the same thing with the same results. People are counting on you to be a bigger, better government.

I want to talk a little bit now about schedule 4 where you're talking about fare integration. Again, I have to be clear that we're big advocates for public transit and we always have been. But I'm going to say that, like this whole bill, the devil is in the details. There is so much here in this bill that will go to regulation that we don't get to see the details on. And I need to be clear, and we need to be clear to the people of Ontario: You don't get to weigh in on regulations. The government gets to write basically a big blank cheque, and the detail in regulation-making, you don't get to weigh in on.

Again, back to this government's MO—their preferred way of doing business—back to behind closed doors, back into the Premier's office, back into the backrooms where we don't know who is weighing in on those regulations,

and those regulations are where the rubber meets the road. But we're locked out of that.

Absolutely, seamless transit is a great idea, but what is not a great idea is a minister-controlled fare hike with no accountability. Because, again, we've got a bill that is empowering the minister with all kinds of power to make decisions about transit routes, to make decisions about fares. And we have to wonder if in fact this government is really truly committed to public transit when the idea of improving affordability when it comes to public transit and increasing ridership was omitted from the act's purposes.

We know a lot about supporting and advocating for public transit. We've put a lot of things forward as the NDP, the official opposition. So when you're doing that part where the devil's in the details and you're working on regulations, come over here and have a chat with us, because we can tell you some of the pitfalls that you might want to avoid. Some of those pitfalls are making sure that you don't end up making service worse by having uneven cost structures across the province, or even unequal access wherever the fare is integrated. Really, how can you guarantee that you're not going to drive up fares for individual riders?

Actually, public transportation fares are expensive in the province, and so the last thing we need to do is do something that drives up those fares, and certainly we don't want to drive up transit system costs for our already cash-strapped municipalities. Oh, my Lord. The poor municipalities, what have they ever done to you? Because any time you can't balance a book or you don't want to pay a cost, who do you look to?

Mr. Chris Glover: Yes, download it. Download it to municipalities.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Download, download.

Okay, let's see—

Mr. Chris Glover: And municipal taxes go up.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Exactly, your municipal taxes—poor, poor property owners—

Interjection: They're raising taxes.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: They're raising the taxes.

Mr. Chris Glover: And they say they're not raising taxes.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: That's right, but they're just downloading it. They're taking it out of your pocket—just in a way that, as per usual, you may not notice it, but it's coming out of your pocket. I would just say that, across Ontario, there's an identified \$750-million shortfall when it comes to transit operations. Really, what that is about is the fare box is not covering the full cost of running transit and transportation costs. Municipalities are covering that cost.

We have long, long advocated that the province up-load—restore—50% of provincial funding from municipal transportation costs. This was a program cancelled by the PC government in 1998. We've long advocated that you restore it. Right now, estimates are there is as much as—did I already say this? There's as much as a \$750-

million transit operation shortfall across the province, and that's a direct result of the municipalities struggling—struggling to keep up with costs.

I will just point out that in Hamilton they have something called an HSR Fare Assist program, which is a 50% discount on fares for low-income households. The program is funded by the gas reserves that replaced the previously temporary program for OW. This is an example of—will the minister be making the decision inside their office and not consulting with individual transit operators, municipal transit operators across the province to make sure we don't lose important programs like that?

In the last four and a half minutes that I have, let me return to schedule 5 and everybody's favourite non-transparent corporation, Metrolinx. Guess what? How is it possible that the Conservatives want to hand even more unchecked power to Metrolinx?

Mr. Chris Glover: They need more vice-presidents.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: They need more VPs, exactly.

Come on. You're going to have Metrolinx be exempt from the building code? In what world is this? Is it because Metrolinx has such an exemplary record? I think not. Because what I have here is a series of recent articles that talk about Metrolinx's operation, and it is stuff that would really make the hair on the back of your head stand up, because we have, in fact, a whole series of reports here that are not public, that had been leaked, including that the GO train fleet is in dire condition. In fact, there are warnings that the situation could get much worse at Metrolinx. There was a near miss that was unreported; it's only known because of a leaked report. The minister defends the safety record, but another leaked report showed that a GO train near Oakville was seconds away from a high-speed, worst-case scenario after it blew through a stop signal in January.

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Why don't we know this? Why is this not accountable? Why are there not measures to make sure that Metrolinx needs to report through the government to this Legislature when there was a practical near miss where, more than likely, it would have resulted in a fatal collision? But no: Metrolinx, for some reason, is shielded from scrutiny and from accountability. But this is the organization that you want to exempt from the building code? It makes absolutely no sense.

And so I will just say that our leader, Marit Stiles, has written to the Auditor General because enough is enough. She now has—many, many times—called for a public inquiry into the conduct and the operation of Metrolinx. She now has written to the Auditor General asking for a value-for-money audit of Metrolinx and specifically its planning and delivery of infrastructure, safety oversight of the agency's board and the accuracy and adequacy of Metrolinx's public communications concerning its performance.

So if a near derailment is not enough to make sure that Metrolinx needs to be held under scrutiny, our leader, Marit Stiles, the leader of the official opposition, is calling

for transparency. She has called for a public inquiry; now she's asking the Auditor General to probe their operations.

Again, the devil is in the details. Why is the government exempting Metrolinx from this Building Code Act? We heard from the member from Humber River–Black Creek that Metrolinx collapsed a basement and flooded a neighbour's home and that they're denying claims and they're denying accountability. So why would this be the organization that you want to exempt from any kind of oversight? What aspects of the municipal building system does the government believe are so insignificant that Metrolinx can bypass it when demolishing buildings or constructing something?

And really, I have to say: Why should people trust Metrolinx with this power when it has kept secrets from the public? Every project has been a cost overrun, not on time. So why would we trust this organization when they've covered up so many problems, including now, we're hearing, a near head-on collision?

I have to say to the government: People don't really trust this government, especially now with your efforts to hide all of your records back to 1988; no freedom of information for the people of Ontario. So, hand in glove, Metrolinx and this government—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I'll offer another open-ended question to the member who just spoke. Schedule 9 of the act says the following: "The shareholders of a water and waste water public corporation shall not sell or transfer the shares of the corporation except to a municipality, the province of Ontario, the government of Canada, or an agent" thereof.

I just ask the open-ended question to the member and invite her to comment on that phrase.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Well, as we've heard in this House many times, and it's quite obvious, the safe operation of our source water, our drinking water, is critical.

We on this side of the House expressed serious concerns when it appeared that this government was considering privatizing the oversight of waste water and drinking water in the province under the Safe Drinking Water Act. It wouldn't be the first time this government has privatized something that isn't nailed down.

I think the fact that the government has now come clear, I will say that that is because of water advocates. It's because of folks like us. It's because of the people, the unions that operate those systems, made clear that this is a line you are not going to cross.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you to the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

I was very interested but also very disturbed to hear that there's a case of trying to get permission for a developer to build on the greenbelt.

I just looked at the history of the greenbelt a little bit. In 2021, the Premier said, "No, I'm not going to build on

the greenbelt.” But before that, there was a video of him saying yes to his developer friends: “Yes, we’re going to build on the greenbelt.” Then it was introduced, and you know what? We spent almost a year of time in this Legislature dealing with the greenbelt, and then it was ultimately pulled back.

At the time, the developers were expected to get an over \$8-billion windfall. We thought, “Gosh, what’s going to happen to the Premier if those people don’t get their money?”, because they’re expecting the money.

So I’m asking myself if you see a pattern between the sell-off of public school lands by this government and the amalgamation of conservation areas so that the government can sell off prime land to developers. Is this a pattern?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: “Fool me once, shame on me.” That’s what the people of the province of Ontario are saying. This government has a reputation for selling anything they want out the back door to their connected insiders and friends. Greenbelt—they got caught with their hand in the cookie jar.

You think that these big, powerful folks that have invested big time in this government are going away quiet? I don’t think so. So the government has learned that maybe we should do this in small ways, in incremental ways, in ways that maybe will fly under the radar.

People are saying, “The takeover of school boards in the city of Toronto—is that all about real estate? Is that a way of selling off what is deemed surplus property in these downtown cores? Is that another way for people to get their hands on good property?” Who knows? I wouldn’t put it past this government.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and boy, oh boy, is it wonderful to see you in that chair.

I have a question for the member from Hamilton—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas. Shoot, I’d better memorize that.

Do you feel that this government’s decision to remove the requirement for the green development standards for building our future housing is a smart move? Also, do you feel that green development standards delay housing starts?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I would say that the government has not provided the evidence of how this is delaying housing or the cost associated with this.

As we see now, with the price of gas through the roof, the demand for EVs is on the increase. Had the government done what they did originally and put that in the building standards, we would have homes now that had EV chargers.

I drive a fully electric EV. It is difficult to find a charger outside of your home. But that is what people want, and I would argue that good developers understand that if they

build homes with that kind of amenity, people will want to buy it.

So I can’t help but believe it, given the lack of evidence as to how much this is going to cost on a home and what the delay will be—because you just add your charger to your already-200-amp service. There’s no big whoop; I’ve done it myself. I just can’t help but believe that this isn’t an ideological opposition to anything green that this government seems to have.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you to the member opposite.

What we’re proposing is not about eliminating environmental standards. Environmental protection, energy efficiency and sustainable development will continue to be supported through the Ontario Building Code and other provincial environmental regulations. What we’re doing is ensuring standards are consistent. We want to make these goals achievable and predictable across the province so that housing projects are not delayed or made expensive by patchwork and different local environment.

Will the member support this legislation that will bring the dream of home ownership to so many?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: That was a big leap in this question. I honestly have to say that I have some empathy for the Minister of Housing and those that work in that ministry because I think that they are diligently working at solving this problem. I genuinely will give you the benefit of the doubt that you’re trying to do that. But then somebody—maybe the Premier—comes and big-foots all of your work because of some other interest that has nothing to do with building housing.

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And so what I want to say to you is, show us the evidence that you’re going to have a streamlined standard that is the highest standard, not the lowest. Open this up to the bill. Don’t do this in regulation, behind closed doors, so that you can hear from EV advocates, you can hear from engineers, you can hear from builders about how this standard can enhance what we’re trying to do here in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

This is the sixth bill that this government has introduced that has something to do in the title with “building homes faster.” And they have downloaded billions of dollars, \$5 billion of donations from municipal taxpayers to developers to build homes faster. They’ve gutted environmental regulations. They’ve gutted the conservation act. They’ve handed billions of dollars of land to the developers. They’ve removed greenbelt protections. And yet the result of all this is that they have the lowest number of housing starts per capita of any province in the country.

How is this government such a failure at building the housing we need, and what would an NDP government do to build housing?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I would only point to the fact that this government had their own blue-ribbon task force on housing, and I think they ignored every recommendation put forward. In fact, the housing plan in BC is basically what that blue-ribbon panel proposed, and BC is on fire. They are eating your lunch when it comes to building homes that people need and people can afford in that province.

So at what point do you say it ain't working? Like, it just isn't working. And they've had every excuse under the sun: "Give us more time," "The dog ate my homework" or "The alarm didn't go off"—all of the excuses in the world.

In the meantime, kids are living in parents' basements, people are living under bridges in the province. People are delaying the start of their family; they're having struggles to launch their careers, because they can't have the most fundamental thing that a government is supposed to be helping to provide, which is a stable home to live in.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Further debate? I recognize the member for Orléans.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker—

Interjections.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I appreciate the thunderous applause from my colleagues; I'm not sure it will happen at the end.

I want to specifically touch on schedule 4 of the bill, the so-called Fare Alignment and Seamless Transit Act. Let me say this very clearly: I am not opposed to the One Fare. If you live in Toronto or the GTA and you transfer from GO to the TTC or from Mississauga to Toronto, you should not have to pay twice. That makes a lot of sense. That's how we help encourage transit ridership.

But what does not make sense is asking the people of Ottawa to pay for it while getting absolutely nothing in return, and that's exactly what this Conservative government is doing. The people of Ottawa pay provincial taxes just like everyone else. They pay sales tax. They pay gas tax. They pay the income tax Premier Ford has promised to cut but hasn't. Ottawa residents help fund the One Fare program through all of the record taxes the government has collected from them, and yet they don't benefit from the program. We help subsidize cheaper transit in Toronto, in Mississauga, in York region and in Brampton. But when it comes to Ottawa, the answer from this government is, "I'm sorry, you're on your own." In the GTA, the province says transit riders should not have to pay two fares. In Ottawa, the province says, "Please pay more."

In 2022, an adult OC Transpo fare was \$3.70 and an adult monthly pass was \$125.50. Today, the same ride costs \$4.10, an increase of about 11%, and the cost of a monthly pass is now up to \$138.50, an increase of 10.5%. It's more than inflation. It's more than wage growth. It's more than many families can afford, Madam Speaker.

And what are Ottawa residents getting for it? Fewer buses, more delays, more overcrowding. This year alone, Ottawa's transit system has become so unreliable that the city has had to pull most of the O-Train fleet out of service

for weeks. In February, 61 of the city's 81 Line 1 cars were sidelined because of ongoing problems. OC Transpo has admitted it did not have enough working trains to meet rush-hour demand. That is not seamless transit, Madam Speaker.

Ottawa residents have paid more and received less. They paid more and were told to squeeze on to crowded platforms. They paid more and were told to take an R1 bus instead of the train. They paid more and were told to leave earlier, wait longer and hope the system worked—this time. Speaker, imagine paying more than 10% extra for a service that regularly disappears. This is, of course, the system the Premier promised to upload to provincial taxpayers. Is there anything in this bill? No. Is there anything in the budget about it? No. Any public insights into progress? No.

While all that is going on, we now learn that the washrooms on the O-Train line are closed. The washrooms at O-Train stations have been closed for months because of vandalism, drug use and safety concerns. Yet, at the same time, the city of Ottawa is spending nearly \$1 million to build a new public washroom downtown. So if the city cannot keep the washrooms open in a secure transit station with cameras and staff and fare gates, how exactly does it plan to keep a million-dollar public washroom open in an area of the city struggling with addiction and public drug use? How is it we cannot afford washrooms staying open for commuters who are trying to get to work, but somehow, the city can afford to build new ones somewhere else? Somehow, the province won't help Ottawa Transit. They don't have a transit strategy because it is a failure of their priorities.

Speaker, here is where it becomes even more frustrating. For months, Mayor Sutcliffe and Premier Ford have stood shoulder to shoulder, telling public servants to get back to the office. They tell people in Orléans, in Barrhaven, in Kanata: "Get back downtown." They say, "The city needs you. Businesses need you." But whose businesses? Because they ignore the coffee shops, the restaurants and the small businesses in Orléans, Barrhaven and Kanata that benefit when people work closer to home. They prioritize downtown businesses over the suburban small business owner trying to get by.

If Premier Ford and Mayor Sutcliffe are going to insist that people return downtown, they have an obligation to make sure they can get there safely, seamlessly. How is the public servant in Orléans supposed to reliably get downtown when the train may not run? When 61 of 81 trains are out of service? When Line 1 is shut down? When the answer every second week is, "Take the alternative route?" Sutcliffe and Ford are demanding reliability from workers while tolerating unreliability from the transit system.

That is a contradiction at the heart of this Conservative government. They want Ottawa residents to pay more for transit, they want them to wait longer for it and then they want them to be grateful when the transit arrives at all. For Ottawa riders, there is nothing seamless about paying more

for a train that may not run, a bus that may not come and a system that keeps asking for more while delivering less.

Meanwhile, this government is spending hundreds of millions of dollars to reduce fares in the GTA. If this government wants to talk about seamless transit, then let us have that in Ottawa, too—not special treatment, equal

treatment—because right now, Ottawa residents are paying twice. They pay once at the OC Transpo fare gate and they pay again through their taxes only to subsidize transit riders in the GTA.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

Report continues in volume B.

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Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
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Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
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Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
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Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	Deputy Speaker / Vice-Présidente Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
Watt, Tyler (LIB)	Nepean	
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Vacant	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough- Sud-Ouest	