

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

No. 60

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

N° 60

1st Session
44th Parliament

Monday
13 April 2026

1^{re} session
44^e législature

Lundi
13 avril 2026

Speaker: Honourable Donna Skelly
Clerk: Trevor Day

Présidente : L'honorable Donna Skelly
Greffier : Trevor Day

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

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

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 13 April 2026

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 13 avril 2026

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): And now a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

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

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 1, 2026, on the motion for 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): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's always an honour to get up and rise in this House, especially when we have the opportunity to debate the housing crisis, which is the number one crisis facing families in this province and driving the affordability crisis that so many people are facing as they have this impossible choice of paying the rent, paying the mortgage, and putting food on the table.

Bill 98 is a bill that makes some important changes around the edges that in some respects can be positive, and I'm going to talk about that, but it also makes some changes that are going to set us back and make life less affordable for people, and that in some respects just don't quite meet the moment—the bold moment that we need to address this housing crisis. To put this in context: Right now, housing starts in Ontario are at historic lows. Housing prices are at historic highs. There is no city in Ontario where a full-time minimum wage worker can afford average monthly rent. And, tragically, over 85,000 people in this province do not have a place to sleep tonight and are experiencing homelessness. So we need bold, ambitious, pragmatic actions to solve this crisis.

There are some things in this bill that will move us forward. The changes to lot sizes and making them smaller is a good thing, something we've been advocating for. It

makes a lot of sense. We utilize land more efficiently, which makes homes more affordable and makes opportunities for municipalities to service housing more affordable. We know how expensive low-density sprawl is. If you look at most of the housing record of this particular government over the last eight years, it has been about, "How do we incentivize low-density sprawl to benefit a handful of wealthy, well-connected land speculators to cash in billions and billions of dollars at the expense of homes that everyday people can afford?" So moving forward on changes to lot sizes is a good thing.

Clarifying the rules around site planning is a good thing. I can't tell you how many builders talk to me about the fact that one of the things that's slowing down quickly increasing the supply of new housing is challenges around site planning. I want to say, if we can fix that, if we can make it more efficient and speed it up, I'm all for it. It's going to help builders move faster, quicker, which is going to help them save money.

The changes to development charges, something the Ontario Greens have been pushing for over and over again: It's finally great to see the federal and provincial governments working together to do this in a way that makes municipalities whole. We can't transfer the cost of new home building off of new home owners and put it on the backs of existing property tax payers who are struggling right now with these Ford-government-inspired property tax increases you're seeing in municipalities across the province. They simply can't afford to do more. But I will say the government's rules around development charges should be done in a way that doesn't incentivize low-density sprawl development, which is actually going to put more costs on the back of municipalities. It costs 2.5 times more to service low-density sprawl than to service homes built within existing urban boundaries, where—many planners have shown quite clearly, we already have enough land within existing urban boundaries to build over two million homes in Ontario. This government is not even going to get close to their goal of 1.5 million, but we have enough land already approved. We should restrict the development charge changes to homes built within existing urban boundaries. That way, we don't incur additional costs on municipalities for additional infrastructure because the infrastructure is already in place within most existing urban boundaries. It will save taxpayers tremendous amounts of money, it will lower the cost of new home construction, and it will help us speed up construction. So let's do development charge changes. Let's do it in the right way to save people and municipalities money.

Let's get into some difficult changes in this bill. Removing the requirement for green development standards: Taking that away from municipalities and making it a volunteer instead of a mandatory standard is going to set Ontario back. It means we're going to build less energy-efficient homes, which are cheaper to operate. So at a time when we're seeing gas prices go through the roof, at a time when so many families are struggling to figure out how to buy groceries, heat and cool their homes, pay the rent, pay the mortgage, this government is going to make policies that will help lower operating costs, help people save money by saving energy—they're going to get rid of.

The other thing that's going to happen is, there are going to be other unintended consequences. FLAP Canada did a fantastic event on the weekend that I attended, that shows how many birds die by hitting building windows. Green building standards in Toronto prevent that from happening by having mandatory bird-friendly glass in those windows. Those are standards that are being internationally recognized. There was a company there—bird friendlier—who talked about how they are getting work all across the world, creating good jobs right here in Ontario, based on the standards that exist around bird-friendly windows, and now Ontario is going to get rid of those. The rest of the world is saying, "You guys are doing great things in Ontario. We're going to do this." And this government wants to get rid of it, and it's going to increase the number of birds we lose. I think that's wrong. It's wrong for nature, and it's wrong for our quality of life, especially when simple, low-cost solutions exist that actually—Ontario companies are innovating and moving forward, benefiting our economy at the same time.

The second thing is, the provisions around removing EV charger mandates for parking lots and new home construction is also going to set back affordability for people. There was a recent study done—and it particularly pertains to me because I drive a Chevy Equinox EV. If you look at the cost of a gas-powered Chevy Equinox versus an electric vehicle Chevy Equinox, the electric vehicle will save the average owner over \$22,000 during the course of the lifetime of that vehicle. But the challenge increasingly is, where do you charge those vehicles? The number of EVs on the road are exceeding the charging capacity of this province. We've had a government—and I complimented the government for this—spending billions and billions of dollars to incentivize electric vehicle manufacturing in the province of Ontario. That is critically important to the future of our economy. It's critically important to creating jobs. But who is going to buy those vehicles? They've taken the rebates away. Now they're taking the charging mandates away.

0910

I can tell you, I've been driving all electric for almost eight years now. I used to easily get access to chargers wherever I went.

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you for that.

I'm saving lots of money. I'm just telling you guys, you fiscal conservatives over there, you should be driving EVs

to save money. It's good for the environment too, by the way. But it's increasingly becoming difficult to access a charger. I can't tell you how many times I go to charge my electric vehicle and all the chargers are full because so many people like me want to take advantage of the lower cost of operating an electric vehicle, and they know it's going to make our climate better. If we don't have chargers for them, then it's going to create a disincentive for people taking advantage of that.

Yet this government is removing the mandates around having chargers in place. That not only hurts electric vehicle drivers and the environment and everything else, but it actually hurts the investment this government has made in building an EV manufacturing sector.

So you only have half a strategy. If we're going to truly take advantage of the generational jobs in electric vehicle manufacturing, we need to ensure that people have a place to charge and they can afford those electric vehicles.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you to the to the member for Guelph.

I just want to bring your attention to Metrolinx. This government has given Metrolinx more unchecked power, and they've exempted them from having to apply for building permits. We know that Metrolinx is awash in VPs—they have 124 VPs, one VP for every MPP in the province—and they have now a really disturbing pattern of safety problems. Our leader, Marit Stiles, has asked the Auditor General to investigate. There is a report that was revealed by the Toronto Star that there was a near derailment, a near miss in Metrolinx, and it was only revealed by investigation. This is an organization that's awash in VPs. They are not transparent. They don't bring anything on budget, on time. Now they have safety concerns.

Why in heaven's name would this government give this organization more unfettered power when we need someone to be on top of this organization that costs us so much in terms of taxpayers and puts people's lives at risk?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question.

Yes, Metrolinx needs a complete overhaul. It is so top-heavy. So much money is being wasted on all these vice-president positions, and yet transit is not being delivered on budget and is not being delivered on time.

As a matter of fact, we've been waiting for all-day, two-way GO on the Guelph-Kitchener line, it feels like forever now. I was told back in 2014 it was going to happen within a few years. It's now 2026, and Metrolinx just announced another delay in it happening.

So I think this whole organization needs a complete overhaul. To give it more power, especially unaccountable power, and especially when the government is taking away freedom-of-information request opportunities—I am deeply concerned about what's going to happen here, and I share the member's concerns with the question.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you to the member for Guelph. I love to talk about EVs. I also drive an EV. I know you know we've had those discussions before, for years now.

When this government took power eight years ago, one of the first things that they did was cancel all green projects and rip out EV charger stations. Because of that, we have a challenge today in finding those chargers when we travel.

Now that the government has seen a financial benefit to encouraging EVs because of the battery business, they're encouraging people to drive EVs, without providing more charging stations.

I've been to Guelph, actually, in the last few months, a number of times, and there was no way I could charge my car in Guelph. So you've got to do something about this, Mike.

What would you recommend the government do to be consistent with its encouragement to produce more EVs— to make it accessible to everyone in Ontario?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question.

I've got to say, as the MPP for Guelph, we do have to do better on high-speed chargers. We have the automotive dealership in Canada that has the largest per capita sales of electric vehicles—it's where I bought my electric vehicle—and yet we only have three high-speed chargers in the entire city of 150,000 people. It's a big issue, 100%.

Do you know what? Here's what people tell me all the time: We need to have mandates in place—that when new homes are being built, especially in multi-residential buildings, they at the very least need to rough in charging infrastructure, because it will be way cheaper than to put those chargers in later, when there is more demand for chargers. But as the member just noted, there is already sufficient demand. We do not have enough chargers in Ontario now. Five years ago, we had enough; today, we don't. The government removing these mandates is only going to make it worse.

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

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thank you to my colleagues from the Green Party and the Liberals. I note that they both drive electric vehicles—my colleague from Guelph, for the last eight years.

I drive a 2010 Honda Accord. It's a great car, a V6 engine—sorry to my colleague across—270 horsepower. It's a great vehicle.

I'm just wondering—because the member from the Liberals talked about more chargers being available under the previous government than today—can my colleague across confirm, are there more chargers under the PC government of today or the Liberal government of yesterday?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the question. And by the way, congratulations. I know you had a personal milestone last week, and I think we all want to congratulate you.

Interjections.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I will just say that there are not enough EV chargers given the number of EVs on the road. If we're going to incentivize EV manufacturing, we have to have enough chargers.

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I am so happy to stand today and talk about the future of Ontario and to talk, specifically, about Bill 98, Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act.

I want to speak for a minute and set the stage as to why I really want to congratulate the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the associate minister—the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka—and everyone in our caucus who believes that now is the time to be bold and visionary. Now is the time when we're staring down the barrel of a gun—it's not only the threat of US tariffs and what they're doing to our economy; it's seeing them actually here and knowing that in Ontario and in Canada we have used this time judiciously to reinvent ourselves and to understand that in our province there's nothing we can't do, there's nothing we can't achieve.

As I've said before, I am proud that in this province of Ontario, we all have an equal place to belong, to contribute and to succeed. I'm really proud of that.

I can't help but say, when I've had the privilege for almost four years of serving as the Solicitor General, the minister responsible for public safety in our province, and seeing our first responders first-hand in their place of work, at graduations, in our correctional facilities, in our police stations, in our fire halls—I've seen the animal welfare inspectors in action. I've gone to the coroner's office. I've been to the Centre of Forensic Sciences. At each opportunity, I realized these are people who wanted to come forward to make a difference to our public safety. But these are real people too, who want to have the ability of home ownership, just like we all want.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has said many times that one of the problems facing us is that it takes too long and it costs too much. If we remember that line that he has made many times—"It takes too long, and it costs too much." It's because, left unchecked, the way that things have progressed for decades—the bureaucracy to get a building permit, the wanting of a person to build a home or a series of homes, an understanding that they don't have the municipal services to do it.

0920

And what we want to do, including in Bill 98, that I think is a great component, is bring in this communal water concept—also allowing that the service corporations will have a role to play, because we have to continue to expand the services to bring more houses online.

Bill 98 showcases the importance of our homes and the role that a home plays in a person's life.

I was lucky, although the economics looked different in the 1990s, just before I got married—and many members of this Legislature will tell the story of when they finally, in their day, had enough courage to move out of their parents' home. This was a big step—moving out of your

parents' home and understanding what would be the first place that you would occupy. Some would rent an apartment. Some would put a down payment on a condo. Some would even go further and put a down payment on a house. When you go back to the 1970s and 1980s and 1990s—and for people in this Legislature, that's our generation. We knew what it was like to take that first step.

I want to go back even further, to the time when my grandparents had an opportunity to not only build but buy their first home. That is something that we have to go back to the 1930s and 1940s for. The 1930s were the Depression era. People didn't have a dollar. What people would do is work two or three jobs—maybe similar, actually, to today—and they would find a way of finding a few dollars and making a deposit.

My dad, Max, who will be 95 in a few months, reminded me that when he was a baby, born in Toronto in 1931, his family moved five or six times—interestingly, all around the corner to where we are, to Huron Street, to D'Arcy Street, to Wells Street and other streets. Along the way, what he told me about my grandparents the late Sam and Sarah Kerzner was that they would rent out rooms in their home so that the family would be able to fulfill a dream of owning a home. Gradually, as they worked even harder, they were able to occupy a home—a single home. People know that in the area around where we are, the homes are small. They had seven kids, but they made it work.

Along the way, in the 1940s and 1950s—and in the 1960s, when my parents, Max and Dolly Kerzner, got married, they aspired, after getting married, to own a home. They went up to Bayview and York Mills, which was probably—and people might remember that period of the Windfields Farm. This was E.P. Taylor's area that he was developing. He was selling homes—again, by relative standards; they were relative to the days. Whether you could buy a home for \$20,000 or \$30,000 and get a mortgage for 4% or 5% in the early 1960s, people made it work. They worked hard, and they paid off the mortgage monthly. They tried to raise a family and to be part of a community, growing Toronto in the 1960s, of which I was a part. I was lucky to grow up in the area of Bayview and York Mills, which was a new subdivision at that time. I really benefited from the parks and the schools that were being built and the infrastructure that the government, led by Premier William Davis—wow, if there was one person other than our Premier, the Honourable Doug Ford, who I most aspire to be like, it would be Premier Davis, followed by Premier Mike Harris, because they believed in our province. *Parce que nous croyons en notre province et en notre avenir, et ensemble, nous bâtissons l'Ontario.* We say it because we have to believe in our province. And we know when we build our province together, we'll leave something for the next generation.

Bill 98 is important because we acknowledge a number of things—that things have changed from the 1930s, 1940s and the 1960s.

The 1930s and 1940s—when my grandparents placed their first deposit. And on my mom's side of the family—

and I've spoken about my late grandfather Murray Penwick, who bought a home, firstly, on Cherrywood Avenue in the Vaughan-St. Clair area. He, as a pharmacist, put a deposit down on a little store at the end of the street and had his first pharmacy. Those were different times.

What we have learned now, in 2026—and I'll repeat it again: It takes too long and it costs too much to build a home in Ontario. The problem is completely undeniable.

I've had a chance to speak to people who are building homes—and firstly, I want to acknowledge the great work that our incredible Minister of Finance has done by removing the HST on new homes. If you read the *Globe and Mail* just today, it was quite interesting but not surprising that since the government of Ontario, led by Premier Ford, made this incredible announcement, the phones are ringing again. People are calling developers and they're coming forward and saying, "This is our chance to get into the home ownership opportunity."

In 1996, when my wife and I were getting married and we put a deposit on a home in Bathurst Manor, in the riding of York Centre that I live in today—we never moved out. I'm so proud that my wife and I were able to not only say at the ballot box twice, "We live in the riding," but—we're so proud of it. When we had an opportunity to make a deposit on a home, we were scared. We didn't know how the future would fare. We didn't know what the value of a home would be. We were fortunate a few years later, after we had three kids, we realized—like many families, you outgrow a home. You want to make sure that the priority is always for our children—that they should be close to a school, if possible; that they should be close to a park.

I remember my father—when it came time to buy our first home, he said, "These are things that are important. You have to have a backyard for the kids to play. You have to live on a side of a street that allows kids to play when they get older—road hockey, kick the soccer ball around where it's safe."

Home ownership was important then, and it's very important today. And one of the reasons why I think we have turned the corner in terms of encouraging people to take that first step is because we laid the foundation to make sure that protecting Ontario means protecting us.

As I've said before—public safety perspective, yes. As Solicitor General, I'm very passionate about it.

From a health care perspective, I was at our incredible Humber River Hospital, where we welcomed, last Friday—the Minister of Health and the Premier and my colleague from Humber River–Black Creek across the aisle—a visionary donation of \$50 million from Jay and Barbara Hennick and their family, who believe in our visionary approach to our province.

When we look at housing, one of the things that we want to do is standardize, as an example, and simplify the official plan. We want to standardize it across the province so people know what they're getting. We want to standardize the fact that, as we know—and I was in that business for a long time with my father and my uncle. We were small builders, and we took after my late grandfather, who

may have claimed the fame that he built the first angular carport in the 1950s. If somebody lives in a home from 1950 and you see the angular carport—the reason I used to say, “Why didn’t you build a garage?” They said, “It was too expensive. We wanted to pass the savings on to a person in the Victoria Park and Sheppard area”—the area we call today Wishing Well. In that area, my grandfather built a few homes. What we want to do is make it simple where it became cumbersome. The conversation of standardizing the process of one obtaining a building permit in a period of time that allows somebody to get the job done—“It costs too much, and it takes too long.” We have to remember those words from the Minister of Housing and the associate minister, my friend from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

0930

We want to move forward, and we want to be bolder. We want to move forward with our plan for the municipal service corporations to help municipalities finance critical infrastructure, getting key waste water facilities in place. It’s a model that has to evolve.

This whole concept, by the way, of municipal service corporations is to work with pension funds and other funds that taxpayers are part of, because these funds should help build Ontario.

When we read the statements of pension funds across Canada—I remind them all the time that Ontario is a great place to invest, because when you invest, you’re helping your members every single day. And this is something I’m very, very proud of.

We want to make sure that we don’t leave anybody behind.

We want to make sure that we’re there for our seniors. That’s why, when we look at the record of building long-term-care homes, our government has already—through Bill 17, the building faster and smarter act—exempted long-term-care homes from development charges. When I came to this place almost four years ago in the class of 2022, I was amazed by the opportunity that we had in front of us. Whether it be things that I learned along the way, both as the MPP from York Centre but also as Solicitor General—I understood that we had limitless potential. We had nothing but opportunity to be bold. Yes, we knew we were not going to get the problem solved on day one. But all of us will tell a story of our seniors, some being our own parents—or my friend from Niagara West, perhaps his grandparents, or others who have grandparents alive. We want to make sure that we don’t forget our seniors. That’s why exempting the long-term-care homes from development charges will make a difference.

We want to bring the cost of housing down in Ontario. One of the ways we do it, as the Premier has said, is to lay the groundwork, lay the foundation for people to invest.

There is no doubt that the times we find ourselves in are scary for everyone in Canada. Now is the time to unite. Now is the time for governments of different levels, federal and municipal, to work together. And I’m very proud that our government, led by Premier Ford, is continuing to work day and night with the municipal

governments of Ontario and our federal government. Nobody has an exclusive for patriotism and loving our country more than one to another.

Go back to the anthem. I’ve said it in this chamber before—what does it mean, in the second stanza: “True patriot love in all of us command”? Again, what are we commanded to do? We’re commanded to love our province, to take care of everyone who lives here, to be responsible to the taxpayers who are allowing governments to exist, to understand that the role of the government is to make sure that we lay the seeds for people to invest.

We know, as the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade has shown us, there’s a multiplier effect by every investment, whether you’re in the southern part of Ontario or—today, I spoke to friends in Kapuskasing. And I want to thank the people, especially up north.

Madam Speaker, it’s easy to say that you represent an urban riding in Toronto—and it’s true, it’s easy to say it, simply because the size of our ridings relative to rural ridings is much smaller.

Yes, I’m fortunate—on a nice summer’s day, as I do in the summer, I walk weekly the four corners of our riding. I can see people gardening. I can see people in their backyard. I can see families whose kids are growing up right in front of me. I can see people who want to have a dream fulfilled.

In my own family, where I’m blessed to have three children, Seth, Aaron and Shaina, I want one day for them to have everything that my father and mother were able to give to me and my brothers.

This concept of home ownership shouldn’t just be a dream that skips a generation. No. That will never be acceptable for our government, led by the Premier. We’re not going to let that happen.

We’re going to continue to evolve. We’re going to continue to make sure that this concept of being visionaries, of imagining things that we could solve, imagining ways of getting things done quicker and making sure that this moniker, which we must one day—and we say it’s undeniable; we can’t let that define us. It costs too much, and it takes too long—I’m saying it differently.

This bill that we’ve had the privilege of speaking to today is another example of a government that is not afraid to be bold. Bill 98 helps move the needle.

I’ll go back to where I started. I’ve had the honour of a lifetime to meet thousands of our people who proudly wear uniforms and keep us safe. They raise their families. Their kids play in the park. Their spouses go to work. At the end of the day, they shop. At the end of the day, they want to have a place to worship. It all revolves around the concept of home ownership.

Our government’s responsibility is to be bold when others tell us to be quiet. We will stand up. We will never stop in believing in our province and in our future, parce que nous croyons en notre province et notre avenir. Et madame la Présidente, ensemble, nous bâtissons l’Ontario.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the member opposite.

I would like your opinion on schedule 4. Schedule 4, the Fare Alignment and Seamless Transit Act, allows the minister to set the TTC, Toronto's, fare structure. It also allows the government to take money from the TTC and give it to other transit agencies, which could mean that Toronto will be subsidizing York's and Peel's transit agencies instead of keeping that money within Toronto.

My question to the minister is, is this government looking at increasing fares on the TTC?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to say proudly that the Amalgamated Transit Union is located in York Centre. I have a great relationship—and I want to shout out to Marvin Alfred, who is its president. I speak to President Marvin Alfred on a regular basis. We spoke about this, actually—what the member just referred to—and I said to Marvin Alfred, as part of his leadership at the ATU, that we're going to speak to stakeholders. The Minister of Transportation said that. And we're going to make sure that we will always stand with everyone, not only to keep us safe, but to provide the motion for us to go to work every day on our transit.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the Solicitor General's remarks.

Also, you talked about your support for first responders. I want to thank you for the many visits you make to my riding to support both police and fire services in Guelph.

The member talked about the need to standardize things across the province with a building code review. The housing affordability task force, which I admit issued its report prior to the member's election in 2022, said two of the most important standardized changes that could be made to incentivize building more homes that people can afford is to legalize fourplexes and mid-rises as-of-right across the province of Ontario. Would the member agree with the government's own housing task force that that would be a bold step forward in building homes people can afford in communities they know and love?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to say to the member from Guelph how much I appreciate his support of his local fire service and his police service. I really appreciate it very much.

0940

At the end of the day, it goes back to what the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has said: If we have to address something that's undeniable, that it costs too much and it takes too long, we have to be bold. I hope to say that we have to continue to evolve.

Bill 98 before us today takes that first step. The member from Guelph has said in this House many times suggestions that we debate, and this is something that—we're not going to leave any stone unturned. We're going to continue to be bold, and we're going to continue to be visionary.

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

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Speaker, my honourable colleague across mentioned a number of communities that have been built up over the years, that actually surround my own riding.

As a younger person today, in my own riding, where I have been born and raised, the dream of home ownership unfortunately has become just that—a dream—for many people.

When you speak to housing experts, the experts will tell you that in order to get people to that dream of home ownership, not only do we need a government that is making the rules easier; we also need to support the entire housing spectrum, because it's a continuum. There's not just one point that we need to focus on.

The government itself committed to 1.5 million homes about eight years ago—a number that this government now refuses to even speak about, and for understandable reasons.

What do you plan to do to support the entire spectrum of housing to make sure that this dream of home ownership is able to be alive still today?

L'hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Je voudrais remercier mon collègue pour cette question pertinente.

At the end of the day, we have to make sure that if we set a goal to build a large number of homes, we get that thing done. But we had a few things that happened in the way—we had a pandemic; now we have the undeniable threats of tariffs.

We have to make sure, as an example, that by removing the HST, that we did as part of the Minister of Finance's budget, on new homes—that has encouraged people. I'd ask my friend opposite—check with your builders there to see whether their phones are now ringing.

But this undeniable burdensome permitting that takes forever, the development charges in Toronto that are ridiculous, and the fact that to get any permit issued in the city of Toronto you'll wait till you become a grandfather—we have to move past that.

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to the Solicitor General for his great remarks. He actually touched on the subject I was going to ask about this morning; it was around development charges.

I know in Bill 60 and Bill 17—earlier in this Parliament, last fall, we've tabled and this assembly has passed those bills. The work around development charges, making sure people understand what is included in those development charges, working with our municipal partners to get a greater understanding of that—it should go to infrastructure. It should go to pipes in the ground. Unfortunately, in some municipalities, that doesn't go to those infrastructure investments, and it goes to general reserves and sits there.

I was wondering if the Solicitor General can talk about how this bill before this place further builds on that important work on improving transparency around

development charges and what's included in those, so we can continue to cut taxes on homes and get more homes built.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to thank my great friend from Perth–Wellington. I know, as a new father, he's waiting, one day, to figure out a plan—that his newborn baby will move out of his home—with his wife, Meghan, but not today.

The reality is, it's so obvious: What this bill tells us is, whether we're looking to cut red tape—and we have a great Minister of Red Tape Reduction, our member from Barrie–Innisfil. If we're looking at ways of making it clearer and more transparent to a developer, knowing that there will be certainty to get a permit, understanding where the development charges are going—but at the end of the day, most people don't understand.

And the member is 100% right; the development charges have sat in a private bank account—that didn't go to what they should have gone to, to build the infrastructure. That's why we're changing that.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member for his comments.

This government has the worst housing record of any province in the country. So I've got a suggestion for you.

The Ontario Line runs through my riding. There are a number of stations. The government owns the property over the stations. They're going to be building housing there. Why aren't you going to mandate that 30% of that housing be affordable housing? In the city of Toronto, Mayor Olivia Chow is doing that. She's converting parking lots—she's giving parking lots to developers in exchange for 30% of the units that are built to be affordable housing. Why don't you do that with the Ontario Line stations?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to thank my colleague opposite.

At the end of the day, homes need to be affordable. What's driving the inflationary cost of homes? It's the development charges. It's the fact that, especially in the last few years, people have been demotivated to want to build anything. As the Minister of Housing said—and we talked about it—it costs too much, and it takes too long.

This bill goes forward—but specifically, what the member says is that we need to have more affordable rental housing units.

We know—and the minister has said this—that the interesting thing that we've seen in recent days, in recent months, is that developers now will build rental housing. It's the marketplace that's driving the cost down, which is important.

Rental home prices need to reflect the better economics—of making sure that they are affordable. One way we do that is, get rid of some of the onerous development charges that are preventing people from owning a home.

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

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I just want to follow up with the minister, as he asked me if my phone is ringing off the hook from developers. No, it's ringing off the hook from my constituents who can't afford a home, because that's who I speak to every day.

I'm concerned about hearing from the minister the constant repetition of how this supports developers.

If he wants to help get houses built in my riding, will he commit to build the Sheppard extension?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: The member opposite knows I'm 100% in favour of seeing the Sheppard extension join from where my riding is to his riding. So 100%, yes; I want to see that get done.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Happy Monday morning.

There are a number of things to talk about in this bill, and I know my colleagues have addressed them earlier. There are some real causes for concern around the attacks on green development standards. And there is a very strange exemption for Metrolinx from provisions of the building code. Given the difficulties we've had with Metrolinx in my riding, the idea that they're no longer going to be covered by the building code is a pretty odd thought. I will be curious to hear how the government justifies that.

There are a number of concerns here around housing affordability.

This bill does not legalize missing-middle housing options—as-of-right—in all neighbourhoods. If you're concerned about making low-cost housing available quickly across Ontario, this would help tremendously. I'll note, recently, I believe it was the mayor of Markham who used his strong-mayor powers to block this kind of housing—so no thanks to the government in making it more difficult for people to find a place to live.

The government, in this bill, continues to rely solely on the for-profit, private market for delivery of all new housing, as if the collapse in developing housing in Ontario can be fixed with a tweak here and a tweak here, and a change to development charges. I don't think it's a bad idea to reduce the cost of building new housing. In fact, I think it's a really good idea to reduce the cost of building new housing—going back to my earlier comments about missing middle and making it possible to build fourplexes all over the place.

But the reality is that people who earn minimum wage are not going to be buying \$1-million, \$1.2-million homes. It's not going to happen. The government needs to actually step in and have a housing agency, as we have had historically, to build housing for those parts of the population—and they are large—who do not actually have the purchasing power to participate in the market. That's something that this government needs to address, and it's not addressed in this bill.

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Frankly, one other huge affordability issue that needs to be addressed is real rent control, so that people who are living in rental housing in my riding, and many others,

who are facing continuous increases in their rents, to the extent that people have said to me—and I had an 80-year-old come up to me at a meeting in an apartment lobby late last year, who said, “One more rent increase and I’m out. I can’t afford to buy groceries and pay rent,” in this fairly modest rental building in my riding. She said, “So do you have government housing options for me?” I had to say to her that it’s a 10-to-15-year waiting list. And her response was very simple: “I’ll be dead.”

This government is not addressing the needs of a big chunk of the population who aren’t going to be buying new houses, and it isn’t addressing the needs of those who want to and may well be able to buy a new house, by actually taking the steps necessary to change regulations in this province.

A few other comments: Seamless transit is a good idea. I take transit a lot. I’ve used the GO train to get out to Oshawa. I’ve used it to get out to Ajax. I’ve used it to get out to Mississauga, to Hamilton. I think that investing in more transit makes a lot of sense. But I don’t think that a minister-controlled fare hike with no accountability is a good idea. How is the minister actually going to determine what is a fare hike? Will the minister actually look at things in terms of affordability? Will the minister actually look at things in terms of the sustainability of the transit entity that he’s dealing with or she’s dealing with? That giving of power without accountability is not a reasonable or thoughtful approach to the problem that we’re facing. Putting money into transit? Absolutely.

When Mike Harris cut funding for transit back in the 1990s, it had an immediate and obvious impact on the TTC—I can’t speak to other transit systems, because I don’t travel in transit in Hamilton and Ottawa. But I did see it in Toronto, and my suspicion is that transit systems all over were hurt badly by that withdrawal of funding—not being restored, not being addressed in this bill.

The environmental standards for new housing and the attack on the efforts of local governments to actually do something about affordability, about the cost of operating those homes by reducing their energy needs, and the efforts of local governments to reduce emissions so that we deal with climate change are being undermined by this bill. And I find it weird, but this government effectively has abandoned action on climate change. As you’re well aware, it has abandoned its targets on greenhouse gas reductions. Am I totally surprised? I’m not, because I knew they weren’t going to make their targets, notwithstanding the statements of the Minister of the Environment in this House.

The reality is that the climate crisis is there and things are deepening. For those who care about bottom lines rather than the impact on people: It is having a huge impact on insurance across North America. Insurers are withdrawing from jurisdictions where the impact of climate is making homes effectively uninsurable. So California, Louisiana, Florida are jurisdictions where there are areas that cannot get insurance. In those states, state governments have set up insurance companies that, I have to say, are deeply underfunded.

We are facing a northern Ontario problem with people getting insurance, because of the increase in flooding that is, again, happening because of climate change. So we are seeing increased costs. This is a real phenomenon. This is a government that has responsibility for looking after the people of Ontario and is not paying attention to a fundamental issue that will determine the kind of future that we have.

And going from water, I’m going to go to fire. The reality is that as the world gets hotter and as the interior of continents gets drier, we will see more fires in cities. You saw the fire in Los Angeles well over a year ago. That was a wake-up call to everyone. We’ve seen the fires in Fort McMurray, in Jasper—Lytton, British Columbia burned to the ground. But we hadn’t seen it in big cities. You should all be well aware that the wildfires that we’ve seen in places like Australia a number of years ago—wildfires that produced enough smoke that in Sydney, the smoke detectors in the interior of office buildings started going off because of the concentration of smoke from the outside coming into those buildings. That is substantial.

The World Bank runs a website on risk, and on that site they look at fire risk in cities around the world. Toronto is listed as a high-risk city for urban fire. That is something people need to consider. It wouldn’t have been a high-risk city 30 years ago or 50 years ago, but the world is hotter; it is drier. And thus, the potential is there for a fire breaking out in a wooded area going into an urban area. Halifax, in 2023, had that problem—165 houses lost. I talked to one of the firefighters who was on the scene. They drove their truck into the area. The glass on the fire truck shattered from the heat. That week, a number of firefighters, after the fire was out, retired—“We didn’t sign up for this.”

So we have a substantial problem that is in motion right now and is deepening. And yet, this government is going after every measure it can that actually will try to address the problem.

Governments tried before to get rid of the green building standards—and it’s sort of like whack-a-mole: They hit it; it didn’t really work. They hit it again; it didn’t work. Maybe they’ll be successful this time and knock it out. That is a real disservice to the people of this province. It raises some very substantial questions. What has this provincial government got against local governments trying to make housing more efficient so people have lower energy bills? The reality is, if you have a higher standard of insulation, if you seal a house properly, you will need less fuel, less energy to heat it and to cool it. So why don’t we, in fact, require that standard so that in the long run people’s costs are lower? It’s much cheaper to make a house efficient when you’re building it the first time than to go back and try to retrofit it later. A number of you are well aware of that.

You also are well aware, I’m sure, that 70% of our natural gas comes from the United States. So the more gas we burn, the more we are subsidizing a government, a country, that is actually trying to undermine our economy. When we hire Canadian workers to insulate our homes, upgrade the windows at time of construction, make

buildings more weather-tight, we are putting Canadian workers to work and reducing the amount of money we send to the United States. Why is the government against that? They could make the argument that we'll get rid of these city standards and we'll have an Ontario Building Code that brings about the same result. That would give you a uniform standard. But that is not what is proposed before us.

And then I have to ask: Who is asking for this? Who is saying, "Get rid of these green building standards. We want to pay more for heating and cooling"? Who, in the end, is asking for that? It does not help the vast majority of Ontarians who will rent or own a home that could be efficient, weatherproof, and hopefully far less expensive to operate.

If you look around, you'll find that the green building standards in Toronto have not slowed down development. Toronto has seen increasing or consistent housing starts since its green development standards were introduced 16 years ago—16 years ago, and you're trying to roll it back now. Seriously? We do have a decline in housing construction. It's not because of a 16-year-old standard for energy efficiency and weatherproofing in a house.

So if the province wants to step up and set a standard that will protect people from climate change, it will protect people's pocketbooks from higher energy bills—bring on those regulations. But that's not what is happening here. What we're seeing is a rollback to increase the heating of the world, increase the risk, increase the cost of insurance, make home ownership more expensive and home renting more expensive.

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If the government is not that concerned about the homes and their standards, then I want to go on to this whole question of safe drinking water and water corporations. I found it interesting that this initiative was coming forward, and I found it useful that there was enough political pressure that the government said, "No, these will be publicly owned water corporations." It sort of reinforced that language.

I was here when Kathleen Wynne took it upon herself to privatize Hydro One, and you could just see the steps of setting up a corporate structure with shares that can be sold, that allowed one to move step by step to eventually taking it out of public hands. And that is my worry about what we see with this bill.

I appreciate the fact that, again, political pressure has made the government make a variety of statements about how, in fact, these private water and waste water corporations won't be privately owned. But you have to ask, why on earth are you doing it in the first place? And when you have in the text of the bill that the ownership of shares can only be with a level of government or an agent of that government, you have to ask, how is an "agent" defined? If you appoint an agent—let's say Imperial Oil—to run your water, and they decide to run it on a basis that is contrary to your interests, are you going to overrule them? Are you going to actually have a de facto operation that delivers the same results as a private corporation with a

window dressing of public ownership? I have real questions about the government's intentions here and what exactly is driving them.

I'm also concerned about the communal water systems. I can see some utility—particularly in small, rural, northern communities—where a communal water system could be useful. But I have to say, you have to be very careful here, because you have to wonder whether or not those water systems will actually be subject to the protections of section 19 of the Safe Drinking Water Act, which was recommended by Justice O'Connor. The proliferation of those communal water systems necessitates the updating of many source protection plans under the Clean Water Act, and I don't see any provision in the bill to do that. I don't see an apprehension that, in fact, we might put ourselves in another Walkerton situation. That is a substantial concern. You also have to ask, what is the long-term financial viability of these communal water systems, and how does one assure that the actual operation is at a level such that those who drink that water will be protected? That is a substantial concern. I can also see—because I accept that these systems can be useful for small, rural, northern places—that, given human ingenuity, they can also be used to facilitate sprawl. And if you're concerned about the affordability of government or the affordability of housing, facilitating sprawl is not your friend. So that is a real concern for us.

My hope is that, in committee, we'll actually get an opportunity to dig into this further and hopefully make some amendments that would put us in a position where the bill would be beneficial to the people of Ontario. So there are a number of amendments, obviously—one of which being either drop the attack on green building standards or make sure that the Ontario building code reflects the highest possible level.

And I did leave something out—the member for Guelph remarked on this: The attack on requirements for charging for electric vehicles is quite extraordinary. The world is going to electric vehicles, in terms of technology. If you want to be building tomorrow's products, you want electric vehicles. And if you want a market for electric vehicles in Ontario, you need to have the charging capacity. So if you take away that charging capacity, you undermine people's incentive to buy electric vehicles; you undermine your industrial future. Why would you do that? Who does this serve? I just find this bill to be contradictory in the way it's set up, contradicting statements of the government around its commitment to future manufacturing by undermining the conditions that are necessary to make that future manufacturing viable.

We are going to need committee hearings on this bill. The custom in the last year has been far fewer committee hearings. I don't know what the government is currently planning. My hope is that they will have committee hearings and that the public will have an opportunity to come, present information, be questioned and, although they won't get answers, at least raise questions that may be substantial in the way people assess where things should go with this bill.

One of the things that I hadn't mentioned earlier and I want to mention now is that reducing development charges will, or should, make housing less expensive. It depends on whether or not the builders are charging at what the market will bear or charging at what it actually costs the builder to put a house in the ground. But if you reduce development charges which are collected by cities, the cost of putting in place the infrastructure doesn't disappear. So, effectively, what you do is say to cities, "You will now pay for this infrastructure that previously was paid for by the new development." Cities will be pushed to have property tax increases. This government says, "We don't raise any taxes." That's right; you farm it out. You put the pressure on lower levels of government, and, in the end, they're the ones who are forced to raise taxes so that the roads are paved and the infrastructure is there for new development.

Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to talk to the bill. There's a lot here, but I covered as much as I could.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank my friend the member from Toronto–Danforth for his ever-eloquent presentation on Bill 98.

He spoke about power without accountability. In Metrolinx, we see that there are now 124 vice-presidents, which has been revealed through a scan of the sunshine list—the same as the number of members of provincial Parliament for the entire province of Ontario. It's up 5% since last year. Having a bloated, top-heavy and arrogant administrative overlord—overload such as this is really—

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Overlord?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: —siphoning money away from the core mandate of Metrolinx, which is really to get people to their location faster and more effectively.

My question is, what does it say about the Conservative government, that they have allowed Metrolinx to become this bloated and this top-heavy?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the question, and I thought the Freudian slip about overlords was entirely appropriate. I urge you not to correct your language, sir. I think it simply reflects the culture of the government.

As people are aware, the Premier has, I think, the largest Premier's office in history, and you have to ask why. Seriously, why? If the Premier is operating with some efficiency, he shouldn't need a larger bureaucracy than the Liberals had. And let's face it, the Liberals were very, very generous with themselves.

Do you need to be more generous than the Liberals with your political staffing? I suggest not. I would suggest some modesty in this matter and going to a level that is defensible.

Frankly, your comments are well put, sir—overlords indeed.

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

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you so much, Speaker. Through you to my colleague: We know that Metrolinx has been plagued with well-documented concerns: bal-

looning executive ranks with an unusually high number of vice-presidents, a pattern of costly delays, decisions that have too often disconnected from the communities that the transit was meant to actually serve.

At the same time, in my riding of Parkdale–High Park, we're not asking for luxury announcements or glossy press releases; we're asking for reliable, accessible, affordable transit.

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So my question to my colleague is this: How does—if it does—the Metrolinx section of Bill 98 actually improve accountability and deliver better transit rather than simply reinforce the same top-heavy structure and decision-making that has led to the challenges in the first place?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, that's a puzzler. I don't know how it actually does in fact make things better and more accountable.

I know this may sound strange to some members of this Legislature, but ensuring that government operation is as close to the population it serves as possible makes a lot of sense to me. So the idea that the TTC had its downtown relief line taken away from it and the Ontario Line put in place raised serious questions.

We were told the Ontario Line that was being put in place would be done faster than the relief line. Well, the relief line was going to be under way shortly before or about the time this government came into power. Instead of having transit from the east end to downtown in the mid-2020s, we're looking at closer to the mid-2030s. I don't see that as being responsive to the needs of the population.

I would say that structuring things so that accountability is lost and power is vested at a much higher and much less accountable level is a huge problem. I don't see this bill actually correcting that.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question is regarding public transit and the fare integration that this government is talking about.

I will just say that one of the things that municipalities struggle with is all the downloading that they have to deal with from the province. The province dumps all the costs on municipalities and expects them to deliver expensive services like public transportation.

One of the things that we have been saying is that the government needs to actually take back, upload the 50% cost of running public transportation, but now, instead, we're going the opposite way.

With this minister's ability to integrate fares but have no consultation with municipalities and no indication as to whether they can increase fares, whether local municipalities will receive additional funding to support this, do you have any confidence that this government's meddling in public transit will improve things for the people trying to use that as an affordable option for getting around their cities?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, that is a toughie.

No, I don't have any confidence. I would say that—

Interjection: I'm shocked.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I know the member is shocked by my response and by my apparent cynicism. But no, I don't think the government is going to be very responsible on this.

Frankly, if they did care about transit and they did care about the impact on fares, they'd start putting the money back in; they would reverse the decision that was made by Mike Harris and actually put provincial dollars, in a substantial way, back into public transit and municipal transit corporations around this province. It would make for more affordable transit. It would make for transit systems that were better funded and thus better maintained.

I would say that what we see here in this bill is in fact an undermining of that ability to make sure transit works well and make sure that transit is accountable to those who ride it.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I have a question for the member from Toronto–Danforth about parkland dedications.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'm sorry. I can't hear.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: —a question about parkland dedication. It could be a maximum of 5% parkland dedication under the Municipal Act for planning purposes—actually, I don't know if it's the Municipal Act or the Planning Act.

Sometimes municipalities and developers have difficulty negotiating what portion of the development should be dedicated to parkland—"Should it be that part? Should it be this part? Should it be something that looks like along a river valley?"

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

REPORT, FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): I beg to inform the House that the following document was tabled: a report entitled 2026 Ontario Budget Note, from the Office of the Financial Accountability Officer of Ontario.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

JOHN HENRY

Ms. Jennifer K. French: When I was first elected to serve Oshawa, in 2014, it was alongside then-Mayor John Henry. John was always kind and thoughtful and fair and interested in the story of Oshawa and its people. I was very grateful to work with John. Lefties thought he was a Conservative, and Conservatives thought he was a progressive, but from my vantage point he was always a principled, community-minded politician and neighbour. When we didn't agree on an issue, I remember John

having said to me, "It's just politics, Jennifer. We can still have coffee."

In 2010, the people of Durham region voted in a referendum to stop appointing and start electing our regional chair. So in 2014, we elected Roger Anderson. In 2018 and again in 2022, Durham region elected John Henry to be regional chair, responsible to the voters across all our communities and for the staff at the region.

Unfortunately, John Henry is being very publicly fired by this Premier and his minister through new legislation that overturns the will of Durham region residents, who voted to elect their regional chair. This minister and Premier will be appointing someone who will answer to them and not to the electorate—a puppet for the Premier who can be hired and fired by this minister. This unelected chair will have control over the regional budget with strong-mayor powers and will not have to answer to voters. This is taxation without representation.

The Premier and minister want someone to do as they are told, and I don't believe John Henry was ever that man.

John Henry has always worked tirelessly and sincerely on behalf of the communities he has been elected to serve. He doesn't—

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

MUNICIPAL PLANNING

Ms. Lee Fairclough: A complete community is one with quality schools for children, parks, affordable housing, and reliable transit for people to make their daily commutes.

But in Etobicoke–Lakeshore, we are seeing more high-density luxury condos without any accompanying new infrastructure like schools, public transportation, recreational centres and parks that communities need to thrive. Municipal planning decisions are being completely overridden by this government in all corners of our riding, including on Bloor Street and in Long Branch.

The community of Humber Bay Shores, for instance, has over 30,000 people without schools or a promised GO station. The congestion is unbearable. Eight years ago, this Conservative government halted the procurement of GO stations. People in Humber Bay Shores are still waiting for this government to build Park Lawn GO.

The Ministry of Transportation must get back to directly financing and building our public transit infrastructure.

We need to build complete communities—ones with affordable housing, reliable transit and schools.

Communities in my riding or anywhere in Ontario shouldn't have to fight for basic infrastructure; they should be able to count on it.

FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. John Jordan: I want to thank the Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Response and this government for announcing in last month's budget that it's maintaining the \$20-million enhanced funding for the Fire

Protection Grant in 2026-27, after doubling it in 2025, to ensure firefighters on the front lines have the infrastructure and equipment necessary to protect themselves and do their jobs effectively. This funding provides municipal fire services from across the province with funding to purchase equipment and supplies for cancer prevention initiatives, equipment to address lithium ion battery fires and infrastructure upgrades and modernization.

I was very happy to see funding go to our fire departments in Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston. I visited several of them in the fall to see first-hand how this funding will assist our firefighters.

By investing in these resources, departments can respond more effectively, protect their firefighters and deliver faster and safer services to the communities they serve.

The Beckwith fire department, the Carleton Place Fire Department, Central Frontenac Fire and Rescue, Drummond/North Elmsley Tay Valley, Lanark Highlands, Mississippi Mills, Montague, North Frontenac, Perth, Smiths Falls, South Frontenac, and the Kingston Fire and Rescue team received just under \$671,000 to purchase life-saving equipment, ensuring municipal firefighters have access to the tools and equipment they need to stay safe in critical situations, when they are needed.

1020

LAND USE PLANNING

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Speaker, it would be nice if the Premier governed for the whole province, but, instead, like a child whose parents have failed to buy him a Lego set, he obsessively uses taxpayers' money to build infantile schemes along Toronto's waterfront.

While families across Ontario are buckling under the weight of grocery bills and rising rents, this Premier is focused on a luxury spa, a convention centre in the lake, and the Billy Bishop airport takeover. He's trying to turn our public shoreline into a private playground. I'd like to remind him that his predecessor Bill Davis halted the Spadina expressway, saying, "If it's not for the people, stop."

Ontarians want clean, E. coli-free beaches for boats and sandcastles, but this government is rerouting sewage overflow to accommodate a private spa, risking contamination in Lake Ontario. Waterfront land on one of the world's Great Lakes is rare; it should belong to everyone, not just those who can afford luxury spas and private jets.

The Premier keeps giving away our children's future for developers' payday, and that has to stop.

While this Premier consolidates power and hides his business dealings, the NDP is standing with the millions who are pushing back—just like we did on the greenbelt—because Ontario deserves better.

Now to the Premier: I see the obsession. I'll buy you a Barbie beach house or a Lego beach amusement park—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): I recognize the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

HEART AND STROKE FOUNDATION

Mr. Steve Pinsonneault: I'd like to welcome the Heart and Stroke Foundation to Queen's Park today, as it highlights two critical health issues that affect Ontarians every day: stroke and cardiac arrest.

In Ontario, someone experiences a stroke every 12 minutes, and delays in treatment can lead to permanent disability or even death. That's why it is essential that Ontarians recognize the FAST signs of stroke:

- face: Is it drooping?;
- arms: Can you raise them both?;
- speech: Is it slurred or jumbled?; and
- time to call 911.

Knowing the FAST signs offers a simple and effective way to identify stroke and seek urgent treatment.

When someone experiences cardiac arrest, the heart suddenly stops. Every minute without CPR and defibrillation dramatically reduces the chance of survival.

This government has demonstrated leadership through Bill 141, Defibrillator Registration and Public Access Act, which establishes a framework for a provincial AED registry to map AEDs and connect these life-saving devices to emergency responders. Fully realizing the impact of this legislation depends on public awareness, including ensuring people, especially young people, have the confidence and skills to respond.

Please join the Heart and Stroke Foundation in the legislative dining room tonight at 5:30.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Chris Glover: This Premier is not satisfied with being the Premier of Ontario. He also wants to control the chair of every region. He wants to control the mayor of every city and town in this province. He wants to control the directors of all of our school boards. And he wants to control every police officer and judge.

The latest attack on our democratic rights is Bill 100, the seizing control of regional governance act. With this act, he's going to be replacing elected regional chairs with his appointees, and these appointees will be able to govern with only one third of the votes of the elected councillors. This is an assault on our democratic rights. Ontario is the only region, the only jurisdiction in the Western world where we do not have the right to majority-vote decision-making in our democracy.

Under this government, you no longer have the right to democratic municipal elections.

We no longer have the right to impartial judges, because this government is appointing Conservative judges.

He has tried to appoint his friend to be the chief of the Ontario Provincial Police.

He's gutting the freedom of information act so he can hide his phone records and not obey a court order.

He has stripped us of freedom of speech and our other charter rights, using the "notwithstanding" clause.

And what is he doing with this consolidation of power? He is using it to hide his attacks on our public services and to hide his corruption.

We need to restore our democratic rights in Ontario, and removing Bill 100 is a start in that direction.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: I rise today to share an announcement in my riding of Bay of Quinte.

Last Friday, I had the pleasure of making a significant announcement at Belleville General Hospital on behalf of the Premier and the Minister of Health. BGH's aging HVAC infrastructure challenges needed to be addressed in order to ensure that staff and patients alike had a safe and welcoming environment that was conducive to providing high-quality care. That is why I was so proud to announce \$20,037,000 to replace the boiler plant, to replace one of the chillers, and to refurbish the other two 700-ton chillers, and to replace the emergency power system. These upgrades will not only ensure that everyone at BGH is comfortable in the climate-controlled environment but will also double operating capacity when using the emergency power system, and reduce energy usage by 25% to 30%. This investment represents 90% of the costs associated with the projects, and I want to thank the leadership and the maintenance team for their advocacy and planning for this project.

I especially want to thank Tim from the maintenance department, who got creative and was able to source the emergency power system over four years sooner than the projected timeline, meaning that the units are already on-site and ready to be installed.

Tim, thank you for the incredible work, on behalf of our hospital and all the people of the Bay of Quinte. And I know we have you until the end of the year, but in case I don't see you, congratulations on your retirement—very well deserved.

RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE

Mr. Deepak Anand: Each year, there is one thing in common for more than 26,000 families across Canada: They receive support from a Ronald McDonald House program. One of the hardest realities any family can face is having a child in a hospital far from home. This charity provides a place to stay for family members during a child's medical journey, by giving them the ability to be by their child's side during some of the most difficult moments of their life. These homes are truly a godsend for these families in pain.

One in four Canadians has either stayed at a Ronald McDonald House or knows someone who has.

Over the past 45 years, more than half a million families have been supported across Canada by Ronald McDonald House.

Today, there are 16 Ronald McDonald House programs and 21 family room programs, including one at SickKids, providing families with meals, mental health and wellness

support and a place to rest and recharge close to their child's bedside.

Colleagues, May 6 is McHappy Day. I encourage everyone to visit their local McDonald's, take part and support this noble cause. Together, let's do our part and support those who are supporting our communities.

VOLUNTEERS

Mr. Ric Bresee: Speaker, I was recently honoured to stop by the volunteer appreciation day hosted by one of my smaller municipalities, the township of Tudor and Cashel. They were hosting the day for all their volunteers, but with an extra special thank you to one in particular: Debbie Woolley.

Debbie has deep roots in the community of Tudor and Cashel. For over 30 years, she has been volunteering and contributing to help sustain small-community life. Debbie has organized and coordinated so many initiatives and events for families and children, from improvements to the playground equipment at the community centre, to this last term serving as the library board chair. Her long involvement in the community has set a great example for her children and for her grandchildren, showing them what it means to be there for your neighbours and to take part in local life, helping your small community.

Speaker, my role as MPP for Hastings–Lennox and Addington has given me the opportunity to interact and engage with so many volunteer organizations and people just like Debbie. With each visit, I'm reminded that it is these people, the everyday folks who share their time and energy, who make the difference and help to define the amazing quality of life in rural communities.

Speaker, as we approach volunteer appreciation week, I want to express my gratitude to all those who help. Volunteers are the very heart of our communities, and we are very grateful to you.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Joining us today in the Speaker's gallery we have the Right Honourable Alison Johnstone, the presiding officer of the Scottish Parliament; accompanied by Mark Brough, principal private secretary; and Steven Bell, international relations officer at the Scottish Parliament. Welcome to Queen's Park.

And the timing for the kilt was perfect today.

Introduction of visitors. I recognize the Minister of the Environment.

1030

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I would like to introduce and welcome to the House today my niece Julia McCarthy, who has just finished second year at the University of Toronto Victoria College. She is the youngest daughter of my younger brother, the Honourable Justice Mr. John McCarthy.

Welcome, Julia.

Hon. Nina Tangri: I just want to take an opportunity to wish my husband, Ashwani, a very, very happy birthday.

And for those of you celebrating today and tomorrow, a very happy Vaisakhi.

Mr. Jeff Burch: It's my pleasure to introduce Melinda Chartrand, who is here from the French Catholic school board, and also the chair of an organization I used to run, immigrant services Bridges, from Niagara.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I want to introduce my son, Michael, and my granddaughter Anika, but they're not here yet; they're on their way.

But I will introduce people from the Heart and Stroke Foundation: Liz Scanlon, Dr. Robert Ohle, Joanna Degez, Maggie Zhang, and Orli Joseph.

Welcome, Heart and Stroke Foundation.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): And when the member's family arrives, we will stop the clock and actually greet them. How is that?

I recognize the member for Orléans.

Mr. Stephen Blais: It's my pleasure to welcome Daryush and his mother, Neha, to Queen's Park this morning. Daryush is joining us as a legislative page, proudly representing the great riding of Orléans et le Collège catholique Mer Bleue. Bienvenue, Daryush. Je suis sûr que tu feras un excellent travail.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Today I'm pleased to introduce Meg and Danny Young. They are joining their granddaughter, Paige Young, who is one of my ministry team leaders.

Welcome to Queen's Park, Nonni and Poppi.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Today, I am also pleased to welcome Heart and Stroke—of course, the leading funder for life-saving research and a champion for healthier lives across Canada. Joining us are Brady Carballo-Hambleton, the senior vice-president for Ontario and Nunavut; and Liz Scanlon, vice-president of health systems and provincial mission teams. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Laurie Scott: I'd like to introduce page captain Catherine Charpentier. Her family is in the gallery. Christina and Josh, her parents; and Maggie and Eve, her sisters, are here.

Welcome, and have a good time.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I have some friends from Thunder Bay who are here: Nathan Vaillant, Ivan Brady, Ellen Yeast, and Jim Bailey.

Welcome to your House.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm delighted to welcome Jelena Jelich from London West, who is here today with the Heart and Stroke Foundation. I'm looking forward to our meeting later this afternoon.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: I want to welcome Ted Arnott, the 42nd Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and my predecessor, here to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): To our guest from Scotland: He is the previous Speaker, and he is my mentor as well.

Welcome, Speaker.

I recognize the Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries.

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: We have Colin Anderson, president of the Association of Power Producers of Ontario today, with a number of companies from across Ontario.

Welcome. It's great to have you at Queen's Park.

Hon. Doug Ford: I'd like to welcome the Etobicoke—I've got to emphasize the Etobicoke—women's U22 Elite hockey team. They did something that no one has ever done, ever: They won the triple crown—only from Etobicoke, the greatest jurisdiction anywhere in the world. U22 girls—champs.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I'd like to welcome, from l'Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, Melinda Chartrand. Bienvenue.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: I'd like to welcome two people from my riding of Oakville North-Burlington, from the Heart and Stroke Foundation: Avril Goffredo and Donna Bedell.

As well, I'd like to welcome page Mayra Kaushish from Oodenawi Public School in Oakville, who will be with us for the next two weeks.

WEARING OF PINS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston on a point of order.

Mr. John Jordan: If you seek it, you will find unanimous consent from the House for members to wear pins in recognition of heart and stroke disease.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston is seeking unanimous consent from the House for members to wear pins in recognition of heart and stroke disease. Agreed? Agreed.

SHOOTING AT LAMBTON COLLEGE

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Sarnia-Lambton on a point of order.

Mr. Robert Bailey: If you seek it, you will find we have unanimous consent from the House for a moment of silence for the victims of the shooting at Lampton College last Thursday in my riding of Sarnia-Lambton.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Sarnia-Lambton is seeking unanimous consent from the House for a moment of silence for the victims of the shooting at Lambton college last week. Agreed? Agreed.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): You may be seated.

This morning, in the members' gallery, we are joined by Joanna Majoko. She is a vocalist, composer and bandleader from the riding of University-Rosedale, who will be performing O Canada and God Save the King.

Please stand and join her in the singing of our national and royal anthems.

Singing of the national anthem / Chant de l'hymne national.

Singing of the royal anthem / Chant de l'hymne royal.

1040

QUESTION PERIOD

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Premier.

This Premier's gutting of public education has been going on since 2018, and I can tell you that parents see it every day. They see the impact of that. Our children are living it.

Now, nearly 300 teaching jobs are being cut at the Toronto District School Board alone. These are real educators, these are real classrooms, and these cuts are going to have real consequences. This is what we get when this minister is in charge of our public education system.

Why is this Premier forcing school boards to fire teachers instead of properly funding our schools?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Leader of the Opposition, it's like déjà vu. This is a question that comes up every time this year.

The Leader of the Opposition will know that in Peel region in particular, student enrolment is down some 5,000 students. There will be fewer teachers who are required, as a result of the declining enrolment.

Having said that, every year this is something that happens. And every year, very few teachers are ever laid off, because the amount of retirements through the system far outpace the potential reduction in staffing.

I suspect that in September of this year Peel will be the exact same as it has been every single year before that.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, Speaker, do you know what's not down? The needs of our students in our schools. That's not down.

This isn't about this minister and his ego and his power play to take control of our school boards. It is about our kids, and it is about our classrooms.

I want to say, as a parent, I know that you would do anything out there, parents, to support your kids.

If your kids need extra help, if your child is getting bullied at school, when there are fewer caring adults in our schools, then we know that they have nobody now to turn to.

Some 331 teachers are being let go in Peel—78 jobs in York, hundreds more cut across the province of Ontario. This is a pattern. It is a choice by this government to make cuts to our kids' classrooms.

Why is the Premier choosing to make cuts to classrooms when students are already struggling?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. We are continuing to invest at record levels in education across the province of Ontario.

What we want to ensure, though, is that teachers, parents and students are supported to the maximum poten-

tial. We want to put more resources into the classroom and less resources on administration. Later on today, I'll be introducing a bill that continues along that that path.

Madam Speaker, what we're hearing from parents and what we're hearing from teachers is that as long as you give them the support that they need, our teachers will be able to give the best quality of education to our students. That is what this government is all about. It has been what we're about since 2018, and we'll continue on that path.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: The bottom line is that this Premier is firing teachers, is eliminating vice-principals, and is reducing supports for our kids in classrooms right now.

It means something when your kid loses their teacher. It means that we're going to have larger classes. It means we're going to have fewer supports for our children, who are already falling behind the rest of the students in this country. More students are falling behind every single day, less resources for our kids—that's what this means.

Will the Premier stop deflecting, take some responsibility, and stop firing our teachers?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, let's put that into context: Literacy rates—reading and writing—are the highest that they have ever been in provincial history, under this government. Graduation rates, of course, are higher than they have ever been in recorded history, under this Progressive Conservative government. Math scores are starting to finally trend up, after a decade and a half of Liberal failure. We're starting to see those math scores move up. But do you know what? We aren't satisfied with just moving up. We want them to be the best, like they are in literacy, reading and writing.

That's why we are doubling down on programs established by previous ministers to ensure that more support gets into the classroom for our teachers so that they can deliver quality education. That is what this government is all about. We're putting more resources in the classes—\$750 supply cards for our teachers. Do you know who wants to cancel that? The NDP and the Liberals.

We'll plow more money into education because it's the right thing to do. We want better outcomes, and we'll hold people responsible for—

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

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: ᐱᐅᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ. It's a good morning.

Last month, families shared their stories, their experiences of losing loved ones to the dangerous and unsafe conditions on Highways 11 and 17. Actually, some of them are here today with us in the gallery: Nathan Vaillant, Ivan Brady, Ellen Yeast, and Jim Bailey.

I ask the Premier: Your government has the power to stop the cycle of grief and loss in the north. When will you take real action to make northern highways safe?

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

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I express my condolences and sympathies to the members in the gallery who have lost loved ones. I can't begin to think of what the families who have been affected by these accidents are going through.

Road safety, in my job as Minister of Transportation, is a top priority, as well as for all the members of the northern caucus, who have continued to advocate on this issue. We continue to make targeted investments on these highways to improve safety, protect all road users across the province—through targeted investments as well as legislative changes that we have put forward through this Legislature.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to continue working with that member, the members of the north and the political leadership in the north to continue building upon the work that needs to be done to move forward on this. I look forward to working with that member, whom I spoke with last week, on northern highways as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Mushkegowuk—James Bay.

Mr. Guy Bourgooin: We appreciate your condolences, Minister, but we need action now.

People in the north are tired of hearing this minister deflect while their families and friends continue to die in collisions.

Minister, what you are doing now is not working. People keep dying on our roads.

So I ask again: What will you do differently to make our highways safe?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We have continued to make investments into northern highway systems.

Madam Speaker, just this year alone, we increased the amount of transportation enforcement officers in the north by over 48 individuals and conducted over 129,000 inspections, which is up over 50% from the year prior. We've got individuals on our highways across both the northern parts of the highways as well as all across the province.

We've also made over \$650 million of targeted investments into the northern highways, to continue the expansion of that, which is a part of our \$30-billion plan to continue expanding our road networks across the province of Ontario, but specifically the north.

I've also had the opportunity to work with many of my colleagues in the north on ensuring that we continue to move forward on historic projects like the 2+1 pilot that we are moving forward with—the first in North America.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Member for Timiskaming—Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: To the Premier: Highway safety, especially on 11/17, is at a crisis level. For some of the people in the gallery, their families have paid the ultimate price. Jim's family paid the ultimate price eight years ago. Ivan's family paid the ultimate price just a few months ago. Do you know what's the worst thing? They know. Everyone in northern Ontario knows that there's a crisis. What the worst thing is—so do you. You've had the

northern highway safety task force. The MTO keeps stats on every kilometre of the highway, every accident. It's not that you don't know; it's that you are deciding to ignore the crisis. You are deciding to ignore—

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

1050

Mr. John Vanthof: So what is it going to take—because we are going to do it. What is it going to take, Speaker, for this government to recognize there's a crisis, to recognize that people are dying needlessly on 11 and 17?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order. Order. The Leader of the Opposition will come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Leader of the Opposition will come to order. Order. Order.

I recognize the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We continue to make investments into the northern—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I apologize to the Minister of Transportation.

The opposition will come to order.

I recognize the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: As we continue to make investments into northern highways, I'd like to remind that member that the Leader of the Opposition has voted against every single one of those. The \$670 million that we have put towards investing in the highways in the north, that member voted against. When we increased the number of transportation enforcement officers, that member voted against that as well.

Madam Speaker, we're going to continue to work towards building more transportation infrastructure across the north, as we have historic investments into the north and the northern communities. Whether it's the Ring of Fire, whether it's Highway 11, whether it's Highway 17—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order. The member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas will come to order.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Madam Speaker, those are priority projects for this government, and we're going to continue to move forward on that. I'm working with my colleagues from the north. We're building a plan to continue moving forward on that.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Before we go to the leader of the third party—I will start warning people today.

I recognize the leader of the third party.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier.

After eight years of this tired, out-of-touch, out-of-ideas Conservative government, our schools are not safe places for our kids to learn or for our teachers to teach.

Class sizes are too big. They've grown. Special education has been starved. Simply put, kids aren't getting what they need. And there's a mental health crisis in our schools that the Premier and his government are ignoring.

So my question to the Premier is, what's it going to take for the Premier to understand that investing in our kids' schools is not just investing in them, but investing in our collective future?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: This coming from a member who sat on his hands while the government that he was a part of closed 600 schools across the province of Ontario; this coming from a member who forced on students something called discovery math—and every year, as math results kept falling and falling and falling and our kids got left behind, that member and the party that he was a member of, the government, couldn't care less. Literacy rates falling behind—did they care? No.

What we're doing is, we're putting more money back into the classroom. We're supporting our teachers. We're ensuring that students, parents and teachers are at the heart of the education system. We're plowing away the bureaucracy that has held them back for so long. And what we're doing is this: We're insisting that the education system is focused on student achievement by supporting the very same people who deliver it, our teachers. That's what we're doing, and we're going to continue to do the job.

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

Mr. John Fraser: This government has cut about \$150 million from education this year, so he can blow as hard as he wants; it's not going to change that.

After eight long years, this Conservative government—this tired, out-of-touch, out-of-gas government—has dug a billion-dollar hole in special education.

I've told the story about Marigold, a six-year-old girl in Ottawa who has been waiting two years for the support that she needs—two years. When you're six, two years is a heck of a long time. And she's one of thousands of those children across Ontario who aren't getting the support that they need.

Now the Premier's hand-picked supervisor at TDSB is cutting special education, making the lives of families here in Toronto harder.

Speaker, does the Premier think it's okay to cut special education, to have an almost billion-dollar hole and create hardship for families not just in Toronto, but across Ontario?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, it's interesting, coming from a member who never supported special education with funding and resources.

When we came into office, we knew that there was a challenge in special education, because for 15 long years, the Liberals did nothing. So what did previous Ministers of Education do? Supported by the Minister of Finance and Premier, we increased the budget for special education by 36%.

The member opposite complains that I've taken over Ottawa, I've taken over Toronto—I've taken over both of those school boards. Do you know why? Because they were more focused on themselves and not on students, not on parents, not on teachers.

What are we doing? We're putting more money back into the classroom. We're stripping away bureaucracy and funding the things that matter to people, and part of that is student achievement. I know that it's foreign to the Liberals—insisting that a school board focuses on student achievement as opposed to the ideologically driven failure that they had for 15 years.

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

Mr. John Fraser: In more than 50 years, there has never been a Premier who is less interested in our kids' schools than the one across from me. And it shows, Premier.

Now this Premier and his tired, out-of-touch Conservative government are making life harder for families.

When your child has an exceptionality, it's a life of advocacy—I know this, Minister, because I spent 27 years at a community office that's mine now helping families like that. I don't know if you've done that, but I know what it takes—

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

Mr. John Fraser: It's not working. The Premier has made it hard for those families.

So my question simply is, when is the Premier going to get interested in education in some way and make life easier for these families of children with special needs?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member opposite acknowledges his own failure, doesn't he? He spent 27 years in a constituency office, 15 of which he was in government—15 of which he was in government. Failure after failure after failure, supported by a group of people around him who insisted on nothing more but failure—all they cared about was ideology.

What are we doing? We've increased funding to the highest level in the history of the province—billions of dollars more to build modern schools. While he was closing them, we are building new schools. We're investing in special education. We're investing in curriculum. We're investing in teachers.

Do you know what we won't do? We won't waste money on things that keep our students from succeeding.

We'll put more money into teacher education. We'll put more money into students. We'll take away the constant battles that put teachers in the middle of a battle between school boards and parents.

We're going to focus on student achievement, and we'll let them focus on failure, because for 15 long years, they did failure very well.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. John Fraser: That's rich, from the minister who has not made one class size smaller, not funded special

education properly, and is totally ignoring a mental health crisis that exists in our schools.

A big reason for that is, our class sizes have grown. The Premier and his ministers have let that happen. Right now, between grades 4 and 8, there are 1,000—that's right, 1,000—classes of more than 30 students. I know this too because my grandson is in one of them.

The Toronto District School Board supervisor, the Premier's hand-picked supervisor—that's the only address he takes in something like this, if he's going to appoint somebody he knows to something that pays \$300,000 a year. The supervisor has lifted the cap of 32. How does that make any sense?

How does making class sizes larger help our kids?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I suppose that what they're doing is respecting what was negotiated by the trustees and the unions in that area.

That aside, what we're doing is focusing on—and I know it kills them. We are focused on student achievement, and the results are there: highest literacy scores ever, under a Progressive Conservative government, and highest graduation rates ever, under a Progressive Conservative government.

In fact, I'm pleased that there's a Scottish delegation here—because I met with a Scottish delegation in one of their smaller, poorer districts. Do you know what they did? They revamped the system in much the same way we're doing, and now that district is one of the highest-scoring districts in Scotland. They are showing the rest of the United Kingdom what you can do when you focus on student achievement.

So do you know what we're going to do? We're going to steal good ideas from around the world, we're going to make our students better than they ever were before, and we are going to let the Liberals focus on failure, because as I said, they do it better than anybody else.

1100

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

Mr. John Fraser: The minister excels at finger-pointing and pumping himself up.

Speaker, class sizes aren't the only thing growing here in Ontario. The Premier's office salary budget has gone from \$2 million to over \$8 million a year. Executive offices in the Premier's government have gone from \$34 million to \$82 million—that's 243%. So the Premier's gravy train just keeps rolling; it's just not stopping for our kids.

There is a mental health crisis in our schools that everyone else can see—except for the Premier and all these folks, because it is being totally ignored. Ask any teacher. Go into any school; ask anyone in the school. Our kids are suffering. There are more behavioural instances and more violence in our schools.

But the Premier has no plan. They have cut \$150 million from education.

What is the Premier going to do to make our kids' class sizes smaller, so they're safer?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, talking about safety in our schools—this is a party that decided that it was more important to pull police officers out of the schools than it was to keep them in there. And what happened when they did that? What happened? We saw the results of that. We saw less safety in our schools.

So do you know what we are going to do? We are bringing police officers back into our schools. Thanks to the good work by the previous Minister of Education, they are coming back in. When I am talking to teachers, they are excited about this.

The opposition thinks that it is a teacher's responsibility to go and police bathrooms. The opposition thinks it is a teacher's responsibility to break up fights in the hallways. Do you know whose responsibility it is? It's police. That is whose responsibility it is.

We are going to double down to support our teachers, to support our students, to make sure our schools are safer than ever before. But we're not going to do it by cutting the very things—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order. Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The members of the third party will now come to order, especially the ones who know—

Interjection.

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

I recognize the leader of the third party.

Mr. John Fraser: The minister would benefit from stopping to look at their rear-view mirror. Look out the front window and see what's happening.

I spoke to my neighbour who is a principal and he told me a story. He has told me stories before, but this one was about a 12-year-old boy who was going after an eight-year-old girl, so he got in between them. He got hit more than 20 times, and the teacher who came to help him got hit in the head and had to go to the ER. That's a 12-year-old. Do we need a cop for that? Do we need that? I don't think so. We need more adults in schools.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Every day in Ontario, across Ontario, this is happening in schools. We know that. Go talk to any teacher. Premier, go and talk to anybody in a school, if you haven't already.

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

Mr. John Fraser: And through it all, the Premier has been cutting special education. But we found \$10 million for a strip club owner or \$2 million for the family dentist.

Why will the Premier not spend some money and make our kids' class sizes smaller?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I have said this a million times; I'll say it again: We spend more on education than anybody else has ever spent in the history of the province. But ultimately, I don't think parents care about that. They

don't care, when the Minister of Education gets up here and says, "Oh, I spent \$43 billion." Do you know what? They don't care about that. They care about, "How is my kid doing when he or she goes to school? What are the achievements that they are getting?"

And that is what we are focused on—student achievement. For 15 long, miserable years under the Liberals, they were focused on failure. We are focused on achievement.

This is the party whose education adviser went to jail, for crying out loud, and they're trying to give us advice on how to build a bigger, better, stronger school system. I think we'll take no lessons from them.

But the lessons that we will take are from educators—educators who are telling us that what we are doing is seeing positive results, to keep doing it.

We are going to double down and support our teachers, parents and students.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Our children are already in overcrowded classrooms in unsafe schools, and now, thanks to this government's funding cuts, schools are losing even more teachers and education workers next year: 124 staff in Hamilton-Wentworth, 100 teachers and ECEs in Upper Grand, 97 elementary teachers in Waterloo region, 78 custodians and trades workers in York region, 30 elementary teachers in Waterloo Catholic.

Our kids are struggling under this government; EQAO scores show that.

Why does the Premier think our kids deserve fewer teachers and supports instead of more?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: What the EQAO scores show is that when we started focusing on proven delivery of curriculum, we started seeing results increase. That is why our literacy rates—reading and writing—are literally the highest they have ever been in recorded provincial history, under this Progressive Conservative government.

Math scores are starting to increase. But we've said that we're not happy with slight increases in math scores. We have to be able to compete with the rest of the world. That's why we are doubling down on some of the things that were brought in by previous ministers to put more supports for math in our schools—and we're going to see results; I am very confident of that.

What we're doing is putting more money into the classroom. They have already said the \$750 school supply fund—the Liberals and NDP are going to take that away. The Liberals called it an unnecessary frill for teachers. I don't think giving teachers the resources they need for their classroom is an unnecessary frill. I think it's what helps our students achieve, by giving teachers the support that they need.

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Let's talk about the minister's record on getting money into classrooms. He appointed

supervisors who are billing almost \$400,000 a year for their paycheques while cutting educators from our schools: 515 in Toronto, 331 in Peel, 120 in Ottawa-Carleton, 77 in Toronto Catholic.

The minister's vision is grift for Conservative insiders and cuts for our kids.

Will the Premier do what parents actually want: Tell his minister to stop firing teachers and properly fund our schools?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Millions of dollars spent by trustees fighting each other—not in the classroom, supported by the NDP and the Liberals, right? That is what the record is. A trustee going out and buying a milkshake at 2 o'clock in the morning because he needed to wash down his cheeseburger that he had at 2 o'clock in the morning—that's okay for the Liberals or the NDP, right? That is the type of system they want.

Do you know what we want? A system that supports our teachers, a system that supports our parents, a system that takes away the conflict between school boards and parents. And do you know who is always put in the middle of that? It's our teachers. When those two fight, it's teachers who are put in the middle.

What we're going to do is support teachers. And the results are there: highest literacy rates, highest graduation rates, and math scores finally starting to trend up. It drives the opposition crazy, because everything they've talked about for 20 years in the education system has proven to be a failure.

Under Conservative governments, all the stats are going in the right direction. But we're going to double down and work even harder.

SCHOOL BOARDS

M^{me} Lucille Collard: My question is for the Minister of Education.

It's no secret that the minister is planning to bring changes to school board governance, and the minister's past comments to this effect are raising serious concerns, particularly with the francophone community.

For generations, French-language school boards have been at the heart of protecting our language and culture. This is not simply an administrative question; it is a constitutional right. The Supreme Court of Canada has been very clear: Section 23 of the charter guarantees not only access to French education, but also the right to manage and control the education.

My question is simple: Will the minister commit right now to not taking any measures that would weaken the autonomy and governance of francophone school boards in Ontario?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I'm very much looking forward to the announcement this afternoon and the new legislation that will be introduced, and I will be looking very closely—because when we talk about keeping the governance at the same level it's at, with the same power, the

control and management, this is very important. So I look forward to this, and I will hold the minister to this promise.
1110

Hon. Paul Calandra: Sometimes you've just got to go on the fly when you get an answer that you like, I suppose. So I do appreciate the member, which really highlights—I don't know why it is that they've picked the three-time leader of the opposition for the third time when you have a qualified person sitting just beside him.

Let me conclude by saying this: I'm very proud of the work that is done in our francophone school boards. The results far outpace those in our public system. We're going to be doing even additional work. I know Minister Quinn announced some teacher education reforms which will help us get more educators in the system, including the francophone system, building on some of the work done by the Minister of Francophone Affairs. So I continue to be very optimistic about the future of francophone education across the province of Ontario.

INDIGENOUS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

MPP Billy Denault: My question is to the Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation.

We are defining the next generation of responsible resource development and economic prosperity by advancing the Ring of Fire. Through the submission of the First Nations-led environmental assessments, we will see the completion of the construction of the all-seasons roads to the Ring of Fire five years ahead of schedule.

Our accelerated plan to access the Ring of Fire is gaining international attention, with northern Ontario taking its place as the jurisdiction that is stable, reliable and committed to responsible development.

Speaker, can the minister provide further details on how our government is accelerating the Ring of Fire and building a stronger Ontario?

Hon. Greg Rickford: I want to thank the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for the great work that he does.

Here at home, there's a lot of excitement. We spoke last week about the different projects. What I want to expound on in this intervention is the hundreds of new jobs for young First Nations people in the corridor to prosperity this actually represents. Think of it: three different access sites to this corridor roughly the size of Toronto to Montreal, commercial plazas being built, young people in their communities working with the political leadership to understand through our community partnership agreements just exactly what they need to be supported in the workplace.

I was talking to the president of TKG Group. They're an exciting company that supports and works with a major road construction company that happens to be in my riding. He goes by the name of Jonathon Mamakwa. He's a pretty cool guy, and he is bent on delivering reliable businesses and services. His only problem was, he says,

government doesn't move fast enough. I said we'll live up to that commitment—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

MPP Billy Denault: Thank you to the minister for his response.

The Ring of Fire represents one of the most important economic opportunities of our time. This is about more than just critical minerals; it is about generational employment, generating clean technology and advancing economic partnerships with First Nations communities.

We know that, increasingly, jurisdictions around the world are turning their attention towards our province.

Last week, the minister joined First Nations leadership at the Canadian Indigenous Investment Summit to highlight the opportunity that is Ontario, that is the Ring of Fire.

Speaker, can the minister share how partnerships in the Ring of Fire are positioning Ontario to lead globally while also advancing economic reconciliation throughout the province?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Chief Achneepineskum from Marten Falls, and I, and Michael Fox, who works closely with Webequie First Nation, were on a panel at the London Stock Exchange—palpable enthusiasm from global investors at the London Stock Exchange. It's the third annual summit. It brings some of the biggest and best investment companies around the world. They were asking and looking for investment opportunities and were keenly interested in the legacy infrastructure that's going to be required to support development in the Ring of Fire. This is not just about a responsible resource development project. They understood that it checked so many other boxes, working with First Nations communities who are looking for an opportunity to share in the kind of prosperity that people from across this province should and would come to expect.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier.

Speaker, I encourage the Premier to check his inbox and read the email he received last week from London West resident Kate Reid. Kate's mother was left in a hallway stretcher at University Hospital for six hours in acute pain, waiting for surgery, along with 11 other patients. Two patients had been forced to sleep overnight in the hallway, with no way to dim the lights.

Speaker, how does the Premier think that no longer collecting data on hallway health care is going to help patients like Kate's mother and the 2,000 other Ontarians who are being treated in hospital hallways every day?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: The member highlights exactly why we are investing in our hospital and our health care system. It is precisely those examples—because we have invested in dedicated off-load nursing programs to make sure that when someone comes into an emergency

department, they are quickly assessed and triaged based on their area of need. It is why we have expanded our medical education in every single school across Ontario, including, of course, a brand new medical school in Brampton that has already taken on—

Interjections.

Hon. Sylvia Jones:—and coming soon in York region as well.

As we make these expansions, as we enhance and have opportunities for primary care—multi-disciplinary teams across Ontario—it really allows us to make sure that not only our hospitals have the support, but also in community.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, the government's investments are obviously not working because there are double the number of patients being treated in hospital hallways under this government's watch. It's not just hospital hallways where patients are lining up. Londoners are still waiting months and even years for specialist referrals. Janet Bruce was first referred to a spine specialist in 2022. Almost four years later, she is still waiting, still in pain and still without a specialist appointment.

Speaker, why does this Premier think it is acceptable to force Ontarians like Janet Bruce to wait years to access the specialist care they urgently need?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Well, again, the member opposite is highlighting exactly why in the budget, most recently, a number of weeks ago, we actually had another 4%, over a billion dollars, to our hospital sector. Why? Because we see that they are an important part of our health care system, but they are not the only one.

On Friday, I had the opportunity to be at the Humber River Health centre, where we were able to acknowledge an incredible philanthropic gift from the Hennick Family Foundation. I had a physician come up to me, after the announcement, and say, "Thank you for what you are doing in the primary care expansion. It is truly making a difference in our hospitals and making sure that our patients have access to those primary care, multi-disciplinary teams."

TECHNOLOGY IN SCHOOLS

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Minister of Education. Parents across Ontario are telling us that school is no longer the refuge it once was. It's yet another place where children cannot escape screens—smart boards, Chromebooks, Google Classroom. And when a teacher loads up a YouTube video, children often sit through ads. Those same children go home unable to focus, unable to put the screen down, and parents are told to fix it.

Denmark has brought back textbooks. Sweden has returned to paper after declining literacy rates. They tried more screens, and they're reversing course. Screens don't always lead to better student achievement.

Will the minister commit today to a comprehensive review of technology in the classroom?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the question. It is something that we have been reviewing.

The member will know, of course, that there are very few people who publish textbooks in Canada.

It's something that the Council of Ministers of Education nationwide are actually seized with—what is the balance between technology and textbooks and paper? And I think it is a very important discussion that we have to have, because there is obviously a balance that has to be struck.

We have to prepare our kids for the jobs of tomorrow, but we are hearing increasingly—and it's not only just that type of technology—as I said, the availability, with Minister Quinn. We also have to look at cellphones and the impact that that is having in our classrooms and whether we need to expand the ban on cellphones even further. It is work that is continuing.

1120

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: Ontario is the largest market in the country. If Ontario schools aren't using textbooks, it's no wonder people aren't producing them anymore.

Teachers know students are struggling to focus. They know children learn differently from a book than from a screen, but many feel trapped. The textbooks are gone. The workbooks are gone. Even photocopies are rationed, replaced by screens, replaced by subscriptions and replaced, in some cases, by advertisements to our kids.

School should not be a place where kids are trapped to the screen.

Will the minister hear teachers, hear parents, conduct a real, comprehensive review, show leadership in Canada, and bring more textbooks and paper back into the classroom?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member will know, of course, that the trend actually started under the previous Liberal government, withdrawing textbooks—paper—from our classrooms. That is when they started to devalue the curriculum and allow for a greater interpretation of curriculum, forcing that workload onto the teacher. We have said that we're going to go in a bit of a different direction on that.

Make no mistake: The use of technology is very important. We have to prepare our kids for the jobs of tomorrow, and technology is a very important part of that. But I would agree with the member that there has to be a balance. So we are working very closely with ministers of education across the country—in fact, with jurisdictions around the world who are grappling with the same challenges.

Again, ironically, we have a Scottish delegation here who has actually led the way in many of their jurisdictions in creating that balance, and the results that they are seeing are very, very encouraging.

So, to be very clear, it is something that we are looking at—what's the right balance? We're going to make sure that we have that balance.

We're going to support our teachers and boards in ensuring that our kids have the best opportunity to succeed.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Dave Smith: In recognition of the delegation from the Scottish Parliament, I am wearing one of my family tartans today.

My question is for the Minister of Long-Term Care.

Speaker, we're seeing real progress in Ontario communities, like my own in Peterborough. Construction is well under way on three new long-term-care homes by peopleCare, Extencicare and Omni care. These homes will bring over 600 new beds to my riding, helping people get the care they need, closer to their loved ones' homes.

While increasing capacity is critical, residents and families also know that high-quality care depends on having the right staff in place to support them every day.

Speaker, through you to the minister: People in my riding want to know how, as we build new homes, our government is also ensuring that there is a strong and stable workforce ready to care for those residents.

Hon. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you so much to the member for that question and for his ongoing advocacy.

I can't wait to come back to God's country with some more good news for your constituents.

Speaker, as the Minister of Long-Term Care, I am so proud of our workforce. And as our Premier says very often, Ontario's biggest asset is what? Our people. And I couldn't agree more.

That is why we have invested almost \$2 billion annually and have hired over 16,000 additional nurses, personal support workers and support staff over the last four years.

But that is not all. We are not only hiring more staff; we are also investing in their training and education. Whether it is specialized wound care training, person-centred dementia training or career laddering options, we are seeing these investments take shape in our seniors' quality of life and our staff's improved work environments.

We will continue not only building more capacity, with 26,000 homes already built, under way or with necessary approvals; we will continue our record-breaking investments into our staff.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Peterborough-Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: I want to thank the minister for that response.

I just want to point out one thing as well: In the 15 years previous to me being elected, there were 611 new beds built across Ontario. There are more long-term-care beds currently being built in Peterborough alone than in the entire time that the previous government was in power.

It's encouraging to hear how these investments are helping support staff across the province.

Speaker, as new long-term-care homes are being built and more beds come online, residents in my community

want to be confident that there will be enough staff in place to meet that growing demand. Ensuring a strong workforce will be key to the success of these projects, particularly in communities that have faced staffing challenges in the past.

Can the minister share how our government is ensuring that staffing levels keep pace with the expansion of long-term care across Ontario?

Hon. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you again for that question.

We are building thousands of new long-term-care spaces—or homes, as we call them. And this year will be our busiest year. So I encourage all members to get your cutting hand ready, because we will be doing a lot of ribbon-cuttings together this year.

That is precisely why we are aligning our capital plan with workplace investments so that every new and redeveloped state-of-the-art long-term-care home is also supported by the staff needed to provide the highest quality of care. For example, through programs like the Local Priorities Fund and the High Intensity Needs Fund, we are supporting homes with additional staffing resources to meet the needs of residents with complex care requirements.

And as I say in all my travels, long-term care is hiring. So if you know a nurse, personal support worker, allied health professional, dietary—we are hiring, so please encourage them to apply.

We have over 600 homes, and we're building a lot more this year, so please apply and join us.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

MPP Jamie West: Speaker, in every election since 2018 the Premier has promised to complete the four-laning of Highway 69. In fact, last summer the Premier said, "Have you ever (gone) from Sudbury down to the city? That two-lane is like white-knuckle driving down there. If the transport is off by two inches ... you're done."

In eight years of Conservative budgets, not a single dollar has been allocated for Highway 69—not a single cent has been spent, and not a single inch has been four-laned.

My question is, why does the Premier keep breaking his promises when he knows Highway 69 kills people?

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

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We continue to make great progress on Highway 69, and we're going to get shovels in the ground to get Highway 69 built. We have detailed design work that is continuing to happen as we speak today. We're working in collaboration with the communities on Highway 69 and the remaining stretch that hasn't been four-laned, but that is work on the way. It's a part of our \$30-billion plan to invest in roads across this province.

But specifically on Highway 69, which that member has voted against every single time that it has come forward in this House—we've got a plan to build Highway

69. We're going to continue to invest in it, and we're going to continue to move it forward.

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

MPP Jamie West: Speaker, perhaps the next time the Minister of Transportation flies to northern Ontario to tell us how safe our highways are, he should drive up.

The Premier said, "If the transport is off by two inches ... you're done." The Premier predicted what would happen to my neighbours. Vinodkumar and Shilpa Patel are dead. Last Tuesday, their car collided with a transport, and now Arsh and Yug's parents are dead.

How many more people have to die before the Premier finally four-lanes Highway 69?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: That's why we've put forward Highway 69 in our plan—as we have on Highway 11 and Highway 17, in the northern highways plan. We invest over \$650 million into those programs on a yearly basis.

Highway 69 is a program that that member has had an opportunity to support in this House. Every single time, he has voted against it—every single time. When it has come down to putting more enforcement officers on our highways—whether it's Highway 69, 11, or 17—that member has voted against it every single time. Last year, we hired an additional 48 individuals just for our northern highways, to make sure inspections are happening across the north—an additional 48, which that member did not support, unfortunately.

We will continue to get shovels in the ground. We're going to continue to make progress on Highway 69, because we believe in investing in highways, and we believe in building for the future.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Last week, students across Brampton walked out of their classrooms as 300 teachers face layoffs affecting 33 of 39 high schools.

In Toronto, another 600 teaching positions are cut.

At the same time, one of the government-appointed supervisors removed class size caps for grade 4 to grade 8.

After eight long years of this tired Conservative government, this will mean larger classes, less support and fewer opportunities for students across Ontario.

1130

Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Students are already stuck in overcrowded classrooms. Why is he making it worse?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: This class size she refers to was negotiated in the collective agreement, so the supervisor is honouring the collective agreement.

Having said that, we are seeing significant declining enrolment in Peel and declining enrolment at the TDSB. The notices reflect that declining enrolment.

Having said that, this is something that happens every year at this time of year, as we ascertain what the

enrolment will be in our schools in September. As happened last year and the year before, very few teachers ever actually lose their job, because the pace of retirements far exceeds the potential for teacher reductions, and I suspect this year will be no different than that.

That is why the Minister of Colleges and Universities announced a new program to actually accelerate teacher education—because we are expecting a teacher shortage in the years ahead, as I said, as the pace of retirements simply outpaces the amount of teachers we have in the system.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: That didn't answer my question.

And it has been eight long years of these decisions. The Conservatives are systematically hollowing out public education.

Can the Premier name a single teacher who supports these cuts?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Actually, I was just in a number of schools last week. I was touring a number of schools, and they consistently tell me the same thing: "Don't stop. Keep doing what you're doing." What they keep saying to me is that for 15 long years, what the Liberals did was put teachers in the middle of battles between parents and school boards—

Interjections.

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

The House will come to order.

Back to the minister.

Hon. Paul Calandra: They said that for 15 long years, teachers were put in the middle of battles between school boards and parents. And they don't want to do that. What they want to do is teach our kids, and they want to be supported by the Ministry of Education.

I was in the chief government whip's riding just the other day, and teacher after teacher after teacher said to me, "You're on the right path. Keep doing what you're doing."

Having said that, I will say this: I did see the chief government whip's graduation photo from 20 years back. I would be willing to share that with anybody who wants—especially on my side. It is quite the haircut that he had back then.

We're going to continue to focus on teachers and the delivery of excellence in—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Oakville North–Burlington.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: My question is for the Associate Minister of Small Business.

Small, independent businesses in my community of Oakville North–Burlington have been hit with rising costs, tariffs and economic uncertainty. These businesses are the backbone of many communities across Ontario, creating good-paying jobs, sponsoring community events, and

keeping our neighbourhoods vibrant and well connected. From our local pharmacies to convenience stores to restaurants to manufacturers, they are essential to our communities.

Speaker, can the associate minister please share how our government is stepping up for Ontario's small business community during this period of economic uncertainty?

Hon. Nina Tangri: I really want to thank the great, hard-working member from Oakville North–Burlington for the question, for the great tour in her riding, and for her amazing advocacy on behalf of her constituency.

Small businesses are the backbone of our economy. More than 500,000 businesses here in Ontario have less than 100 employees, and together they employ around 2.5 million people.

Speaker, when small businesses succeed, communities across Ontario succeed.

That's why, through the 2026 budget, we're cutting the small business tax rate by 31.25% on July 1. If passed, this amounts to \$1.1 billion in savings for small businesses so they can reinvest the money back into their businesses, creating good-paying jobs. This second cut to the small business tax rate is the cornerstone of our plan to keep costs—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Oakville North–Burlington.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you to the associate minister for her response and for sharing how our government is continuing to keep taxes low for Ontario's small businesses.

Speaker, our government is taking real action to support our small business community. Not only have we never raised a single tax since forming government eight years ago; we are lowering them.

Over the past year, small business owners in my riding tell me they have had to pause purchasing new equipment. They've had to pause hiring additional employees and growing their businesses. During the constituency week last week, I heard loud and clear that they are glad help is on the way.

Speaker, can the associate minister further expand on how the cut to the small business tax rate will help local businesses and entrepreneurs grow and stay competitive?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you again to the member for the question.

Speaker, through the cut to the small business tax rate, more than 375,000 small businesses will save up to \$5,000 every year.

In the past two weeks, I met with small business owners from Arnprior to Lincoln and everywhere in between who are thankful for the relief. They know that our government will always be on their side.

Alongside our proposed changes to the small business tax rate, in tandem with the federal changes, we intend to allow businesses to accelerate the writeoff of a broad range of capital investments. This action would provide about \$3.5 billion in income tax relief over four years.

Under this Premier, we'll never waver in our commitment to protect hard-working small businesses in every corner of our province.

EDUCATION FUNDING

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Over the next year, our province will lose hundreds of teachers from our overcrowded, struggling classrooms—300 educators from the Toronto school board alone, and another 77 from the Catholic school board in Toronto. Across the GTA, we're seeing hundreds more educator positions being slashed in both Peel and Hamilton—hundreds even more in Waterloo and Guelph.

Doesn't the Premier understand that crowded classrooms make them less safe? Will the Premier put students first and stop endangering our educators and students?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: As I've said on a number of occasions, of course, this is something that happens every year at this time. They're the exact same questions that we get from the opposition every year at this time. They're usually not followed up in September, when all of those teachers have been rehired—or more. They usually don't follow up with those questions, saying, "Thank you for the incredible investments that you're making in education that have allowed us to hire even more teachers."

Madam Speaker, I'll say this: This is an NDP that has said that the \$750 teacher supply card—they're going to rip it up because they don't think teachers deserve it. In fact, the Liberals went one step further. They thought it was an unnecessary frill for teachers. This is a party, along with the Liberals, that has voted against a budget which is increasing funding to education to record levels across the province of Ontario.

What we're going to do is focus on student achievement, full stop. How do you achieve great results? By focusing on resources for our teachers, because they are the backbone, the lifeblood of our education system. That's who we're going to support, and we're going to do it without the conflict between boards and parents. We're going to give our teachers the support to grow students the best.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Once again, that answer just shows us that the government is out of touch and untruthful.

Ontario's students are set to lose hundreds of—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I will ask the member to withdraw the comment.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Withdraw, withdraw.

Ontario's students are set to lose hundreds of teachers—and that is the truth—because of this government's misguided choices. This means larger classrooms, fewer supports, more violence and students falling behind.

After eight years of indifference, incompetence and underfunding, will the Premier finally take some responsibility for the state of our schools and stop firing teachers?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I always love listening to the NDP. Do you know why? Because for the 15 long years that the Liberals were in power, the NDP actually propped them up.

So where was the member when police were being dragged out of our schools and student safety was starting to decline? Where was the NDP? They were the ones leading the charge. When the Liberals were closing 600 schools, where were the NDP? Propping them up—propping them up, leading the charge. When Liberals were cutting and firing teachers, what were the NDP doing? Propping them up every step of the way. When they were closing hospitals, what did the NDP do? Prop them up. When they refused to build transit and transportation, the NDP propped them up. That's all they do—they prop up. They don't build. They have no way of understanding what it takes to build a bigger, better, stronger province of Ontario, and that's why they're never allowed to govern Ontario.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I am going to recognize the member for Nickel Belt on a point of order. But I'm cautioning members: This is a one-off.

M^{me} France Gélinas: That's very kind of you.

I wanted to introduce my son, Michael, my grandson Maddox and my granddaughter Anika, who came to the Legislative Assembly today.

DEFERRED VOTES

RESTRAINING ORDERS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): We have a deferred vote on private members' notice of motion 53.

Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1141 to 1146.

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

On April 2, 2026, MPP Ciriello moved private members' notice of motion 53.

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

Ayes

Allsopp, Tyler	French, Jennifer K.	Quinn, Nolan
Anand, Deepak	Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Racinsky, Joseph
Babikian, Aris	Gélinas, France	Rae, Matthew
Bailey, Robert	Gilmour, Alexa	Rakocevic, Tom
Bell, Jessica	Gretzky, Lisa	Rickford, Greg
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Riddell, Brian
Blais, Stephen	Gualtieri, Silvia	Sabawy, Sheref
Bouma, Will	Hamid, Zee	Sandhu, Amarjot
Bourgouin, Guy	Hardeman, Ernie	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Bowman, Stephanie	Harris, Mike	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Bresee, Ric	Hazell, Andrea	Sattler, Peggy
Burch, Jeff	Holland, Kevin	Saunderson, Brian
Calandra, Paul	Jones, Sylvia	Schreiner, Mike
Cerjanec, Rob	Jones, Trevor	Scott, Laurie

Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Jordan, John	Shamji, Adil
Cho, Stan	Kanapathi, Logan	Shaw, Sandy
Ciriello, Monica	Kernaghan, Terence	Smith, Dave
Clancy, Aislinn	Kerzner, Michael S.	Smith, David
Clark, Steve	Khanjin, Andrea	Smith, Graydon
Coe, Lorne	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Smith, Laura
Collard, Lucille	Leardi, Anthony	Smyth, Stephanie
Cooper, Michelle	Lennox, Robin	Tabuns, Peter
Crawford, Stephen	Lumsden, Neil	Tangri, Nina
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Mamakwa, Sol	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Darouze, George	McCarthy, Todd J.	Thompson, Lisa M.
Denault, Billy	McCrimmon, Karen	Tibollo, Michael A.
Dixon, Jess	McGregor, Graham	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Dowie, Andrew	McKenney, Catherine	Tsao, Jonathan
Downey, Doug	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Vanthof, John
Dunlop, Jill	Mulroney, Caroline	Vaugeois, Lise
Fairclough, Lee	Oosterhoff, Sam	Vickers, Paul
Fedeli, Victor	Pang, Billy	Watt, Tyler
Fife, Catherine	Parsa, Michael	West, Jamie
Firin, Mohamed	Pasma, Chandra	Williams, Charmaine A.
Flack, Rob	Pierre, Natalie	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
Ford, Doug	Pinsonneault, Steve	
Fraser, John	Pirie, George	

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

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 109; the nays are 0.

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

Motion agreed to.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Ottawa South has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to the question given by the Minister of Education regarding class sizes. This matter will be debated tomorrow following private members' public business.

There being no further business, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1150 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF GOVERNMENT BILLS

PUTTING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT FIRST ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 DONNANT LA PRIORITÉ À LA RÉUSSITE DES ÉLÈVES

Mr. Calandra moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 101, An Act to amend various Acts in respect of education and child care / Projet de loi 101, Loi modifiant diverses lois relatives à l'éducation et à la garde d'enfants.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Minister of Education?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, if passed, the bill would enact the Putting Student Achievement First Act, 2026, which contains five schedules: Schedule 1 would amend the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014; schedule 2 would amend the Education Act; schedule 3 would amend the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario Act; schedule 4 would amend the Ontario College of Teachers Act; and schedule 5 would amend the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act.

PETITIONS

EDUCATION FUNDING

MPP Catherine McKenney: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly to reduce class sizes in our public elementary schools. We know that over \$6 billion has been cut from public education since 2018, and larger class sizes negatively affect students. They affect the quality of education. We are seeing those detrimental outcomes for students and teachers, and the vast majority of parents, students and educators support smaller class sizes.

So I am going to send this down with Aadyant. I wholly endorse it, and I will send it down with the page now.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

M^{me} Lucille Collard: This is actually day five of the Ontario Liberal Party filing this petition on behalf of the students in Ontario, where they're asking for the reversion of the OSAP decision because their financial situation should not be a barrier to post-secondary education and because the changes to OSAP that are dramatically reducing access to grants are hurting students, burdening them with more debt. At a time where they are already struggling because of rising unemployment, cost-of-living and housing challenges, the change actually cuts deep in their ability to build a future. That's not fair.

That's why they are asking the government to immediately reverse the changes to OSAP, to conduct consultations before it considers changes affecting their future, and uphold their promise of accessible, affordable and quality post-secondary education for all.

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and give it to page John to bring to the table.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I'd like to thank John Rounq of Harrow, Ontario for submitting this petition. It talks about Ontario being the number one export market for 15 US states. It talks about both senators and the representatives of the US House of Representatives voting against Donald Trump's tariffs. It also talks about how the US Supreme Court has ruled that Donald Trump's tariffs are, in fact, illegal. It calls upon this Legislature to adopt regulations that put Ontario first, especially when it comes to

procurement, and especially when it comes to supply chains in the public sector procurement process.

I support this petition. I will affix my name to it and hand it to this fine page, Owen, who will bring it to the Clerks' table.

EDUCATION FUNDING

MPP Alexa Gilmour: My petition is timely given the Minister of Education's bill. I actually have three about education today. This first one is called "Save Public Education."

Nowhere in this bill are they asking for the governance bill that's coming up. They're asking, actually, to reverse the supervision of the school boards. They're asking to return the over \$6.3 billion that have been taken from the school system, to fix our schools, to make sure that special needs children are fully cared for.

This is obviously a petition that I can support, seeing in Parkdale-High Park how students are struggling under the current system that this government has brought in place. I will affix my name and bring it back with page Regan.

HEALTH CARE

MPP Lise Vaugeois: This is a petition entitled "Stop Ford's Health Care Privatization Plan." I have petitioners here from all across my riding—Geraldton, Nakina, Marathon, Thunder Bay. From all 93,000 square kilometres of the riding, people have written to say they want every dollar that is spent on health care to go into public health care. They don't want to see that money siphoned off into for-profit clinics.

I fully support this petition and will give it to Spenta with my support.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Catherine Fife: My petition is entitled "Ban Above-Guideline Rent Increases." More than 50% of people right now in Ontario are struggling to pay their rent. Landlords, particularly commercial landlords, can apply for above-guideline increases. This is particularly detrimental for those who are on fixed incomes, particularly seniors.

This petition calls on the government to ban the use of above-guideline increases on all buildings with six or more units, and this will stop large landlords from exploiting loopholes in the RTA.

Listen, we're never going to stabilize the economy if we don't stabilize the housing sector. Banning above-guideline rent increases is a major part of that.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am proud to present a petition on behalf of the thousands of post-secondary students in Ontario and the high school students in Ontario who are very worried about their ability to access post-secondary

education because of this government's decision to cut OSAP grants.

The petition notes that Ontario's youth are being hit on all sides: sky-high rents, some of the highest youth unemployment numbers in the country, the cost of groceries just keeps going up. And now they are being hit by the government's decision to reduce OSAP grants, forcing them to take on loans if they want to go to post-secondary. So they have to make the choice of whether to take on a huge burden of debt when the economy is so uncertain and they're very concerned about their ability to repay, or not go to post-secondary at all.

The petitioners who have signed this petition are calling on the Legislative Assembly to direct the minister of colleges and universities to reverse those cuts to OSAP grants, stop the tuition hikes and, most of all, provide our colleges and universities with the funding that they need to provide the programs that students and our economy rely on.

I fully support this petition, affix my signature and will send it to the table with page Manuthi.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Brian Saunderson: It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon to present a petition from Darlene Bell to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario regarding our trade relationship with the United States and the tariffs that they have unilaterally imposed on us. Our bilateral trade with the US is over \$500 billion—half a trillion dollars—annually. Ontario is the number one export destination for 17 US states and the second destination for 11 more. Senators and representatives from both sides of the aisle have voted against Trump's tariffs.

1310

This is asking the House that we petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that the government of Ontario should adopt regulations and issue procurement directives, as appropriate, that would prioritize Ontario-made goods, services and supply chains in the public sector procurement process.

I fully support this petition, will sign my name to it and give it to Henry.

EDUCATION FUNDING

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'm proud to rise in this House to present this petition. It is entitled "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario: Reduce Class Sizes in our Public Elementary Schools." I want to thank the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario for collecting these hand-signed petitions.

They are calling on this government to recognize that the cut of \$6.35 billion in public education since 2018 has left us with larger class sizes, more violence and inadequate special education and mental health supports for students, recognizing that larger classrooms negatively impact the quality of education and the lack of resources for teachers has diminished student and teacher inter-

actions. It has been detrimental to students who need additional support.

The undersigned call on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make the necessary investments in public education to lower those class sizes, increase student supports and to ensure that students have the schools that they need.

I'm so proud to sign this petition and to return it to the centre table with wonderful page Regan.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: I'm happy to present a petition calling on the provincial government to prioritize procurement directives that would prioritize Ontario-made goods.

This week I participated in a round table hosted by my Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce, and a big topic there was the importance of buying local, buying Canadian. They called on us as a provincial government to do the same and to lead in that way. So I'm very supportive of this petition. I will affix my name to it and pass it to page Hagop.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

MPP Paul Vickers: I would like to present this petition today. Ontario is the number one export market for 15 US states, and we help keep millions of Americans working. Senators and representatives from both sides of the aisle have voted against the Trump tariffs. The US Supreme Court has declared President Trump's tariffs to be illegal.

This government should adopt regulations and issue procurement directives, as appropriate, that would prioritize Ontario-made goods and supply chains in public sector procurement, including capital infrastructure and construction projects supporting Ontario's economy. I've had mayors and councillors from municipalities ask me about this. I have small business people from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound wanting to make sure that this is a priority for this government.

I'm more than happy to put my name to this petition and give it to Saasana. She can take it to the centre table.

TENANT PROTECTION

MPP Catherine McKenney: We know that we are coming back into the summer season, where we will see record-setting heat waves across Ontario. We know that extreme heat puts people's lives at risk, especially for seniors, people who are low-income renters, people living with disabilities.

We have already passed Bill 97. However, we are not yet giving people the right to install their own AC in rental units. We also need maximum temperature regulations to be able to protect renters.

So the undersigned for this petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario call to permit tenants to safely install air conditioners in their units and to respect the health, safety and dignity of tenants by establishing a maximum temperature law for all rental units.

I am very pleased to affix my name to this and send it down to the Clerk with Hanuj.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Speaker, I don't know if you know, but the number of people on Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program who are experiencing homelessness right now has shot up 72% since 2019. That is about 30,000 human beings in Ontario who are in precarious or homeless situations right now. We know that the Ontario Association of Municipalities has said that 85,000 people experiencing homelessness will jump to about 300,000 by 2035.

That's why I am so pleased to be presenting this petition to raise social assistance rates, which is asking for a doubling of social assistance rates because without the doubling, we will see so many more people who are experiencing homelessness who have disabilities, who cannot work. What kind of a province are we if we are okay with 300,000 people being homeless by 2035?

I want to thank Dr. Sally Palmer for bringing this to our attention and for gathering these petitions. I will affix my name and be fighting alongside these people, and I'll be sending it down with Nihaal.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'm also once again proud to stand in this House to present this petition. The petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to create more affordable housing, understanding that for many families throughout Ontario owning a home is simply a dream, a dream that is slipping away very painfully. Rent is too expensive and people cannot afford it. Consecutive Conservative and Liberal governments have sat idle while housing costs have literally spiralled out of control. Speculators and land developers have made fortunes while families have had to put their lives on hold.

Every Ontarian should have access to safe, affordable, decent housing. If the family wants to rent or own, they should have that choice in the neighbourhood of their choice. Whether it's an apartment, a condominium or a co-op, they should have all those affordable options.

Therefore, the undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately repair the social housing stock; commit to building new, affordable housing; crack down on housing speculators; and make sure that rentals are more affordable through real rent control and updated legislation.

I'm very proud to sign this petition and return this to the centre table with page Livy.

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

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 13, 2026, on the motion for 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): Further debate?

MPP Andrea Hazell: Today I stand to present a schedule for Bill 98, the Fare Alignment and Seamless Transit Act, 2026, a favourite topic for me in this House.

To me, Madam Speaker, public transit is not simply about tracks, buses or fare gates; it is about people and the role the government plays in ensuring they can move through their daily lives with dignity, reliability and fairness. It is about parents trying to get to work on time so they can provide for their families. It is about the student who crosses municipal boundaries each day to attend school or training. It is about the seniors travelling to their medical appointment, often with no alternative means of transportation, and it is about people with disabilities who rely on accessible, dependable transit services to participate fully in their communities.

As we can see from this bill, Bill 98, it's not just a power grab. It's about the people that we move through the entire Ontario, not just in the Toronto core.

Madam Speaker, schedule 4 has serious concerns, especially the scope and concentration of authority, the level of transparency afforded to riders and municipalities, the mechanisms for accountability and the practical realities of implementation.

Schedule 4 represents one of the most sweeping and deliberate concentrations of transit authority this province has seen in decades. Under this legislation, the Minister of Transportation is not merely coordinating transit policy; the minister is empowered to control it, just like the education file, just like the health care file, but nothing new when it comes to this government increasing their powers—nothing new at all for this Bill 98's schedule 4 for this government.

1320

The minister will set fare structures across multiple transit systems; dictate prices, discounts and transfer rules; decide how revenue is divided between agencies; and how priority routes are designated in provincially imposed service standards. That's a lot of power for this ministry that has a lot of issues with transportation year over year over year. Let us be clear: This is not a fair and inclusive bill when we break it down. It is just a bill that gives this government more power to work with its insiders, friends and its donors.

Madam Speaker, schedule 4 is a fundamental re-ordering of who governs public transit in Ontario, pulling authority away from municipalities and local transit boards and consolidating it in the hands of a single minister without consultation from concerned municipalities. I want to ask the minister—the residents of Ontario ride all the transportation systems in Ontario; we have got transit agencies and we have got boards, and none of those were consulted. It's just this government coming up with their omnibus bill. This bill is like a wolf in sheep's clothing,

and that is why we cannot let it go. We have got to peel these bills like peeling an onion and look into where we are being tricked to vote for these bills.

I could tell you that I want to be clear here, that municipal governments are not obstacles to be managed. They are democratically elected institutions that build, operate and are held accountable for transit systems every single day. They do their work. They advocate for better transit for their constituents. They balance the needs of service. They do ask for accessibility for their riders. Reliability and public input in real time: That is what is done at the municipality level.

Schedule 4 sidelines that local expertise and replaces it with ministerial command. We are supposed to have democracy in this House, and we are supposed to be showing democracy in Ontario. The diversity of Ontario's transit system makes this approach not acceptable, but to me it's reckless. It also has the potential to harm the transit agencies that support all of the riders in the GTHA.

I want to share some lessons with the government. They usually say, "We will not take any lessons from you," but I want to share these lessons because maybe you have not done the math, you have not gotten the data, and maybe this is why you came up with a 2.0 fare transportation system that you think will easily work. The Toronto Transit Commission accounted for more than 54.3% of all transit riders in Ontario, delivering over 321 million rides. Meanwhile, Durham Region Transit recorded just 7.4 million rides. Hamilton Street Railway served approximately 15.8 million riders. Halton region transportation reached 7.8 million rides and York region served 23 million riders, with Peel region recording over 90 million rides.

What I want to say to this government is that these are not simple transit systems to work on your fare 2.0 integration. These are different worlds that we are talking about. These are different communities.

Madam Speaker, this government seems to be waving a magic wand through this omnibus bill—I'll say it again—with no transparency and no way of helping us to understand how the fare structure proposed in schedule 4 will function across six municipal transit systems. There are no details of how this is going to work, and when this doesn't work, there is no accountability.

So how can the government table this Bill 98, this omnibus bill, without actually taking accountability for their wrongs? Because there is no transparency in this bill. We know the transit agencies are underfunded. Their funding model for the operational costs is in dire need of a new funding model. Every year, the transit agencies plead to this government for a better funding model, but the funding model that this government continues to give all the TTC agencies is like, you go to the desert, you build your house on the sand and you never look back.

A fare structure that might appear efficient in downtown—which is the government downtown, who manages the downtown and has no respect for every other city outside of the downtown core. What might work for the downtown core for this government can be disruptive in

communities out of it, although this government, we know, will continue to prioritize the downtown core. Eventually, we will know why.

Madam Speaker, what is especially troubling is that this extraordinary transfer of power comes with virtually no statutory guardrails. This government knows that we on the opposite side cannot vote down their bills. I know Bill 98 will pass. I know schedule 4 will pass. But you know what we have got to do? The Ontario Liberal Party has got to educate Ontarians at the basic—what they are not getting for their money. We will continue to do that.

Schedule 4 grants the minister broad discretion but imposes fewer obligations. There is no requirement to secure municipal consent, no clear criteria to guide any decision-making. Schedule 4 does not have any information on the way this One Fare 2.0 integration is going to further impact the affordability crisis of the people that drive it and commute on it every day.

Increasing ridership—there are no stats on that. Transit agencies are not back up to 100% to their riding potential. Look at the Finch West LRT: It still works like a museum. Eglinton east LRT—it hasn't even reached capacity and we're talking about giving a government that continues to fail with Metrolinx more authority and more power—

Interjection.

MPP Andrea Hazell: That was when it launched. I'm right beside the Scarborough-Eglinton East LRT—it's empty.

Interjection.

MPP Andrea Hazell: When you launch, you should launch a train that is fully operational.

1330

On schedule 4: There is no permanent provincial operating subsidy embedded in this Bill 98. Provincial funding remains program-based and discretionary, not statutory. As a result, if this fare alignment or integration and what the government is producing do not work, this will be a failing funding and revenue crisis for all the transit agencies in Ontario. We're not moving forward; we're moving backward. We see a government that is actually bringing bills forward and making decisions to support their insiders, their donors and friends. Because this is not positive for the transit agencies and it's not positive for the riders all across Ontario.

In this bill, I would say that the actors are the province, the municipalities, the transit agencies. But the financial responsibility for the province, all they would do in this bill is to set fares and transfer rules, because that's the power they have, and that's the power they like to have over Ontario. But to support the people of Ontario, to support the families in Ontario, to help the people that voted them in—we see zero accountability for that.

For the municipalities, it is going to be resulting in revenue deficiencies. In transit agencies—guess what our transit agencies are going to face? Our service will be abruptly disrupted because they're going to have to cut services or seek municipal bailouts. Is this where we are sending our transit agencies? Is this what we're doing to our transit agencies in Ontario?

We want to give Metrolinx more power, just like we're giving the government more power, and giving Metrolinx more power—I just don't understand the reason, because Metrolinx has a failing grade year over year in their GO expansion projects. There is no transparency in what Metrolinx does or the government in making decisions where Metrolinx is concerned. There is no accountability. Metrolinx, this government and Toronto cannot meet at a table even to have transportation discussions, so I'm not too sure who was involved when this bill and schedule 4 came together. Now they're taking away all the responsibility and accountability that transit agencies have for their community.

This bill stinks, and it needs to be voted down.

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

Mr. Ted Hsu: I am very concerned about schedule 4 in this bill because I'm afraid that it might affect a lot of success that we've had in Kingston. In Kingston, we've managed to—just before the pandemic, we had year after year of exponential increase, literally exponential increase, in ridership through things like express routes, passes for students, free bus rides for students, getting them taking the bus as part of their culture. I am worried that we're going to let the minister, who ignores the Wolfe Island ferry, decide transit fares and what Kingston Transit does, even though Kingston Transit has been leading the province on getting people to use the bus.

I'd like my honourable colleague to comment on that.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you, my colleague, for that question. This is why we are so worried about schedule 4 in Bill 98: because it's going to take away all the amazing work that the transit agencies have done in Kingston. Now you are going to be going backwards and not forward.

This is why I say that when you look at these six municipal transit areas, they cannot work as one. They're a different world; they are different communities. And these municipal transit areas have worked hard to get to where they need to be.

So instead of the government bringing in schedule 4 and giving them powers for this One Fare 2.0, they should be studying the six municipal transit areas and make it work in the other municipal transit areas that are not working. That is integration of a powerful system that will work together.

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

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thanks to the member for her comments this afternoon and her passion about transportation infrastructure.

Speaker, transportation infrastructure is not just about moving cars; it is about moving people, supporting jobs and connecting communities. It's so important. Many people in my riding of Wellington–Halton Hills commute to Peel or Toronto for work, and our government is investing in roads, highways and transit—especially transit—so people can get where they need to go safely and efficiently.

But can the member please explain why they continue to oppose these important infrastructure investments? I'm thinking about the Bradford Bypass and Highway 413. These are very important infrastructure projects for the people across Ontario, so why do they continue to oppose these projects?

MPP Andrea Hazell: Let me make this clear to you right now: As a critic for transportation for the Ontario Liberal Party, I support you when you are making the right decisions that are going to be benefiting the people that voted you in. Okay?

But when I see there are loopholes—

Interjection.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Yes, when I see there are loopholes—and in schedule 4, this is not a bill that is going to be benefiting the transit agencies your government underfunded.

Madam Speaker, this government underfunded all the transit agencies. That's where I'm coming from. There is nothing in the bill, when the transit agencies are going to be lacking the revenue, to sustain them so that they can continue to operate.

Now they're going to be cutting services. Now services are going to go backwards instead of moving forward. This schedule 4 is not positive for the community at all.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think the member from Scarborough–Guildwood's indignation and outrage are well placed, Madam Speaker.

This is a talk on green development standards and a curious exemption of Metrolinx from provisions of the Building Code Act. More importantly, as the member from the Scarborough riding, it is not clear what is the fare and service integration model the government has in mind. Will transit agencies in the GTHA be required to charge the same fare? You don't know. Will some riders pay more? You don't know. Will transit agencies be compensated by the province for any lost fare revenue? You don't know. Will riders, including TTC riders, continue to have two hours of unlimited transfers? You don't know.

In fact, this will potentially very greatly hurt the riders of Scarborough because they travel, on average, for an hour and a half or two hours. Will the member clarify why this is a bad bill for the people of Scarborough?

MPP Andrea Hazell: I love that question. And in my debate notes, I was actually bringing forward the cost and the impact this is going to have on commuters.

We're looking at Scarborough–Guildwood, and we're looking at Scarborough. The average income in Scarborough is under \$50,000, okay? The affordability crisis in Scarborough is impacting 45% of Scarborough.

The child poverty rate in all of the government's ridings that are in Scarborough is above 34%. In this bill there is no detail, there is no explanation, there is no accountability, there is no transparency of how this is going to impact the underserved communities.

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

MPP Andrea Hazell: I'm done. Thanks.

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

MPP Tyler Watt: Speaker, this is a clear pattern: centralizing power at Queen's Park and taking it away from municipalities and the people they serve. We've been here for a little over a year in this session and every omnibus bill that is put forward—which must be a record at this point—is just filled with centralizing power in this government.

I thought that Conservatives were supposed to be the party of small government, but, man, the power that they want to have here in Toronto, at Queen's Park, that will dictate the rest of Ontario is always shocking to me.

Look at schedule 4. This bill gives the minister sweeping authority to dictate fare structures, routes, service standards and even force municipalities into unified systems.

Then in schedule 5, it expands the powers of Metrolinx, allowing it to override local processes and others.

To my colleague: Can you expand on how this government can justify stripping away decision-making from local communities and concentrating so much power in the hands of the minister and Metrolinx?

MPP Andrea Hazell: That is a big question for a big answer. Let me try to break this down as it pertains to schedule 4. As in my explanation on schedule 4, if there's one thing the government is good at, it's taking over these files and giving powers to themselves to transfer to their insiders, their friends and their donors.

As I said, the people of Ontario that voted them in will not benefit from this. Giving more power to Metrolinx, which cannot even control themselves, has maybe 123 vice-presidents—it's like a gravy train at Metrolinx. They are not doing their jobs. They have failed at every GO expansion project, and the government with them is still taking over the power for all the transit agencies in Ontario.

The big question is why, and we will know soon why they have come with this omnibus bill scheduled for a wolf in sheep's clothing.

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

Mr. Steve Pinsonneault: Speaker, through you to the member opposite: We are listening to the voters. They've elected us three times in a majority government.

Our government is working to standardize and streamline infrastructure approvals so municipalities can build roads, transit connections and housing support infrastructure 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 Andrea Hazell: I love that question. You know why I love that question? I'm just going to pick out a piece of what the member across said, that they were elected

three times. But you know what they were elected on in the last February snap election? It's that they will protect Ontario. They're not protecting Ontario when it comes to health care. They're not protecting Ontario when it comes to transportation. They're not protecting Ontario when it comes to education.

I was expecting that this transportation bill is going to give us something to vote for. But instead it has nothing in that bill to support the communities in Ontario that use transit every day—and again, the underfunding of the transit agencies year after year after year. The transit agencies have to fight for fare revenue from fares that this government is eventually going to take away. The transit agencies are going to be facing a deficit when this bill passes and this bill comes into action.

Who is going to be funding the transit agencies so the underserved people of Scarborough can continue to ride our public transit?

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

Hon. Graydon Smith: Good afternoon, everyone—nice punchy start this afternoon. It's a Monday afternoon, a little grey outside, but here we are at it again after a week back in our constituencies. I hope everyone had a great Easter.

Interjection.

Hon. Graydon Smith: I'm getting heckled over wishing everyone a great Easter? Well, aren't we off to a fantastic start this afternoon.

We're going to keep talking about Bill 98, the Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act. Much like the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, who loves to talk about his days on the farm, you may get some extra time from me this afternoon about days on the municipal trail.

As I often talk about when I get up to speak on bills from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, I spent 20 years in the municipal sector—some as a councillor, some as a mayor, and all very, very enjoyable. But one of the things that stood out in terms of matters of importance—and you kind of learn more about it as you get going along today—is just how important planning processes are.

I will say, when you first start out as a councillor, you might not have an appreciation for what all those rules and regulations do and how they function. But as time goes by, you develop a real appreciation for the need for them to be crystal clear, the importance of them to allow for development to occur in a timely fashion in communities, and the importance of—as we look at not only our own communities that many of us around this chamber actually represented in a past municipal life, that rules being similar from one municipality to the next is really helpful for a development community that is committed to building homes in various places across Ontario.

Speaker, all of this to say that I've sat at council tables. I've sat through long conversations about official plans and zoning bylaws. I've listened to deputations on these things that ran late into the evening, and then council

conversations that went on even further into the evening. I've watched projects stall, not because there was opposition in principle but because the process itself, all too often, is the obstacle. And that perspective matters when we talk about housing and getting housing built, because we know housing challenges in Ontario are not created in one place, and they will be not solved in one place or by doing one thing. We need to be honest about it. Many of the biggest barriers that show up that prevent housing from being built show up early in the planning stages and the approval stages, and that's what Bill 98 is helping fix.

Speaker, we've been talking about challenges around not enough housing being built for the last year, if not more. Most of the time, the conversation is about supply numbers, construction capacity and labour shortages. Those are all incredibly important things and all things that our government has discussed and brought forward solutions for, to help implement and ameliorate those challenges. They are very much real issues. Through previous acts—through the Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act and the Fighting Delays, Building Faster Act—I believe we've seen real headway.

But in my experience, housing can and has slowed down long before a shovel ever touches the ground. Projects slow down in planning documents that are unclear or overly complex. They slow down in approval processes that involve repeated rounds of feedback with little certainty as to what is actually needed to move forward. They slow down when the same proposal faces entirely different rules and expectations simply because it crosses a municipal boundary.

Every one of these additional steps costs time. When we're talking about development and talking about getting more building done in our communities, we know that time truly does equal money. Every added month increases financing costs. Every increase in cost eventually makes its way to the price of a new home. Those costs, of course—who are they paid by? They're paid by families, by renters, by first-time buyers trying to make the numbers work in some of the most expensive housing markets across Ontario.

Bill 98 is targeted action. It's about removing unnecessary friction from the planning system while preserving what matters most: safety—we all want safety—accountability and good, local decision-making. It's not about sweeping changes. It's not about one-size-fits-all solutions. It's about targeted, practical reforms guided by how the system works on the ground.

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One of the most significant changes in this legislation is in reference to official plans. Official plans are that long-term road map, that planning document, that strategic document that guides where a municipality wants to go, guides that growth and aligns infrastructure investment with the community vision. In essence, it really prepares for what is to come and how a community will evolve over time.

It sounds simple on its face: an official plan, a road map to where you want to go—simple enough. But the

complexity that has crept into official plans over the years is anything but simple. They have become much, much longer and much, much more technical. They're structured very differently from one municipality to the next and are increasingly difficult for the public to understand and navigate.

I've been through some official planning processes in my own community. We take a look, and every certain number of years do a review and invite the public in to comment on what that road map looks like. I think one of the challenges of having consultation like that, which communities want to do, is that when somebody says, "Well, if I want to comment I'd better crack open the existing plan," they do so and then very quickly find that it's hard to understand. And when they find it's not that simple guiding road map that lays out the vision and that things can get complicated quickly, maybe they withdraw from that opportunity to comment and be part of it.

When we see these plans become overly complex, that creates uncertainty, uncertainty not only for people within the community but for people within the development community who want to build, want to help communities grow. That uncertainty slows everything down. Now we've got time with staff interpreting policies rather than implementing policies, applicants being asked and having additional studies commissioned to reduce risk. My goodness, we could have a whole conversation about risk management and our fear to take any risk at all these days when we have big challenges to overcome and who is risk-managing risk management.

It is complex. I don't mean to trivialize it, but at the same time, if we make things overly complex, if we ask for study upon study, if we don't provide clarity in what that road map looks like, if we don't provide an easy path for something to happen, chances are it won't happen; chances are we'll have councils visiting the same issue repeatedly because policy directions become unclear. That doesn't serve anybody well.

Speaker, if passed, Bill 98 proposes to introduce a simplified and standardized approach to official plan formats across Ontario. It would include a consistent structure, a standardized set of land use designations, common tables of contents and schedules—

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

Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, please continue the debate.

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

Hon. Graydon Smith: To be clear, councillors are still making local decisions. They're still defining those community priorities. They're still planning for growth in a way that reflects and demonstrates their local values. But what the proposed changes do is provide clarity and consistency, clarify the executive director of the Ontario

Professional Planners Institute, Susan Wiggins, welcomes when she said, “OPPI and its members are essential housing enablers, working with government and home builders to create vibrant, healthy communities. We are pleased to see the introduction of simplified and consistent official plans leading to streamlined approval times for municipalities and home builders.”

It means that a land use designation in one municipality means the same thing in another municipality. Oh, my goodness; how novel is that? I cannot tell you how many times, when I was a mayor and since, during my time as an MPP, I’ve sat down with home builders, either from my area or from other parts of Ontario, and they are incredulous that from one municipality to the next this level of inconsistency exists.

Like the member of the public that I talked about earlier who might want to be more engaged in an official plan process, if somebody is coming to your community to build a bunch of homes, what are they going to do? They are going to look at your official plan. They are going to look at your zoning bylaws. And if they have to reinterpret and try to figure out what this means, what that means—“Does it mean the same thing that it does in community A from community B? The tables of contents look similar, but they actually read differently”—again, it slows everything down. Again, it costs more money.

The worst outcome of all of this is that things just don’t get built. Developers look at it and say, “Too complex, too unclear, too many changes needed.” So we need that consistency and that certainty. We need policies that are easier to read, easier to interpret, easier to update and will get faster approvals. Speaker, those delays in the planning system, again, aren’t just inconvenient; they’re expensive. Those carrying costs increase. Financial plans start to become more complex, riskier to deliver.

And that extends to another step in this process around site plan control. Another thing that Bill 98, if passed, will take a look at involves site plan review and ensuring that developments function properly within their surroundings. Site plans are, of course, important: They address things like access, drainage, grading, servicing.

I can tell you—and, again, anyone who was on a municipal council will tell you—that site plans can often cause more excitement than zoning conversations, by a long shot. Oftentimes—I don’t know how many times—we were actually having zoning conversations that would just morph into site plan conversations because when you look at those plans, councils can start to say, “What if, what if, what if?” And it might not even really be germane for them to be commenting on it, but it’s kind of irresistible that if somebody puts one in front of you, you’re going to have something to say about it.

But beyond that, beyond all the what-ifs, we get back to the need for clarity. Many municipalities, over time, have kind of expanded their site plan control bylaws well beyond the core responsibilities that I mentioned earlier. And so when that happens, these processes often add, again, multiple rounds of review.

It’s not that these processes exist—there’s nothing inherently wrong with site plan control; it’s really smart—

it’s the back-and-forth. It’s the constant back-and-forth. It’s the frustration that the site plan requirements in community A do not line up with the site plan requirements in community B, and yet a developer just finished a project in that community. Now they’re going to go somewhere else and have to deal with an entirely different set of rules, have to get interpretations on an entirely different set of rules, have to spend money and time. And too often, in the middle of those conversations, you also see municipalities maybe not answering with enough clarity that’s required, and so then it feels like the goal posts are constantly moving.

So Bill 98 proposes, again, to simplify the world of site plan control, to prohibit municipalities from imposing mandatory enhanced development standards beyond that which is required for health and safety. Municipalities can still encourage high-quality design. There is nothing saying that if you come to an agreement with a home builder or a community developer that they can’t do things differently than is laid out in that basic site plan control bylaw.

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As a matter of fact, in my own community—I’ll go back to more tales from the municipal road—we had a Tim Hortons franchisee come in and say, “I actually want to make things a lot nicer—and give it a Muskoka feel—than is laid out in your site plan control bylaw, so would it be okay if we made this thing look a little more like a cottage instead of a coffee shop?” And then the Boston Pizza across the road said, “That’s pretty cool. That thing looks really nice.” I’ve seen it on TV commercials now for Tim Hortons because they decided to voluntarily enhance what they were doing and make their place look pretty nice. They changed their facade and took a few lights off, added some more stone and gave it a little bit more of a local feel, and that’s awesome; good for them. But that needs to be their decision. We can’t be in a world where site plan control is another potential barrier to getting things done. It needs to be a tool that sets out the standards that we should rightly expect and require, and not more. And then, again, we’re back to simplicity, clarity, the opportunity to move expeditiously through the process, saving money, allowing the opportunity to get things built.

Speaker, I’ll bring up one stat—I’m not a big stat person, but I think this one is particularly discouraging when we look at site plan delays costing Ontario’s economy roughly \$3.5 billion each year. We’ve got to do better than that. We can’t tie up money and time in process. That time and money needs to be spent on getting shovels in the ground. So the site plan reform brings the bylaw, the scope of it, back to its intended purpose, its intended function: safety and efficiency. These timelines just simply need to get better.

Speaker, I’ve only got a couple of minutes left, but the last thing I want to touch on is around communal water systems and the importance of these systems to help enable more housing and more communities in places where we thought they maybe couldn’t be serviced in a meaningful way. By moving forward with this bill, should

it be passed, we're going to see another opportunity to take an opportunity to get more built.

I'll just very quickly tell a story. I was in a community recently talking with someone who was doing a large-scale development on municipal servicing. It's going to be great; it's bringing many rental units online in that community. Just up the road they own another parcel of property. They have an opportunity for what ultimately would be thousands more units, but the capacity of the water and sewer system isn't ready for that yet. So rather than giving them a no, let's give them an option to do something else; let's give them an option to scale up, use a communal system that will treat that water, treat that waste water, bring more units online and help that community.

That's just one example of a system that could be placed near existing urban services until that system is ready to accept the larger volume, but in rural areas in communities that I represent, there are opportunities to get more done with the vast amount of land we have.

Speaker, it has been my pleasure to speak to Bill 98 today. I appreciate everybody's time and attention. Thank you very much.

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

MPP Catherine McKenney: Thank you to the member for the explanation on this bill. I want to just quickly ask about development charges. It's not in this bill, but I know that this is part of what you're trying to do around housing affordability for people who want to purchase homes and to build homes. But I think we can all agree that development charges should come down—it's not whether they should but how—and what that means for the municipality. The municipalities, as we know, are responsible for something like 70% of infrastructure, and yet they get 10 cents on every dollar.

So as we're reducing the development charges that they are depending on today because they are so underfunded, what are you putting in place to ensure that municipalities will be able to stay solvent and will be able to continue to deliver the infrastructure needs for people in municipalities?

Hon. Graydon Smith: I appreciate the question, and it's certainly an important one and a timely one.

Of course, you're right: Development charges get talked about a lot. We've got some communities that feel as though they can take that problem on themselves a little bit and have reduced their development charges. We want to encourage more communities to do that. At the same time, we know that there's a lot of infrastructure to be built. So obviously, we're very heartened to see the agreement we have with the federal government that will work at providing some dollars for municipalities that do lower their development charges.

I think the other thing around development charges that we want to make sure happens is transparency, which this bill does address, to make sure that people know what they're paying, people know what component that represents of the total cost of their home.

But I think we've continued to invest billions of dollars in infrastructure for and with municipalities, and we'll continue to do so.

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

Mr. Ted Hsu: I'd like to ask the associate minister about schedule 1 of the bill. In Kingston, we're always trying really hard to reduce the cost of housing. When we have really old housing, which we have in an old city like Kingston, sometimes it's just very energy efficient—it leaks a lot, and it's worth it to put money into fixing up the house because you get a payback in just a very few years.

The tricky part in Kingston is that we have a lot of homes built a little bit later, in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, when standards were a little bit higher. But they're not so bad that it's worth putting money in right now to fix up the house in terms of energy efficiency. And so you just have to continue losing money every year.

So what I'm getting at is, the only way you can deal with that is to put in standards so that in the future you're not stuck with this problem of, "Oh, we can either spend a lot of money or keep losing a little bit of money every year, and it's not worthwhile to put in the money to fix up a place."

To the associate minister: Isn't it important to have some kinds of standards like that to reduce the cost of housing in the future?

Hon. Graydon Smith: I appreciate the question. I think what's most important, first and foremost, is that we have housing being built to have this conversation about.

As I talked about, in terms of going above standard, that needs to be a decision that a developer makes because they can meet a price point that fits that community. And when we're talking about standards, let's not lose sight of the fact that there are very much a basic set of standards that need to be maintained, whether we're looking at site plan control, whether we're looking at other schedules in official plans, whether we're looking at the building code—very much that safety and performance standards need to exist.

But at the same time, again, I would rather have a home built that meets a price point than not have any home built at all because an enhanced set of standards in one particular municipality makes a project unfeasible.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I have a question about official plans and the standardization of official plans.

When you're looking at an official plan, you might have a definition. Let's take for example the definition of residential zoning, which is commonly called R1. Now, if there are 444 municipalities in Ontario, you could have 444 different definitions of residential zoning R1. And then there's residential zoning R2, which you could have 444 different definitions of, and R3 and continuing on down the line. So I would like to ask the Associate Minister of Housing if he could offer some words with regard to standardization and official plans.

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Hon. Graydon Smith: I appreciate the question. As I said in my remarks, I think this approach to standardization and being able to open one official plan and see a schedule and another official plan and see a schedule for zones makes a lot of sense.

To further the member's comment, you might see an R1-special 12(b), because we get into these almost boutique-level special zones that may be down to a street or a lot that continues to just manipulate and complicate something that should inherently be simple. So let's standardize this across the board. Everyone knows what everyone is talking about from community to community, and we can continue to make sure that we're putting more efficiency into this system.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's interesting to hear the member, a former municipal leader in his community, talk about the importance of consultation when so little consultation was done on Bill 98. For instance, Bill 98 chooses instead to remove entire tools from the municipal tool kit that could have serious negative effects upon the efforts of municipal governments, most notably the city of Toronto. It requires municipalities to limit their official plan designations to only 12 options, which it prescribes—you just talked about that. It would strip municipalities of the power to use site plan control to promote sustainable or smart design. Bill 98 would even restrict the ability of municipalities to include official plan chapter and section headings that address challenges or opportunities peculiar to their circumstances, and it would limit the power of municipalities set their own fares around transit, which generates revenue to build and support communities.

So how can the member stand in his place and talk about the importance that municipalities play in the growth of housing while you are tying the hands of these municipalities and leaving them systematically underfunded around infrastructure? Without the needed infrastructure, you can't build the housing. If this government is looking for the problem, you should look in the mirror.

Hon. Graydon Smith: Speaker, I don't even know where to begin with the many incorrect assumptions that exist and dwell within that statement. But just let me say that over the last eight years of this government, the investment in infrastructure supporting municipalities alone has been in the billions of dollars, and that is because we have many, many people around our caucus table who understand the municipal condition intimately. We will continue to work with municipalities and support them.

But Speaker, the one thing that we can't foment is continuous delay around council tables. Nobody respects the decision-making of councils more than I, but at the same time, decisions need to be made. You cannot say that we are in a state where we need to get things done quickly and then continue to advocate for endless delay. We need to build homes. We'll continue to bring bills that get homes built.

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: To my friend, the former mayor of Bracebridge, our member from Parry Sound–Muskoka, the minister: How important is it that we standardize the official plan that we make sure that there's certainty in everything that we do so that a person can get a building permit understanding that we need them to build? How important is it that in this bill we've included this concept of cutting the red tape and getting it done?

Hon. Graydon Smith: I've only got 10 seconds for an answer. I'll tell you I have met with literally hundreds of developers who have underlined that very fact because they need the standardization from one community to another. Let's build.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'm always pleased to stand in this House and to speak on matters of importance to my community in Toronto Centre and to all communities across Ontario.

Today we're debating Bill 98. The title of this bill is Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act. Like all government bills, it comes with a very benevolent-sounding title. This good-deed-suggesting title sounds a lot better than what the bill actually does, which is build no new housing and take away planning tools from municipalities.

The bill's title suggests and projects solutions, but few are found in the actual bill when you read the language of it. There are nine schedules to this bill, and some of the schedules contain solutions that I certainly would be proud to lend my name to endorse. I think there are some pieces of this bill, with its nine schedules, that should be advanced, especially as we move towards trying to ensure everything we can do to ensure that new housing is built, such as exempting non-profit retirement homes from development charges. That is a good thing. I think we go the step further and do that in every sector when it comes to anyone who's trying to build truly, deeply affordable housing so we're not asked to make exemptions here or there. Let's standardize this.

There's also another component to this bill that I think is worth supporting, and that's making sure that water and waste water public infrastructure remains publicly owned and publicly controlled. That is a very positive section of the bill that is worthy of our support.

Interjections.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Very good.

So that took about a minute to get out of the way, the good stuff about the bill. Now let's talk about the rest of the things in the bill that probably require a little bit more time and attention.

Let's recognize that Bill 98, Speaker, follows Bill 17 just from last year. That bill was also given a very solid-sounding title, Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act—another good, well-rounded title projecting power and action. But what we know about that bill is that it started to erode what powers municipalities have. Municipalities across Ontario are still trying to unpack the impact of Bill 17. There were some questions about Bill

17 restricting the ability of municipalities to implement green building standards. These are the standards that are applied to all buildings, all developments, so that we can get to a place where we recognize that the climate crisis is real.

This is where Bill 98 follows up. Bill 98 cleans up any suggestion and doubt that Bill 17 had, which was to remove and restrict some powers that municipalities have. So anything that was left over and we were questioning—did that bill go far enough?—the industry came back and said, “No, Bill 17 didn’t go far enough. Now we need Bill 98.”

Bill 98 takes us down this rabbit hole even further. It moves towards restricting the municipalities of Ontario from ensuring that their green building standards are enforced. This is happening once again. It proposes—no, actually, it doesn’t propose. It actually will go ahead and amend and repeal municipal codes and acts to remove “barriers to new homes and infrastructure.” That’s what it says in the background material. But yet, there are no regulations attached to this bill, and once again those regulations that come after the passage of the bill—we do not have clarity on what it will contain, who the government will speak to. And yet I am pretty sure, Speaker, that the government has the regulations pretty much cooked in. It’s only a matter of time. We’ll all find out after Bill 98 is passed.

Bill 98 examines how municipalities are going to further reduce building emissions by setting targets—electric vehicle requirements and more. But essentially what it does is opening the door to make our buildings less efficient, less green, less climate positive. And all of this is being done while the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is introducing this bill without any shred of evidence that it will actually lower the cost of housing in Ontario.

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To set the table for this debate properly, we must take a look at the housing condition that we are in right now. Ontario’s housing shortage is not a result of recent economic headwinds or stalled construction. We must recognize that the housing crisis emerged while we had plenty of construction labour, that the equipment and materials were not being stalled at the border because of tariffs, that we had full use of all that is important to move forward with building in Ontario. But the government has incentivized the type of building and housing that is squandering all of the progress that has been made.

What that means is that the government is proposing and promoting the construction and the development of the least efficient form of housing: urban sprawl. That’s why there’s a fixation on the highways: because they enrich developers in these sort of rural, suburban areas, which, of course, will need far more infrastructure support, far more utility hookups, and it’s going to be more expensive down the road. This is a big problem that will see itself come to fruition as we move ahead.

We know that the housing shortage can be fixed in Ontario if the government actually focused on changing

the rules that are within its power to change. Right now the government is fixated on the perversity of laws that make it much more difficult to build infill. We should be pushing forward to build mid-rise development—yes, we should—multiplexes, as well as ensuring that we can build neighbourhoods that are sustainable by increasing all of that as-of-right and letting developers just pull the development permit, which is something that this government is allergic to.

You can do this by implementing the recommendations in the Mid-Rise Manual, which identifies very clearly that the provincial laws and policies in place right now are the major impediment to the development of mid-rise homes at the scale that is required to address and end Ontario’s housing shortage.

Bill 98 sets about killing green building standards in Ontario. There are about 15 municipalities right now, including the city of Toronto, that have those green building standards. These standards are to elevate the bar of the quality of construction to ensure that we manage our stormwater efficiently; to ensure that, moving forward, we are building buildings in the most efficient and climate-positive way; making sure that EV stations are in place, especially since the government now has reversed its policy once again—they were off EVs, and now they’re back onto EVs. Well, it won’t really make a difference in how many EVs are sold in Ontario if people have no place to plug them in. I live in a high-rise building. It’s very hard for me to get an EV car because I’ve got no place to plug it in, and there are no programs coming to help.

Green building standards in Toronto reduce emissions from buildings by up to 58%. That is some pretty phenomenal work that has taken place in this city, and they did this by introducing the program in 2006 on a voluntary basis. What that meant was that it was working with the sector to develop the green building standards. Not everybody understood the standards, but because they were developing proof of concept with some early adopters and leaders in the industry who said, “I see the value in the green building standards. It’s going to make the buildings more efficient and it’s going to cost less over the year in the function of the building”—plus all the different components that make up the building. Then in 2010, it started to evolve through different iterations and then it kept on evolving.

This is a body of work that has taken 20 years to develop, and that means 20 years—if you know anything about how municipalities work, and some of you are former municipal leaders, you will know that there is a heavy load upfront on consultation, not the way things are done here at Queen’s Park where it’s sort of cloaked in secrecy and the committees go in camera even for routine business like setting a schedule on when you meet next. Municipalities are truly open and subject to open-meeting protocols. Everything they have to do goes out to the public—very different from my experience being here at Queen’s Park.

You actually have rules and policies that were developed with industry partners, with environmental

protections and environmental groups, with local area planning neighbourhoods, with local councils to municipal councils. This took place across 15 municipalities in Ontario, and with the stroke of a pen, Bill 98 is going to take all that work away because you don't believe in climate change.

The reality is the Earth is getting warmer and the greenhouse gas emissions that are coming off of our buildings and our urban built form is getting hotter. There are many buildings that don't have air conditioning, where seniors are stifling to breathe in the summertime. We are going to see more people die because of extreme heat than extreme cold. We are going to see water levels rise. We are going to see the Earth literally burn.

Why would you, in the face of all the science, turn to municipalities who've been on the forefront of a green revolution in building science and building standards and say, "We don't care"? I am just flabbergasted because, Speaker, this government hasn't put nearly as much time into their bill as municipalities have in the development of the green building standards.

Municipalities are trying to improve air quality, reduce the urban heat island effect. They're trying to reduce energy use; they're trying to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from new buildings to make them far more resilient. They're trying to withstand what will be inevitable with the power disruptions, and they're going to encourage the use of renewable and district energy—all of that is obtained through the green building standards, including reducing stormwater runoff, ensuring we have potable water consumption while improving the quality of stormwater draining into Lake Ontario—our glorious Lake Ontario. We need to protect and enhance ecological functions, integrate landscapes and habitats, decrease building-related bird collisions and mortalities, divert household and construction waste from going into landfills. All of that is achieved with Toronto's green building standards as well as the green building standards of the 14 other municipalities that have them in place. Why is there such a race to the bottom? It makes absolutely no sense when the proof of concept is there.

Since 2010, the city of Toronto has approved 4,000 new development applications in our city, and the majority of them are meeting either tier one or a higher-level tier of the green building standards. You should applaud the city of Toronto for leading the way, rather than attacking them for what is truly green innovation. The city of Toronto has won awards and is leading the country, along with Vancouver, when it comes to green building standards.

Clearly, this government is not paying attention to what municipalities are saying, and clearly this government is telling them, paternalistically, that, "Daddy knows best." Daddy doesn't know best—not in this place and especially not when it comes to municipal planning.

I have approved more development applications in my riding of Toronto Centre, I would say, than probably almost everybody combined on the government benches. Take a look at the 200 cranes in the sky, and see how many of them are sitting in Toronto Centre. I've worked with

developers who have come forward, and I know the biggest ones in the country, along with their architectural team who have said, "If the province could only standardize the green building approach across the province, that would make it easier for us and cut the red tape," because they would know what to build as they go from town to city. They were asking us to raise the bar so it becomes standard-wide across Ontario what the green building standards could look like, as opposed to rolling it backward. That's really what the sector was asking for, especially the ones that I was working with.

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We now have a bill before us that is going in the opposite direction of what climate change and what scientists are telling us, what environmentalists and what environmental protection groups are telling us. It's going in the opposite direction of what we are hearing from those who are watching very carefully around the stormwater runoffs and those who are very, very keenly and deeply invested in the quality of our lakes and what's happening there.

I want to speak about land use planning a little bit further, especially around the government's proposal to standardize these official plans so that there is a little cutout of 12 boxes that municipalities get to put themselves in.

I don't oppose standardization as long as it's done in consultation with those municipalities. Of course we should be standardizing a few things, but why race to the bottom? Does anybody actually trust the government to build standardized official plans that are going to be very clear and transparent, with documented outcomes that we know municipalities must achieve with respect to the type of units that have to be built—mixed-income—and how diverse land use must include recreation as well as human care facilities, whether it's libraries or parks? Does anyone really trust this government to build neighbourhoods that are inclusive, dynamic and sustainable? And you want us to trust you with our official plan, when you have ripped open the city of Toronto's official plan several times—our secondary plans—before the ink is even dry? You have torn it all up. I've now seen this with my own eyes since this government got elected in 2018.

The planning departments in major cities are struggling to stay ahead of all the different changes that keep coming out of this province because they're getting whiplash.

Interjection: Chaos.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Absolute chaos. That's not what business needs. Business needs a stable environment to do and plan for their budgets so they can predict and forecast their investments plus their profits. You're making it very unpredictable.

May I just say about the building code review that I support a review of the Ontario Building Code, absolutely. But we must do this with industry in tow. We also must do this with an eye to climate action. So this bill contains that one-two punch: Once, we're going to take away your green building standards, and now we're going to open up the building code and probably further erode whatever sensible measures there are to ensure buildings are safe.

Right now, we had the Heart and Stroke Foundation who came in today, talking about the automatic external defibrillators. Why don't we make that a part of the building code, something that will actually save lives? It's so simple, and they're not asking for a heck of a lot.

When it comes to transit system integration and innovation, it sounds good. But I tell you right now, Speaker, that none of it will mean anything if you don't respect the city of Toronto and, by way of extension, our transit workers, represented by ATU 113, because you cannot put in a one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to transit. Transit has to be at the forefront and connected to development. But if you're going to ignore communities on planning or municipalities on planning, I can't see how you will actually build partnerships with municipalities when it comes to transit.

We have to ensure we get it right. There are many parts of Ontario that have transit deserts. So before you slam down a one-size-fits-all approach, listen to municipalities, work with transit workers and work with those unions, because they're the ones who have to implement the chaos that you will prescribe. And I assure you, Speaker, it will be chaos if they're not at the table.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: The Associate Minister of Housing spoke previously about his experience in a more rural area of Ontario and the importance of having various options with respect to providing services such as water services and sewer services to smaller communities. I thought that those were some thoughtful observations.

I come from an area where there are smaller communities, which municipalities have a great deal of difficulty servicing unless there are more options available. I think that this bill provides options for municipalities to provide services to those smaller communities, where services would not otherwise be economically viable.

I think those options are really important, and I invite the member across to offer whatever observations she would like to offer with regard to that particular topic.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you to the member across for that question. When it comes to growth and development, there's a saying oftentimes in the planning world that growth pays for growth. So if we are going to be allocating new development and intensifying new areas, then the resources that must be in place for municipalities to provide the servicing and the hookups have got to be there, and, of course, water is part of it. But if the province continues to download services on municipalities or reduce their ability to raise money, it's going to be much harder for them to manage and to promote the growth that is required to build up an economy.

So be a partner with municipalities because they are begging you to sit with them at the table to build those solutions together.

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

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I have to say, I am incredibly proud to live in a city like Toronto, where the green building standards have been recognized with international

awards, and where we've shown ambitious climate action—and where ambitious climate action and good city planning can go hand in hand.

Because the truth is that buildings are one of the biggest climate levers that we have, responsible for nearly one fifth of Canadians' emissions, and more than half in a city like Toronto.

That's why it's so troubling to see that the elements of Bill 98 seem to move us in the opposite direction. The people of Parkdale–High Park, including members of Seniors for Climate Action Now and Green 13, want to see us building for the future, not lowering the bar; this is the moment to raise it.

My question to my colleague from Toronto Centre is this: I know that they have been a city councillor. They understand the importance of strong local standards. What would they have liked to see in this bill to truly support municipalities in leading on climate and sustainable development?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you to the member from Parkdale–High Park for her thoughtful question. What would be helpful in this bill is if the government actually worked with municipalities to create a standardized, province-wide green building standard. You can do that through the review of the building code. You can do that by making sure that the site plans stay in the hands of municipalities, because a lot of those green building standards can also fit under site plan review. That requires partnership, and that's what municipalities want from their provincial government. They don't want you to do things without them. They want you to work with them because they are experts at building neighbourhoods, not the province of Ontario.

When you go ahead and do things without the municipalities, you're disrespecting the citizens, the city councils and, most importantly, their professional planning department.

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

MPP Paul Vickers: Every time a housing project is delayed by unnecessary red tape, the cost of that home goes up. That makes it extremely difficult for young people to get into the market. Houses are expensive as it is, with the cost of food and everything else. It's just unneeded and unwanted by first-time home buyers, with prices going up.

Our government is taking action to streamline approvals and reduce those delays. Can the opposition explain why they continue to support processes that make housing more expensive and harder to build?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you to the member for that question. I spent 16 years in the real estate financial sector. Bringing the cost of housing down is a personal passion of mine, because I want Ontarians to have access to decent, safe, affordable housing, whether it's a rental or ownership. That is important, and I think that's what we all should be here working towards.

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If this government was really interested in cutting some cost to homeowners and you want to talk about promoting

home ownership, then why don't you eliminate the provincial land transfer tax? Why do you need the provincial land transfer tax when municipalities are struggling with their revenues? So if you really want to make a difference for homeowners, especially for new home buyers, I dare you to eliminate the provincial land transfer tax.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I really appreciated listening to the remarks from the member for Toronto Centre, given their expertise in municipal planning based on their years on Toronto city council.

Now, this bill is the fourth bill that we have seen in this place in the last four years that takes on an overhaul of municipal planning. Over those four years and those four bills, we have seen absolutely no evidence that what the government has done has had any kind of impact on actually increasing housing starts in Ontario. What we have seen is exactly the opposite: Ontario is at the bottom of all Canadian provinces in terms of housing starts.

So my question is, is there any evidence this time around that limiting the ability of municipalities to manage growth sustainably is going to accelerate housing development in Ontario?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you so much to the member for her question. No, there isn't, really. There's nothing in this bill that will foster the creation of more affordable housing, and quickly. I think that the government has now abandoned its own claims to want to build 1.5 million homes by 2030-31, which is something that I heard a heck of a lot of when I first took my seat in 2022, almost three and a half years ago. So not only has the government missed its own targets, they want you to erase any type of promise that they had that they even had targets.

We are rudderless and directionless as a province without housing targets. And yet, at the same time, they want to tinker with municipalities and their official plans, suggesting that somehow municipalities are responsible for the failure of this government in stimulating and building the policies that are needed to build truly affordable housing here.

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

MPP Tyler Watt: We've heard a lot about the need to build more homes. We hear from young people about how they feel no hope right now, that they'll never actually be able to enter the housing market, so we have to get this right.

I really appreciate the experience that my colleague brings, particularly from the municipal level, and the importance that the province should be working with municipalities when making these decisions. So I ask my colleague, could the member share their perspective on how these changes from this bill might impact local decision-making, and whether this approach truly supports building the right kind of housing for our communities?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much to the member from Nepean for their question. No, the bill

doesn't go that distance. What we are seeing in Ontario is a housing crisis that I don't believe the government has fully understood or grasped. We are struggling under the weight of a cost-of-living crisis in Ontario, and young people in particular are stuck in their parents' basement, are stuck in housing that is inadequate, are stuck living with four or five roommates in very unsafe conditions. I wonder how members across feel about having their daughters living with four or five or six different roommates all at the same time, whether or not you think that they are safe.

The solutions are there, especially when it comes to renters, and that includes making sure that we toughen and strengthen and bring in real rent control. You put in policies that ensure that you protect the rental amount during the interim period of transition through vacancy decontrol. There are so many more things that we can do, but why don't you start by clearing the Landlord and Tenant Board backlog and making sure that tenant rights are upheld in Ontario?

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

Mr. Brian Saunderson: It's a pleasure to rise in the House this afternoon to speak to Bill 98, not only as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, but also as a former deputy mayor and mayor of the town of Collingwood and representative on Simcoe county's county council for eight years.

You know, we come down to Queen's Park and we get into what I call the urban bubble. So I want to give some context to our discussion because when we talk about municipalities, we're talking about 444 municipalities across this great province. And when you look at the population distribution, it's interesting because it kind of corresponds to some of the seating in this House, I'm going to suggest, Madam Speaker. Some 75% of the population of Ontario lives in probably 15 or fewer municipalities in the GTA, Niagara and in the Ottawa region. So that leaves 25% of the population living in over 420 municipalities across the country, and that 25% of our population are the stewards for 80% of Ontario's lands.

When I came down to Queen's Park and introduced myself one day, somebody asked me, "What riding do you represent?" And I said, "I represent Simcoe-Grey. That's on the southern shores of Georgian Bay." And the response was, "Oh, you're from the north." And that is not—I might be north of Highway 89, but I am not north by any stretch of the imagination, Madam Speaker.

In fact, in my role as parliamentary assistant to MMAH, I had the great opportunity to meet Mayor Cheryl Fort of the township of Hornepayne. Hornepayne, for those that don't know, is the geographic centre of Ontario. It's 11 and a half hours north of us here in Queen's Park by car, probably 13 hours from the border to Niagara, which means you have another 13 hours if you could drive to get to the northernmost boundary of this great province. So that's the north, and that shows the expanse of what we represent in this House.

And for 15 years, Madam Speaker, the north, the balance of Ontario outside the GTA, was gravely ignored.

In fact, I think it was a Liberal who uttered, “the north is a wasteland.”

And if you look at the area codes they represent across the way, Madam Speaker: 905, 416, 613. And it’s a similar distribution, to some degree, for the NDP as well; they have some in the north. If you want to see the party that represents every single area code across this great province, it’s on the government’s side. This government represents the area codes across this great province.

And Madam Speaker, if you also look at the financial bandwidth of the three levels of government, it’s important to know this, because what we are seeing in municipalities—and I know this first-hand, and I know all the municipal councillors and mayors on this side of the House know this very well. If you take all the tax dollars collected from the federal government, the provincial government—and we should note that the provincial government hasn’t raised a tax of any type over the last eight years—and the municipalities and make that one tax dollar, the federal government gets 48 cents, the provincial government gets 44 cents and the municipalities get eight cents.

And we’re seeing, particularly since the pandemic, increasing pressures for procurement, whatever level of government you are. Things are becoming unbelievably expensive. There’s really no math to explain the costs of procurement for linear infrastructure and for municipal buildings and for convention centres and any type of community facility that a municipality might be looking at.

So what we have to look out for, and this government is doing that, is working with our partners. Municipalities are a statutory construct of the province under the British North America Act, under section 91 and 92. We work at the most granular and close level with our municipal partners to make sure that we get them what they need across this province to serve Ontarians. And whether the service comes from the municipal government or the province, many aspects of what municipalities deliver come through flow-through funding.

We need to continue to operate those programs, and this government, since taking office, has increased its funding for our municipal partners by 40%. That’s 40% in eight years, whether that’s through OCIF, the community infrastructure plans, our infrastructure programs for water and waste water, for health and safety, for roads and bridges. Those have all increased in the last eight years. And that’s how a collaborative government works. That’s how you work with your municipal partners to get the services delivered on the ground, and this legislation is part of that evolution, Madam Speaker.

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This legislation is part of our concerted effort to work with our municipal partners in all 444 municipalities to make sure to tool them to deliver what they need. And efficiencies are a big part of that. When you’re getting eight cents on the dollar to invest in your community to provide infrastructure, road maintenance, community programs, these are things that you need assistance with. Planning is a key part of that process. Getting homes built

is a large part of what’s motivating this legislation, but the economies and the efficiencies are also a huge part. You can’t do one in a vacuum. It’s all interconnected, and it is also an iterative process. This legislation is part of this government’s track record of doing these things along the way in pieces to attack parts of the problem.

And when I hear from across the way there’s no consultation, I can tell you, Madam Speaker, I’ve sat in MOU meetings where this has been addressed. I’ve sat down with the Ontario planners institute to talk about official plans, to talk about site plan development, to talk about planning processes. Let’s be very clear: The official plan is just the framework. The municipality enacts the bylaws that put that framework into operation. So we’re not kneecapping or restricting the municipalities. What we’re telling them is, official plans have to be scoped so they can be done quickly.

I can tell you from my experience both at the municipality and the county, our official plan amendments—a review should be done every 10 years, and it takes often eight to 10 years at the upper-level planning for a two-tiered government like my own to get an official plan amendment passed. I sat on council when we were talking about official plan amendments that were eight years old. They had two years left in their life cycle to enact all the bylaws underneath them to implement them. That is major slippage. It doesn’t help anybody, and caught in the middle of all that are our residents and the developers that are trying to build the much-needed homes. And if you can’t get traction on those official plan amendments, then you’ve got a major problem. We’re seeing that today: 15 years of inaction from across the way, where they didn’t represent most of the municipalities in Ontario, and here we are.

But I want to spend the rest of my time talking about municipal service delivery corporations. Let’s be very clear: All of our municipal and provincial public assets are owned by the taxpayer. This is not a change in ownership; this is a change in control and operation. And if you’re a municipal government and you’re having to charge DCs to support your new linear infrastructure and you’re having to asset management plan—because any kind of grant application in this province requires a municipality to have an asset management plan, which requires you to have 10% in reserve for the total value of your assets. If you have hundreds of millions of dollars of assets, you’re going to be sitting on, depending on the size of your municipality, \$20 million to \$50 million to \$100 million in assets, and yet we’re going to raise your tax rates. How does the taxpayer understand that?

This is a way to take that asset off the table of a municipality. It takes it off their debt load, which, under the Municipal Act, is 25% of their own source revenues. It takes it off their asset management planning, and it takes it off their need for DCs. So where does it go? It goes to a publicly owned and controlled municipal services corporation, which can enter into long-term financing, which can access financing from large things like pension plans which are looking for a 40-year slow burn return. It shifts

that cost from the municipality so it can direct it into other things that are more immediate. This allows us to break the logjam to allow developers to move forward.

And in the county of Simcoe, where I'm from, there are 76 distinct water treatment facilities and over 55 waste water facilities. They're all controlled and operated by each municipality that is only worried about supplying what they can to their own residents. In my town of Collingwood, we draw our water from Georgian Bay, and when I was there, we ran out of water. We had an interim control bylaw which stalled all development. No building permits were issued except with exemption by council. This is the type of issue we're trying to combat.

We know we have a \$200-billion infrastructure deficit across the province. We're not going to get there by handing out tens of millions of dollars to the municipalities. We have to change the delivery facility. We have to open up bandwidth for the municipalities. We have to control the costs that will be borne as a ratepayer base just like our LDCs, and we have to move forward to allow shovels to get in the ground through planning processes and having the infrastructure available.

And that is why I support Bill 98, Madam Speaker, and I'm proud to be speaking to the House today.

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

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you to the member opposite. We've had so many bills about housing in this Legislature, including the one on the greenbelt that is under RCMP criminal investigation. So it's bill after bill after bill somehow lowering the bar for development, and yet we have the lowest building rate in the country.

My question is, what value does it serve to have the lowest common denominator in terms of building standards and abandoning the great work done by municipalities that have developed the green building standard?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I thank the member opposite for the question. When I was on county council in Simcoe county in 2014, we had initiated a 10-year affordable housing strategy. So to say that all of a sudden the housing crisis has dropped out of the sky is inaccurate. It's been here. It's been with us. We haven't addressed it. The previous Liberal government didn't address it, and this government has been addressing it through all these iterative pieces of legislation.

But to get to your point, we are saying this is where the official plans and the building code—these are the standards. If I tell you to go out and buy a gas car but you want to buy an electric vehicle, you have that choice, and this government is about giving the choice.

I will tell you, in the municipality of Collingwood, through our water allocation framework, we have a green policy, but it doesn't require it for a building permit. There are multiple ways to get at this.

We in Ontario have some of the cleanest energy in Canada. We're 43% below the national average for greenhouse gas emissions. Let's address the real issues here, and that is getting housing, because if you don't have housing

you have food insecurity, you have encampments, mental health and addictions. These are all things we are seeing today, and you want us to focus on something we're already leading the country in.

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

MPP Tyler Watt: In schedule 6, this bill allows the government to compel municipalities to accept non-municipal water and waste water utilities. And while schedule 9 attempts to address these concerns, it still could potentially open the door to restructuring how these services are delivered.

Now, last time I debated the bill, I did ask the minister about this, and I didn't quite get a clear answer, so I just want to ask again. Can the minister state clearly and unequivocally that there will be no form of privatization, direct or indirect, of Ontario's water and waste water services under this legislation?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I want to thank the member opposite for the promotion, but I'm not a minister and I can't give any guarantee on that front.

What I've been very clear about in my comments is, these assets are already owned by the public. They're already owned by the taxpayers. We're not changing ownership; we're changing operation and operational liabilities. The Safe Drinking Water Act still applies. All of those safeguards and liabilities are still there to protect end users in Ontario.

This is their asset. We're trying to get it delivered to them in a way that can service not just a municipality, but whole regions. You're seeing that in Peel region, and I'm hopeful that we'll be rolling it out in other areas very soon.

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

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to the member for your comments this afternoon, and also for your expertise on this topic. I've had many conversations with you, and your knowledge on this is really quite exceptional.

Speaker, I hear from young people and first-time home buyers in my community all the time trying to enter the housing market—my peers—and they're finding fewer attainable options in the communities where they work and grew up.

One of the challenges I've heard about is the inconsistent minimum lot size requirements across municipalities, which can limit housing supply and make it harder to build smaller, more attainable homes.

Our government has been focused on finding ways to increase housing supply and provide a wider range of housing options for Ontarians. Through this legislation, the government is proposing new authorities related to minimum lot sizes.

Can the member please explain how these changes will help increase housing supply and create more attainable housing options across Ontario?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I want to thank the member opposite for his question. As we've heard, trying to make sure that we're creating the right types of housing in our communities is very important. And when we look, we

know that it's not one-size-fits-all across the province. But having said that, we also want to make sure that each municipality understands that there are minimum sizes that need to be looked at in order to get the types of housing we need, to be able to get it on a more affordable scale across the province and to get more shovels in the ground.

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You'll often see developers come to one municipality, and they'll say, "I don't understand why I can't do that here because I could do it across the street in the other municipality." We're trying to get rid of that problem. As the associate minister said today in his comments, we're trying to create a standard baseline so that the rules are the same, consistent throughout the province.

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

MPP Catherine McKenney: I just want to get back to housing, housing affordability, actually building more homes and what that looks like. I always go back to the Ontario Housing Affordability Task Force. They were your own chosen folks who came to you in 2022 and said, "Look, if we need to build more housing, we need to end exclusionary zoning. We need to have as-of-right six-storeys, 11-storeys on main streets." None of this has ever been enacted.

So here we are, eight years later. You've been in government for eight years. I just wonder why you're slowly grinding your way to some minor changes but you're not doing what your own Housing Affordability Task Force has said. I guess my question is, will you finally implement four- and six-storeys as of right so that we actually can get housing built for people who need it in municipalities?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I guess this is a bit of an exercise of "damned if you do, damned if you don't." When we do implement some things, like lot sizes and other things, we get accused of taking away the municipality's independence.

In my municipality of Collingwood, we took our maximum size limit from six storeys to 12. The municipality still had that ability to do it. What we're saying is, these are the minimum standards.

Interjection.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Well, you want the municipalities to have a say, and then you want us to just drop the hammer. When we drop the hammer, you complain about that because we didn't drop it on the thing you wanted. I rest my case.

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

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: I want to thank the member for his participation in the debate this afternoon. One of the things that I find remarkable about this legislation is that it continues a legacy of continual improvement. This is a government that has brought forward legislation almost every single year to continue to remove barriers to growth, to continue to fight against that encroachment of onerous, unnecessary regulation and simultaneously to move

forward with measures that will ensure more housing gets built.

What I see under that is a government and a Premier who believe that better is always possible, that we have to keep working to improve the processes that are there, that we can't rest on the laurels that we have. I wonder if the member can speak a little bit about this, this legacy, this almost lean approach, if you will, that the Premier has taken to continuous improvement and why every single member on this side of the aisle and, I believe, also on the rump there, believes in that and why we can keep doing better going forward.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I want to thank the associate minister for the question. We know that the world is not static. There's no finish line in improvement; it's a constant process.

What we've seen is that the causes of some of our delays in our building processes and getting homes built eight years ago are very different from what they are today. So as the world evolves, we have to continually look at and assess what we've done and how we can improve on that. It's a process that I think is working. It's a process that I said in my comments is iterative, and it's a process that will continue.

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

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I've noticed that this government loves to announce transit projects, cut ribbons, take photos. But transit projects actually run on operating funds, and with the municipalities having so much downloaded onto them, being already stretched thin, it doesn't translate to reliable services.

So my question is, what increase in operating funding will the government provide to municipalities to ensure that the transit is not just built but actually operational, frequent and accessible for the people across the province?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I want to thank the member opposite for her questions. I think one prime example is the Eglinton line. I think the province took that over from the city of Toronto, so that's one change there where we're accepting responsibility. We're accepting responsibility for the Gardiner and for other key linkages.

We are also funding through our municipal partnership fund, and in rural areas, through the gas tax. I know in Simcoe county, through the gas tax, they established a Simcoe LINX bus route, and Collingwood has its own internal bus route, so again—

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm so sad I only have 10 minutes to talk about this legislation. It's a perfect example of the chaos that this government has created in Ontario and thus has undermined housing. We can all agree on one thing, I think: that if you are getting housing right, a lot of other things fall into place. Housing is health care. Housing is key to the economy. Housing is a justice issue. But for some reason, this government has had blinders on for now eight years on what is actually needed.

Bill 98, Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act—whoever writes the titles for these

bills, they get an A+, I have to say. It's a good title. It misses the mark on so many levels. Just high level, though, Ontario's Bill 98 is coming under good criticism, I would say, grounded in evidence and research from the communities.

It faces criticism for overriding municipal planning authority. That has actually been a major theme for this government as well. It strips green building standards, including, unbelievably, EV charging requirements. It limits local powers to enforce sustainable development in favour of rapid development, which has proven, if you're looking at Waterloo region, to be a complete and utter disaster.

Critics have argued that it favours developers. Actually, we just heard this confirmed by the associate minister, who, when he was questioned about the consultation on Bill 98, said, "Listen, I met with tons and tons of developers." Yes, we know. We know who you're meeting with. We know who has your ear. It certainly isn't municipalities and it certainly isn't the advocates who actually know how to build housing.

This bill definitely will lead to higher emissions. I've heard some criticism about, "We're doing good enough." That's this government's mantra: good enough for right now, I guess. Creating higher emissions, reducing environmental resilience and potential chaos in transit planning—it's basically everything that you know you shouldn't be doing but that you can't resist doing.

The environmental and energy concerns: For instance, this removes sustainable design requirements in 2026 from construction and eliminates the requirement for municipalities to include climate goals in official plans. You do listen to the insurance sector, and the insurance sector is begging you—begging you—to actually do something on the climate change file because it is so costly. But this government isn't even listening to the insurance sector these days.

This includes removing mandatory EV charging infrastructure requirements in new developments. I just want to tell you, there are so many tradespeople out there in Ontario who have seen what the future is. The future is electric, and EV charging stations are a part of that. In fact, this government has put a good deal of money towards electric vehicles while forgetting the needed infrastructure to actually ensure that that investment comes into Ontario.

My own son is an electrician by trade. The skilled trades right now are hurting in Ontario because we aren't building any housing. Removing this requirement for EV charging stations makes zero sense and denies tradespeople from actually having opportunities to support themselves. And while your knuckles drag along, the rest of the world recognizes that EV infrastructure is needed for a strong economy.

This bill is also, for good reason, criticized for reducing municipal powers. It reduces the ability of municipalities to set their own development standards, taking away local control over planning. The government is literally a walking contradiction. At one point they say, "Rural municipalities, they're not the same as city"—yes, we

know that. That's why they develop their own strategies. Toronto is different than Simcoe; Waterloo is different than Ottawa. That is why those duly elected representatives have the rights and the responsibility to tailor their sustainable plans in those communities.

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This Bill 98 comes under criticism from around transit and urban planning risks. The legislation mandates a unified transit fare system in the GTHA as determined by the provincial minister—because that's going so well; transportation is going so well in Ontario—which could disrupt existing local transit agency budgets and fare-capping programs.

And finally, there is a focus on development over quality. While aiming to increase housing supply, opponents argue it weakens long-term resilience and sustainability standards, prioritizing speed over energy efficiency and climate safety.

I raise these high-level issues to the government because if you look at what's happening in Waterloo region right now—the government called on Waterloo region to grow. They divided the planning infrastructure and planning oversight to the seven municipalities and then the regional level. Everybody got busy trying to build, and then they realized that they didn't have enough water because there was no coordination on water infrastructure.

This government has consistently and systematically been underfunding key infrastructure to build, to grow. The Places to Grow legislation, which was brought in under the former Liberal government, caused Waterloo to go up—great; that's the sustainable way. However, when you changed the whole planning infrastructure, you left these municipalities without a comprehensive view on water infrastructure. And do you know what you can't do? You can't grow the economy, you can't be open for business if you don't have water, Madam Speaker. And we are on an aquifer. Somebody in the ministry didn't realize we don't have a lake to draw water from, so we are completely and utterly stalled right now. We are not building anything. No development permits are happening in a housing crisis.

What this government has become very adept at, I will say, is creating chaos. One only has to review the Peel, Brampton and Caledon decision that caused those municipalities to lose ground on sustainable planning, but also, they lost staff. They lost their ability to retain the talent. My colleague talked about how municipalities are dealing with the onslaught—the assault, really—on municipalities from a planning perspective. We're hiring lawyers and more planners just to deal with the messiness of this government. And one has to wonder, what is driving this process because if you truly cared about housing, the solutions are in your own housing task force, which you paid for, which we paid for.

Which leads me to the lack of consultation with municipalities. I really am worried about this upcoming municipal election, Madam Speaker, because this government has shown their cards. They are incredibly disrespectful to the 444 municipalities. Just last Thursday, as

they are wont to do, they dropped a piece of legislation appointing regional chairs. Waterloo is one of them. This came with no consultation whatsoever.

Essentially, I have to say this is taxation without representation. I do wonder—don't you think that's what it is? The Monty Python 51st anniversary happened, and one of the skits is, "Well, I'm the king" and then the peasants say, "Well, I didn't vote for you." We're going to have to get "no kings" rallies going in this province because for some reason this Premier is so—he has this focus and fetish with the city of Toronto. And maybe he wants to be the mayor of Toronto. Please, go. Please do it. Go. Please be free—

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: No, no.

Ms. Catherine Fife: No? You just said no?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: No, no. It already happened.

Ms. Catherine Fife: But the chaos that is Bill 98 is basically a report card on how this government interacts from a governance perspective. You think that you know best when you don't. There are solutions before you that you do not apply. Housing levels right now are at 1955 levels. It's almost completely stalled—well, it is completely stalled in Waterloo, Madam Speaker.

So please—there is this adage in social work. It's called, "Do no harm." Even if you try to do no harm, I would be happy at this point because the level of dysfunction that is downloaded from this place by this government to municipalities is atrocious. It is undermining our democracy. It is compromising the ability for investors to look at Ontario as a reliable place to live, to work and to invest in. Please, do no harm.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: The member was speaking, and she was talking about the inability of various municipalities to co-operate with one another in order to formulate a coordinated plan with regard to the delivery of water infrastructure. At least, that's what I understood her to say.

If that is the case, it might also be true that some municipalities might have the same difficulty coordinating their delivery with other things as well.

Does it not stand to reason, then, that in certain circumstances it might be necessary for the province to step in and make that coordination happen, in other words, for the province to actually take the action necessary to coordinate those services so that those services do, in fact, get delivered, especially in view of the very large amounts of money that this government is transferring to municipalities in order to deliver those services under the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund and under the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I appreciate the question because it gives me an opportunity to clarify. The seven municipalities were planning in a very coordinated manner for a number of years, until you introduced legislation which gave each one of those municipalities the autonomy to do whatever it wanted. So each municipality started spending.

They started moving forward around housing, only to find out that the key resource, which is water, was insufficient.

Also, there is a long-standing pattern of downloading services to municipalities, which has left them cash-strapped. AMO just put out a report last week saying the very same thing: a \$4-billion in-year deficit for service delivery. Municipalities cannot build this key infrastructure off the local property tax base. If you want them to grow, you have to have a transparent form to fund that growth.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to commend my colleague the member for Waterloo on her comments. She points out that there is really nothing in this bill that is going to accelerate housing starts in Ontario to the extent that the people of this province would be able to access affordable housing.

One of the pieces that's missing from this bill is the legalization of missing middle housing options as of right for all neighbourhoods. Of course, those are the triplexes, the laneway suites, the duplexes and townhomes, etc. that provide families with affordable options.

I wondered if the member could comment on how the government expects to solve the housing crisis when they refuse to take action, like legalizing missing middle as of right.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from London West for the question. Listen, your own task force recommended missing middle housing options as of right in all neighbourhoods. That is where we should be focused.

This model of "growth will pay for growth" has proven to not be effective. It is more expensive. You do not have the infrastructure dollars to grow that way.

So your own housing task force looked at the money, looked at where the return on investment is for this province. Yet the Premier himself is ideologically opposed to this infill housing.

In Waterloo region, Madam Speaker—one of the wealthiest ridings, I think, in Ontario—I'm preparing a pamphlet to help people learn how to live in their cars: where to charge their cellphones, where to get a shower, where to get food. This is untenable—untenable. There are no housing options. Do something that your own housing task force recommended, and that is the missing middle.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: I think it's fair to say that the dream of many Ontarians, once they pursue their education and find a soulmate and start to talk about and think about family formation, is to buy a home and enjoy the benefits of home ownership. Obviously, we've seen the ability for home ownership in Ontario decline.

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The NDP proposes allowing cities to build whatever they want whenever they want however they want, and somehow a 1,200-square-foot concrete box downtown is

going to be the dream, and they have no plan to support a suburban single-family home construction.

So I'm wondering, why is the member okay subsidizing cheaper affordable units in downtowns instead of investing in infrastructure that would allow suburban communities to grow and actually provide the homes that families want to grow into?

Ms. Catherine Fife: You know, Madam Speaker, I don't know what to do with that. I mean, I'll send over our affordable homes strategy for your reading pleasure.

Listen, this is a government, just like the Liberals before them, that continues to rely solely on the private market for the delivery of all new housing, as if the collapse of housing starts in Ontario can finally be reversed and the government can more than double the rate of home construction in Ontario with just a few more incentives and regulatory tweaks and tax cuts. Your model is not working, just like the previous government's was not working.

However, the not-for-profit sector is ready to be part of the solution. If you wanted to create good local jobs in communities, if you wanted to support those skilled trades jobs, you would fast-track the applications, which are about a thousand in the minister's office, for not-for-profit, affordable, attainable housing right now—if you cared about housing, which clearly you do not, and neither do the Liberals.

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: As parents of two growing children, Madam Speaker, something which my wife and I always believe: that our kids do well but stay close to where we live. But in many rural and growing communities across Ontario, it is sometimes difficult because the access to water and waste water infrastructure remains one of the biggest barriers for new housing development. Even when there is available land, strong local demand, they can't move forward because there's no servicing infrastructure. That is why this government is working to find innovative solutions to help those communities.

So my question is very simple, to the member from Waterloo: Do you support this framework that will help unlock new housing opportunities in rural and growing communities by building the communal water and waste water systems?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's interesting that you ask me that question because the region of Waterloo, as I've already mentioned, it is a crisis. It's unprecedented that this has ever happened. They have gone cap in hand to the government, who has yet to bring forward the funding to update the Mannheim water infrastructure. Why did that infrastructure fall into disrepair? Because there wasn't the maintenance funding. So if any funding formula that came from this government recognized that once you do invest in infrastructure, then you should maintain it—it is an investment in the future. But does Bill 98 address that? No, it does not.

At the end of the day, you're looking for a cookie-cutter approach to municipalities. Every municipality is differ-

ent. We've actually heard it from your own members from rural to urban to really northern communities, so that has to be taken into place. Having only 12 models or options for designated planning will not meet the moment that Ontario is in right now, so it misses the mark.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you to the member for her very thoughtful presentation. The primary focus of the Ontario building code, which is obviously a very important set of bylaws and regulations that promote public health, safety, fire protection, ensuring the structural integrity of buildings, whether it's renovation or new construction—all of that is to ensure Ontarians' safety. It promotes the applications around accessibility and green building standards and so forth.

Do you think the government in this bill, Bill 98, is proposing that we exempt Metrolinx because they have instilled so much confidence in the public for the quality of their construction of transit materials and transit assets? Do you think the government is wise to exempt any agency from ensuring that buildings are built safely?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I only have 14 seconds to answer that very important question. All I'll say is that, in Waterloo, Metrolinx is now in a conflict with an encampment right beside the rail station, which is from 1902. Something needs to give in this situation, but nobody trusts Metrolinx and nobody trusts this government.

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

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I'm pleased to rise today to speak to the Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act and to the important work that our government is undertaking to ensure that Ontario continues to grow as a strong, competitive and a connected province.

Now, this legislation reflects a clear and coordinated approach to addressing some of the most pressing challenges that are facing Ontarians today. It recognizes that housing, infrastructure and transportation are not separate issues, but they need to be addressed. They can't be addressed in isolation. They have to instead be deeply interconnected so that they're part of a broader system that must function effectively so that our province can succeed. We cannot build homes without infrastructure, and we cannot grow our communities without transportation. And we cannot support a strong economy without ensuring that people and goods can move efficiently across this great province of ours. That is why this legislation takes a comprehensive and province-wide approach to how Ontario builds.

Speaker, our government has been very clear from the very beginning: It takes way too long and it costs way too much to build in Ontario, and we are taking decisive action to fix that. For too long, the system has been slowed by duplication, unnecessary complexity and outdated processes that have not kept up with the pace of realities of our growing province. Municipalities, builders and families, even, have told us the same thing: Approvals take too

long, requirements are unclear and costs continue to rise before construction even starts. When that happens, fewer homes are built. When fewer homes get built, affordability worsens. And when affordability worsens, it becomes harder for people across this province to find a place to call home. That is why our government has taken consistent and deliberate action to address these challenges.

We have already introduced reforms to reduce red tape, streamline approvals and improve coordination between different levels of planning. We have made investments in infrastructure that enable housing. We have worked with partners across the province to ensure that growth can be supported in a sustainable and responsive way. But we know there's more work to be done, and this legislation builds on that progress.

I'm going to focus most of my remarks, because I don't have a lot of time today, on how housing cannot be built without infrastructure. Water, waste water, roads and community services are all essential components of housing development, and without them, even the most well-planned projects cannot proceed. That is why this legislation places a strong emphasis on housing-enabling infrastructure. One of the most important and innovative elements of this legislation is our approach to water and waste water servicing.

I'll go straight to it, Madam Speaker. Less than six months ago, I stood here in this chamber, and I tabled my private member's motion. In fact, it was tabled on October 20, 2025, and it was debated on November 19, 2025.

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"That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should continue to adopt modernized measures to streamline the development of communal water/waste water systems and permissions for distributed modular off-grid water/waste water treatment facilities in small and rural communities, including those found in York region"—I know it's a mouthful. However, I am proud to say, Madam Speaker, that this motion was passed unanimously by all parliamentarians in this Legislature.

Now, I'm proud of this because, as part of my remarks during the ballot debate, I had noted that critical infrastructure was playing a key role in whether a housing development could move forward. Critical infrastructure like the availability of waste water systems can either allow communities to grow, or they can bring the growth of communities to a halt. These systems can also gravely impact the cost of the home. Depending on the type of home and how the home is connected to the critical infrastructure, it could add upwards of \$60,000-plus to the cost of a single home.

Well, Madam Speaker, I'd like to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing as well as the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks for their leadership. They heard this motion and the overwhelming support of this chamber and by this Legislature and they took action. That is why we are advancing the use of communal water and waste water systems. These systems provide a practical and effective solution to enable development in areas that would otherwise remain

constrained. They typically serve smaller, more rural and unserved areas, and they're often used as an interim solution that allows communities to grow while municipal infrastructure expands over time.

Now, Madam Speaker, these communal waste water systems have been used successfully in jurisdictions across Europe and elsewhere, providing safe, reliable servicing to communities, and there's so much to say about these. I heard from the municipality of York region; I heard from the town of East Gwillimbury, which has a small presence in my riding; and I've also heard from the town of Whitchurch-Stouffville and Uxbridge: Waste water capacity remains the single biggest constraint on new housing development.

While we in northern York region await the long-delayed York Durham sewage system expansion, which is a long-term infrastructure project that will be at a very high cost—and it's going to take more than 10-plus years to get this done in the best-case scenario—there is help. There's an opportunity. And this, Madam Speaker, was my impetus for my motion. Modular or communal waste water systems are a viable, proven solution that exists—better yet, Ontario-based technology. It's scalable and it can be deployed quickly, making it an ideal potential to unleash building solutions for small and rural municipalities, including those found in York region.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to just quote the engineer with Newterra Ltd., Brad Gaffney out of Brockville, Ontario: "Across Ontario, prefabricated membrane technologies already deliver equal or better environmental protection than large municipal plants at a fraction of the cost, footprint and the time to deploy. The barrier is regulatory approvals. A clearer, faster approval path will let rural building homes roll out years from now while upholding Ontario's highest water protections. By streamlining proven options such as membrane bioreactor treatment and modern drinking water trains, communities can choose compact systems that support financially responsible growth and unlock private investment to help grow rural Ontario."

Interjections.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Yes.

Now, imagine—and I can't believe I've only got a minute left—imagine the opportunity to build a variety of attainable housing while creating greater food production and vegetation. I've seen plants, Madam Speaker, and these plants can have phosphorus reduction and the removal of pharmaceutical microplastics in Lake Simcoe or any of our fresh lakes in this great province of ours.

We can achieve the goals of the LSPP through innovation, and we can realize long-term economic growth and minimize long-term overhead costs to the municipalities. We can create deeply sustainable communities. We can have carbon capture and sequestering through regenerative urban agriculture systems. Just imagine. We can have flood and erosion control and protecting water and aquatic ecosystems all at the same time.

Well, Madam Speaker, now that I've got to round this off, all I can say is we're building a stronger Ontario by ensuring that our communities—

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much to my friend and member across. Thank you for your presentation.

I'm very curious about schedule 4 in the bill, especially the schedule that speaks about the creation of a Fare Alignment and Seamless Transit Act. It seems that it will allow the minister to set priority routes and establish fare structure in transit areas such as Toronto, Hamilton, Durham, Halton, Peel, York and just about any other prescribed area that the minister would like. I'm curious to know what this consultation with the transit operators on the ground and the municipalities will look like, because obviously each one will be different. The government will be responsible for making it work. Otherwise, this will just be another boondoggle in the waiting.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the member for the question on transit project approvals. I appreciate that.

You know that our government does understand that transit infrastructure is housing infrastructure. If we do want to complete communities and support housing growth, we must ensure that transit projects can be delivered quickly and efficiently, and they've got to be done at a reasonable cost.

That being said, currently, provincial transit projects often require multiple layers of municipal approvals and technical reviews, including building permit processes that were not designed for large-scale provincial transit infrastructure. That's what we're talking about. We're doing a lot of these large transit infrastructures.

All I can say is this is part of our broader plan to reduce the delays, lower the costs, and build the infrastructure Ontario needs to support our growing community.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: The government has finally, after almost a year, taken the Ontario Liberal idea of removing HST from new homes, which I congratulate the government for.

One of the unforeseen consequences of that particular promise is that families who already have homes under contract, but for which the home is not closed, don't qualify for that. So they might have the home under contract, it might close six or nine months from now, and they are going to lose out on the possibility of potentially saving this \$130,000 or whatever the upside is.

I'm wondering if you think your government should work with Ottawa to close that loophole so all families who move into a new home this year benefit from the HST reduction on new homes.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the member for Orléans for his question.

We're very excited about the deal that was made with Prime Minister Carney and his government. I know that we want to do more for Ontario. What I can say is, that HST, that has been done, and this new bill that we're talking about right now, we're looking at more things that

we could do on reducing the cost—for example, the developmental charges. Because at the end of the day—something that I just spoke about with the waste water systems. Right now, if developers have to pay for certain waste water systems—and I'm using my area specifically—we're never going to get it done because that project would have come in at more than \$2 billion. So we have to find ways on how to come up with other systems to reduce the cost of a home.

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The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

MPP Paul Vickers: Speaker, through you to the member for Newmarket–Aurora: In many rural areas and growing communities like yours across Ontario, access to water and waste water infrastructure remains one of the biggest barriers to new housing development. Even where there is available land and strong local demand for housing, projects cannot move forward without servicing infrastructure.

Our government has been working to find innovative solutions that allow new communities to be built while ensuring public health and environmental protections remain strong. Through this legislation, the government is proposing a new framework for communal water and waste water systems.

Can the member explain how this framework will help unlock new housing opportunities in rural and growing communities across Ontario?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I appreciate the question from my colleague the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. What a great question. This goes back to why I put that motion forward last year in 2025, because communal waste water systems—as I said, these are great systems that can do better than even what municipal systems are doing.

So what this allows us to do, this legislation, is we are proposing to create a clear regulatory framework—and this is critical—for these communal water and waste water systems that will include strong oversight, safeguards and provincial backstops. This is an important part of it as well, too, because something that I heard from stakeholders and different people when we're talking about communal waste water systems is, like, what's the backstop? What happens if a private entity takes on this new waste water system? What happens?

This legislation is the framework that we are hammering out. We're looking at a financially sustainable and properly maintained system. This is what this framework will give us.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): The member for London North Centre.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank my friend from Newmarket–Aurora for her presentation on Bill 98, Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act.

I want to take the member back to May 12, 2022, and this is from the Conservative's own website. It says, "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.”

Well, Speaker, we all know that the PC government did indeed win that election that happened one month after this posting, which is still available on their website, and yet GO service was cancelled to London, to my community. When it was set up, it was a four-hour trip, which is ridiculous considering it takes two to two and a half hours to drive. But the \$160 million that this government promised that they would spend on this line was to improve the speed and improve the frequency, yet it was barely a month after that 2022 election that that promise suddenly vanished.

You know, you shouldn't say something unless you have the intention of making it come true, and I cannot, for the life of me, fathom why this government would claim it is going to spend \$160 million on GO service to London and then break that promise.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the member for the question. I think it's a good question because our government is spending upwards of \$30 billion on transit systems, so when we think about that type of investment, we also have to take into consideration the commuter person themselves. When we think of that commuter, things like the One Fare program—that has been phenomenal for commuters in the GTA.

What we are looking at is doing the One Fare 2.0, and what we want to do there is look at expanding to have single fares across municipalities, because doesn't that make sense? If somebody lives in Peel but they work in York, they should be able to get to work on the transit system very smoothly. This is what our investments are doing.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: I appreciate the member's comments about saving money for those who live in York and Peel and maybe commute into Toronto etc. I think that's a good program; I support it.

I'm wondering if you would support the government taking initiative and intervening to, say, allow residents of Rockland to be able to use public transit from Rockland and, as they enter Ottawa, have a reduced fare for entering Ottawa on public transit, and similarly from Kemptville in the south end or Arnprior in the west end of Ottawa. When might the government take such initiative?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you again to the member from Orléans for the question. I think it's a great question because, at the end of the day, we are going to continue to work with municipalities in Ottawa, in Windsor, in London, in Toronto, the GTA—everywhere—to find the best solutions for their commuters.

This is our plan, and that's our commitment as a government, to work with our municipalities and find the right solutions for their areas.

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

Mr. Guy Bourguin: It's always a pleasure to stand in the House and represent the folks from Mushkegowuk—

James Bay, my riding. To the people that wonder how far James Bay is from here, it's a nine-hour drive—nine and a half hours or 10 hours if the roads are bad.

Bill 98 proposes a number of changes to transportation, housing and infrastructure across Ontario. While much attention focuses on urban transit, housing and Metrolinx projects, there are serious gaps when it comes to the northern communities.

When you look at northern Ontario, the MV Niska 1 ferry connects Moose Factory Island to Moosonee on the mainland. For residents in the region, the ferry is the only link between the communities. It's essential for accessing health care, work, education, among other basic services, yet a one-way adult fare costs \$9.20 to cross just 2.7 kilometres.

By contrast, for the Glenora ferry, owned by the province, operates year-round, the fees there are free of charge despite alternative routes existing and bridges over the water.

In Moose Factory, we don't have bridges. There's the ferry. There's a helicopter when the river is freezing up, a water taxi and then there's the ferry. This represents a fundamental inequity. Northern residents are forced to pay for essential travel, while southern residents benefit from free services.

Bill 98 proposes a one-fare program. The government is claiming their goal with this bill is to integrate transit and reduce costs.

While this is positive for urban communities in southern Ontario, these benefits do not extend to northern communities. Northerners lack integrated transit networks. For northerners, access to transportation is access to health care and access to education. Transportation is too often a barrier for northerners to access essential services.

To see a ferry in southern Ontario be maintained publicly with free ridership while bridges exist for residents to take alternative routes while the Moose River ferry charges a fee with the only alternative transportation, like I said, being the helicopter or water taxi, is just one example of the two-tier system in which northerners pay more for less. To see legislation claiming to connect transportation networks and reduce fares that does not do anything to improve highways, rails or transit services north of North Bay is just the latest example of this government's failure to understand the concerns of northerners.

1550

Bill 98 should be amended to ensure essential transportation links in northern Ontario are affordable, particularly when they are the only way to access health care, work or education.

I guess we have a short time. I just want to mention that today we had people from the north who lost family members. When we talk about transportation, roads for us are the link. They're essential. We don't have the four-lanes. In the bill they talk about two people driving on lanes and how they're going to make it accessible. We can only dream about that, Speaker. We can only dream. We

only have one-, two-lane highways. We're asking for passing lanes to improve our highways. Yet we are seeing in this bill talk about how we're going to give access to one passenger to be able to go on two passing lanes. Northerners can only dream of that.

Au-delà des investissements et des infrastructures, ce projet de loi propose des changements réglementaires introduisant des délais d'attente obligatoires après l'obtention d'un permis de classe G pour pouvoir appliquer pour un permis de classe A. Ce changement a été soulevé par les experts de l'industrie du camionnage, ainsi que par les citoyens du Nord, qui voient de plus en plus de camionneurs sans expérience adéquate sur nos routes, ce qui crée des inquiétudes pour ceux qui doivent partager ces routes avec les véhicules lourds. Alors nous sommes heureux de voir que ce gouvernement agit enfin sur une des questions.

Néanmoins, cette approche demeure limitée dans la mesure où elle vise à lutter contre la fraude que nous constatons non seulement au niveau individuel, mais aussi au sein de nos institutions. Car, on le sait, la fraude peut exister à grande échelle dans toutes les institutions.

Les écoles qui administrent les examens et la formation des camionneurs ne sont pas suffisamment inspectées par le ministère des Transports ou le ministère des Collèges et Universités. Les données les plus récentes, depuis 2023, montrent qu'il n'y avait que huit inspecteurs responsables de vérifier plus de 230 écoles de formation de camionneurs, ainsi que plus de 700 écoles de métiers spécialisés.

Si ce gouvernement veut réellement réduire et éradiquer la fraude dans l'ensemble de l'industrie du camionnage, il doit s'assurer que les institutions respectent les normes établies par le gouvernement.

On a vu les limites de cette approche centrée sur l'individu lorsque le ministère a suspendu 185 permis soupçonnés d'avoir été obtenus frauduleusement. C'est une bonne première étape, mais il doit y avoir un suivi. Une enquête concernant les lieux où ces individus ont reçu leur formation devrait être menée afin de déterminer s'il existe certaines écoles présentant des taux de fraude élevés. Il faut également assurer un suivi de ces données sous forme d'inspections effectuées par des inspecteurs qualifiés et retirer les accréditations des écoles frauduleuses lorsque nécessaire.

Mais comme je l'ai dit, avec seulement huit inspecteurs pour plus de 230 écoles de camionnage, sans mentionner les 700 autres écoles pour des métiers spécialisés, cela semble difficile, voire impossible.

En même temps, le ministère continue de retarder la date à laquelle les écoles de camionnage doivent prouver leur conformité au curriculum de la formation obligatoire de niveau débutant. À deux reprises, le ministère a reporté cette échéance. Initialement prévue pour le 1^{er} juillet 2025, elle a ensuite été repoussée au 1^{er} octobre 2025, puis de nouveau au 1^{er} juillet 2026.

Pourquoi le ministre continue-t-il de repousser cette date quand, sur nos routes, on voit le danger, on voit les camionneurs qui ne sont pas certifiés?

Quand on pense à un camionneur qui a des licences et qui n'est même pas capable de reculer ou de reculer un camion de poids lourd—qu'est-ce qu'il fait avec des licences? Qu'est-ce qu'il fait de conduire sur nos routes et de mettre nos vies en danger?

Le projet de loi 98 devrait inclure des mesures pour obliger les écoles de camionnage à respecter les règles du ministère afin de renforcer la sécurité routière et l'intégrité du système de délivrance des permis pour les camionneurs.

The bill also allows rideshare services along the Northlander corridor, which is a step forward. But again, I want to remind the government that Ontario continues past Timmins, even though the Northlander doesn't. Communities such as Kapuskasing and Hearst remain without improved intercommunity mobile options, reinforcing existing gaps in transportation access across the north.

Similarly, proposals to expand access to high-occupancy-vehicle lanes to single-passenger vehicles outside peak hours are irrelevant in the north, where highways are one lane in each direction. Like I said, we can only dream of having a highway that we can talk about this type of passing lane. These measures reflect southern commuting realities, not northern transportation conditions.

Northerners continue to advocate for a "2+1" highway model and ideally long-term twinning projects along Highways 11 and 17. These corridors are seeing increasing traffic volume, including heavy commercial traffic, yet in many sections there are still no passing lanes or safe opportunities for overtaking vehicles.

Taken together, this bill reflects what northerners have long experienced: a two-tiered transportation system in this province.

I'll stop it there, because I'm running out of time, Speaker.

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

M. Anthony Leardi: J'aimerais poser une question sur les sociétés municipales. Il me semble que, peut-être, le député a une circonscription qui est semblable à la mienne où il y a des petites municipalités qui peuvent, peut-être, profiter du fait que nous avons des sociétés municipales qui peuvent livrer des services—par exemple, de l'eau—d'une façon nouvelle et innovative.

J'aimerais demander au député s'il pense que ces municipalités dans sa circonscription peuvent profiter de ce projet de loi?

M. Guy Bourgoin: Merci pour la question. Le problème qu'on a dans les petites municipalités du Nord, c'est qu'elles sont tellement endettées. Vous n'avez rien qu'à regarder la municipalité de Fauquier, qui a été mise sous tutelle. C'est beau dire qu'elles peuvent avoir de l'aide pour être capable de développer, mais elles n'ont même pas l'argent pour maintenir leur propres infrastructures actuellement.

On a entendu même le maire de Kapuskasing qui dit que les municipalités ne peuvent pas appliquer des charges additionnelles contre le développement parce qu'elles n'en chargent pas déjà. C'est bon pour des grosses

communautés, ce qu'ils appellent les « development charges », mais dans le Nord, on ne peut pas le faire parce qu'on n'en charge déjà pas.

Mais si le gouvernement peut les aider du mieux—mais la plupart de ces municipalités sont tellement endettées qu'elles ont de la misère. C'est pour ça qu'elles vous demandent de reprendre vos responsabilités, comme la police provinciale, comme « DSSAB », comme d'autres charges qui devraient appartenir à la province. Cette responsabilité nous revient. Enlevons ça à la municipalité, reprenons ce qui nous appartient, puis les municipalités vont avoir beaucoup plus de liberté financière pour faire ce qu'elles ont besoin de faire pour maintenir les services dans nos communautés.

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

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to my colleague from Mushkegowuk—James Bay. Speaker, while he was speaking, he talked about how the highways are the way to get to hospitals and to schools. I was thinking where we are, at Queen's Park, and just going down University to get to the hospital, how different it is than northern Ontario, that we not only have four-lane divided roads on a street in Toronto, let alone the highway; in some areas of that road, you have four lanes on one side because of the right and left turning lanes.

Can you maybe expand so our colleagues here who haven't been to northern Ontario—I want to thank you and our other colleagues for doing that trip to Manitoba and back—what does it mean for people in northern Ontario, who, for hours and hours, miles and miles, have a two-lane divided road, busy with transports in all kinds of weather conditions?

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: We wish we had these four lanes or five lanes or six lanes, but we only have two lanes, with very little passing lanes, like I mentioned. If you put winter conditions like we had this winter, there's so much winter that now the road is getting narrower and narrower, to a point that it was right to the white line, so there were no more—what do you call these where you can stop on the side of the highway?

MPP Jamie West: Shoulder.

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: The shoulders didn't exist anymore because there was too much snow; they couldn't put the snow anywhere else.

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So imagine if you come up, and there are two trucks—that we've seen very often—passing when they shouldn't be passing. Where do you go? Where do you go? You better be good at praying, because I can tell you we've seen it over and over. Sometimes they just hit the ditch, and hopefully they can get up and out of the ditch, but we've also seen that they've been thrown back in, and we've seen what happens then—people die.

So we only have two lanes, and that's the reality we have up north. We think that, no, it's divided right across—it's not; it stops in North Bay. Everything else is two-way lanes and then it starts back on the other side of Nipigon. Besides that, they're two lanes, isolated

highways, many times with no Internet—you cannot reach anybody; you're isolated. So if you're unlucky to hit or be stuck or hit a vehicle or be in an accident between that, it can be very long before you get help. So realize that when you go up north.

We'd love to have these—that's why we're fighting for 2+1, and that's why we're fighting for divided highways and that's why we're fighting to make sure that we get all these nice highways that are acceptable for us up north like the rest of the south: because we need highways. And these are Trans-Canada Highways. They're a bottleneck right now for this province, and when the road stops for two, three days, it's unacceptable. We're losing a lot of economic value.

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

M. Stephen Blais: Merci pour votre présentation. On sait que le gouvernement a toujours beaucoup d'argent et beaucoup d'attention pour Toronto et le grand Toronto. On l'a vu dans ce projet de loi. Mais de petites communautés comme Rockland n'ont aucun transport en commun. La vaste majorité des résidents travaille à Ottawa, et il n'y a aucun service de transport en commun. Le gouvernement n'a fait rien pour améliorer cette situation pour les résidents de Rockland et des autres petites communautés.

Si tu peux donner quelques pensées de la façon que le gouvernement ignore les petites communautés, nos communautés rurales et les besoins des résidents dans le transport en commun.

M. Guy Bourgoin: Bien sûr, parce-que très souvent ce qu'on entend des petites communautés, des régionales, surtout : « Est-ce qu'on est des citoyens de deuxième classe? » Puis pourtant, quand on regarde les régions, les ressources viennent toutes des régions. Que ce soit la nourriture, que ce soit l'or ou que ce soit le bois d'oeuvre, tout vient des régions du Nord pour soutenir l'économie du Sud, et puis pourtant on est l'enfant pauvre. Et puis, pourtant on ne voit pas les investissements dont on a besoin.

Tu sais, c'est certain qu'à Rockland, vous êtes proches d'Ottawa, mais plus que tu t'éloignes des grands centres, plus les services sont réduits. Ça veut dire qu'il faut se déplacer encore plus. Ça veut dire qu'on se met dans des situations de danger à toutes les fois.

Les enfants qui vont jouer—j'ai des assistantes dont les enfants sont jeunes, et ils vont jouer au hockey dans le coin du ministre des Transports, qui est Brampton. C'est huit heures pour aller jouer à un tournoi de hockey avec leurs enfants. Imagine-toi, quand ils prennent la route. Ils sont obligés de partir des fois deux jours d'avance pour faire certain qu'ils se rendent à date. Ou, si tu veux t'en aller dans le sud pour un voyage, maintenant, tu te dis : « S'il y a une tempête qui s'en vient, là, il faut que je fasse des arrangements », et aller voir ton employeur : « J'ai besoin de deux jours de plus pour être capable de me rendre prendre mon vol. »

Ce sont des réalités que vous ne vivez pas, mais on le vit dans le Nord. On le vit à la grandeur de la province où on n'a pas les services qu'on mérite et où on n'a pas l'entretien des routes qu'on mérite.

C'est pour ça que j'ai demandé une question au ministre : « Monsieur le Ministre, qu'est-ce que vous allez faire de différent? » Il y a eu de l'investissement, on le reconnaît. C'est bon pour l'infrastructure, mais c'est le déneigement, c'est l'entretien des routes qui a besoin d'être changé, puis avoir plus d'investissements, puis faire certain qu'elles sont entretenues en bonne et due forme, que même s'il y a de la neige, qu'on n'ait pas besoin d'être arrêté deux ou trois jours sans être capable de circuler dans nos communautés ou d'être capable d'aller voir nos enfants, ou d'avoir à dire à nos enfants : « Restez chez vous », ou que le monde dit—

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

Questions?

Mr. Ric Bresee: I appreciate the comments from my colleague on the other side with regard to this bill, and I definitely understand and agree with the passion that he has for road safety, specifically on our northern highways. I do understand that while we are building, we are expanding, we are two-laning, we are 2+1-ing—all of those things that he's asking for, we're doing them. I realize that he's not going to see those being done fast enough—I get it; people are at risk.

I do have to pull out a point that he cherry-picked, if I may. He talked about the ferry up north and the ferry in Glenora. It happens to be in my own riding. But he didn't mention the ferry just 20 clicks down the road from it, also to an island, the only method of egress, that also has a \$10 fee. We have about 15 different ferry services across the province. We have to recognize that they all have different circumstances.

My question to the member, Madam Speaker, is—as we recognize all the municipalities, especially our rural municipalities across this province, it's not just about the highways that the province manages; it's also about the rural roads. Don't you think the inclusion in this bill that says we will have standardized road engineering specs will be beneficial to all municipalities?

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: I'm sorry. My apparatus wasn't working well. I could hardly hear what he was saying.

Interjections.

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: I'm just kidding. It was too easy. I had to do it. Sorry.

I understand that. But remember that in the south you have a lot of options—transportation that we don't have up north. When you go up the James Bay coast, do you know that you have to take a five-hour train to go to Moosonee? There is no road—oh, there is one when it's wintertime. That's the only way available. And then we've seen these roads thaw out a lot faster now, and that they're not being usable as much anymore.

But to go to Moosonee is a five-hour train. And then you have to take a—

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

Further debate?

MPP Jamie West: I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 98, Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act.

I have been listening to the debate all day today on this bill, and it's hard for me to get out of my head what's happened recently in my riding. Last week, we had two fatal accidents on Highway 69. I'll try to be less passionate than I was during question period, but I want the families to know the Gujarati community is coming together this afternoon—it started about 10 minutes ago—to pray together for Vinod and Shilpa. The family is still waiting for the bodies. They were travelling from Sudbury through Parry Sound–Muskoka, where it goes down to two lanes. It looks like they hit some ice and they were hit dead on by a transport truck.

For eight years now, we have been calling for—the first year and a half, it was, “Don't let those final contracts finish. Tender new ones before those construction teams with all their heavy equipment demobilize, because that cost of remobilizing is going to be borne by the taxpayer.” The Conservatives didn't listen to that advice. For eight years, I have been calling and asking for money to be allocated to this today.

This afternoon, when we get to the budget, I'll talk about how much money was allocated to this, but you know—spoiler—zero was allocated to Highway 69. Zero—just like every single year in the budget. But the biggest slap in the face this year was that the Premier, six months before the budget, said, “Oh, my God, you're off by two inches, and you're gone.” And now my neighbours the Patel boys—their mom and dad are gone. They're never going to see them again. Their older son, when he was driving up from McMaster, had to drive past the spot where his mom and dad died.

I don't want to play these games of, “The member from Sudbury voted against whatever.” We are in the opposition; you have a majority government. I can vote against every single bill—every single bill—and it will still go through, so don't blame me for your problems. The Conservative government has dropped the ball on this again and again and again. The Conservative government keeps telling families who have died on 69, on 11, on 17, that, “We're going to begin that hard work,” but no work proceeds.

My challenge to the Premier, Speaker, is, you start going to the funerals. You start meeting with the families and tell them what you tell us.

Do you know what one of the members over there told the family when they reached out to them? “The reason we don't work on 69 is because you voted for a New Democrat.” That's what they told the family. I'll find out who it is. I'll share it to the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka, because it's in his riding.

That section of two-lane highway is more than 70 kilometres from the riding of Sudbury, and so I don't know why I'm the one who gets up and calls for it to be repaired again and again. I don't know why I'm the one who cares about people in another person's riding, but I hope to God that the Conservative members will start caring about their ridings, too.

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We can't have people dying on a regular basis and not do anything. We can't go out and tell people, “Oh my God,

it's the biggest thing," and "We'll be there for you," especially during an election, and do nothing. It just cannot be done. The people of Ontario deserve better than this. We shouldn't be coming together to have prayers for a lost family and try to figure out what's going to happen to two boys. We should be celebrating. There's economic opportunity from four-laning these roads. Not just 69—it's 68 kilometres. It's not even a big patch. The 11/17 is a big challenge, but if you're going to start that, if you're going to eat the elephant, you've got to start with one bite at a time.

If you're not even starting, do you know how embarrassing it is? I'm part of CSG, and we connect with other people from the States and from other provinces. Do you know how embarrassing it is when I tell them that our Trans-Canada Highway is two-lane? Do you know what they call it in other provinces? The cow trail. They have four-lane roads. They understand how important it is to get goods and services across Canada. You know what we have in Ontario? The cow trail. Because when a transport flops over—and it happened once when I was travelling; nobody was badly hurt, but the whole highway is shut down. We're the economic engine of the country and we can't get goods to Manitoba? Come on.

This bill, all these bills—Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act. They always have these great titles, and I know the ministers and other members get to go up and do the photo ops. But what's going on with housing? There's no one excited about the price of housing. You know how expensive rental housing is in Sudbury? The same as Brampton. We don't have the resources that Brampton has. But because there's no rent control and because of predatory landlords coming in and buying places and renovating people and jacking the rent up, it has gotten worse and worse. I mean, you have built more bills about houses than you've built homes. The whole thing is—look, I will be on your team if you can present something that's going to actually build some housing.

I've said this—I bet you could go through Hansard—literally 50 times in this room: Houses are not fidget spinners. I used to help to build homes. I was an electrician. I've been in houses. What happens—with fidget spinners, you can accidentally build 10,000 overnight. They're just flying off the assembly line. Houses take months to build. And when the economy slows down, we stop building. We just stop. Have you ever gone somewhere and just seen a half-built apartment building? It's because the backers pull out. They're not going to get the return on investment.

So no matter what you do to promise these people, if the home builders' association hasn't been honest with you the way they are with me, let me share a pro tip with you: If the government doesn't help to build affordable housing, then they won't do it, and neither would any of us. If we had a property and we were building a house, and for a small investment we could add a second garage or a second floor or just punch out the kitchen a little bit to make it a bigger return on investment, we would all do this.

And so if we want affordable housing, the way that we get affordable housing is the government has to partner with them. It's what the NDP did. It's why all the socialized housing was built. It's where I grew up, in socialized housing. That's an investment in the community, because if you can't afford food on the table and a roof over your head, your outcomes in future life are not going to be that great. They're just not.

We have to keep people housed. This idea that we're going to start counting long-term-care beds as houses—that was floated a while ago. I mean, that's embarrassing. "That's a home," the member says. How far are we scraping now where we're going to start counting beds and pretend that they're homes? Let's tell the young people looking for a place to live not to worry; there's a long-term care bed that counts as a home.

It's embarrassing. I mean, if you want to count homes, let's go across the street to the park at Queen's Park, and we can count the tents. That could be what you brag about as a Conservative government: "Look how many tents we've built. They're family homes." This is embarrassing.

The substance of the bill is fine. There are some parts to work out, but I'm telling you: The people out there are desperate for leadership. They're thirsty for leadership. Just tabling these bills and saying "help is on the way someday"—you're past the point of blaming the Liberals. There's lots to blame them for, but come on, man, it's been almost 10 years. It's you—you're the previous government and the government before. You have nothing to show for this. You have nothing to show for this.

We're looking for homes and the number one priority in the Conservative bench, Speaker, was the greenbelt grab—which didn't build any houses. And then, our biggest focus now is the FOI, so we can cover up what happened during the greenbelt grab, because we don't want to go to jail for stuff that perhaps we might end up in jail for. Not "we"—I'm leaving my party out of this. That's all on you guys, the Conservatives.

Let's build some houses. Let's help people who are struggling. Anywhere in this province, you will find moms and dads just giving it their all for their kids, just doing their best to try to give them a better life. They are desperate for us to work together to help them; to build houses that they can afford, rents they can afford, first-time houses and wartime houses. But none of that happens if we don't partner together.

If the government doesn't say, "We're going to invest in you, we're going to help you, we're going to tell you that these are the types of houses that people need or that this is the type of rent that we're going to insist is charged"—they're doing it in the States already. The States are building apartment—I'm going to run out of time. They're building apartment buildings that are at cost, that are geared to income and that are 10% below the general price. Because they know how important it is to invest in their communities.

We could do that here in Ontario. Unfortunately, Speaker, the Conservative government chooses not to.

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

I recognize the member from Orléans.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you for the presentation. Your comments about government members not fighting for their communities really struck a chord with me.

Highways 174 and 17 connect Ottawa to Rockland in the east end of the Ottawa region. An environmental assessment to divide the highway, widening it from two lanes to four lanes with a carpool and transit lane combination, was approved by the city and the county in 2017. In the eight years that that riding has been represented by a Conservative member, I don't believe that that member has mentioned that highway in this place once.

Why do you think that so many government members are afraid to stand up and fight for their communities, to ensure that there are safety improvements, especially in our smaller and more remote communities?

MPP Jamie West: It's an interesting question, and I don't know that—your story about your highway and the colleague is very similar to Highway 69. Highway 69, the majority of that area, except for about five kilometres—you can walk it—is within the riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka. I haven't heard that member advocate for this at all. Three people died last week.

There are improvements that could be made. I know the argument, because during the election you hear this all the time: “You've got to vote for a Conservative member, or you won't get anything.”

Well, at the same time, all across this province, people are struggling with homelessness and addictions. People are struggling with the high cost of living, and you don't see members speaking about that.

The number of ER rooms that are closing—a lot of those are in Conservative ridings, but you don't hear government members talk about ERs closing. Maybe they're having behind-the-scenes conversations, but maybe they're not. Maybe they're entirely whipped. Maybe they can't say anything. Then it becomes an important role for the opposition to be their voice on their behalf.

But I'm hoping that at some point of sort of being embarrassed or needed, that they will advocate and say, “Look, we've got to do something about this.” I came here to get things done. I know we all did, all of us, my friends on the other side as well. We all came here to get things done and serve our people as best we can. I'm asking to start doing it.

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

I recognize the Solicitor General.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: You know, I say to my friend from Sudbury: I have roots in Sudbury. My father-in-law was born there. He lived there, he spent most of his life there and I have been there many times to see where he grew up.

So when the member says we're not listening and, “Who's standing up for Ontario?”—our caucus is standing up. Our Premier is standing up. I, as a member of the Legislature, am standing up. But when we listen—and I've asked this question before. When we listen to the doctrine of the new federal leader of the NDP that free enterprise

has no place left in Canada—it doesn't belong. This is Doctor Zhivago part 2, where everybody will own nothing.

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So my question to the member is, if we don't give free enterprise a chance to build and to build now then what do we have?

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

MPP Jamie West: What we call that is a strawman argument: “Some guy said something out of context, and I want you to tell me what it means.” I don't know what it means.

Look, here's what I believe in: I believe that when you talk to people who build houses for a living, when you talk to building developers, when you meet with them and they say, “I would not build affordable housing unless you partner with me. I'm in the business of making profit”—which is their right; every business is in the business of making profit—“if you want the houses that Ontario needs, you need to partner with me and provide direction and funding,” then I listen to them. Because the worst thing any of us can do in here is think that because of our titles—MPPs, minister, associate minister, PA, whip; any of our titles that we have—that we suddenly know more than experts in the field. We don't. We need to be humble and we need to listen to people, and when we say, “Look, I don't know why there are so many who can't afford to stay in their houses,” that we listen to the responses they say, we partner with them and we provide the financing so that they can build the houses that are needed.

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

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Thank you to my colleague from Sudbury for his remarks. I'm going to ask the Solicitor General, how do you feel about what your federal leader has been saying and doing for the last number of years? Because I think that's fair.

But to my colleague from Sudbury, we heard three of our colleagues this morning asking questions of the government around the deadly roads in the north and what the government is going to do about it, and highlighted several cases where people have recently been killed on the roads. You now have talked about another highway in the north where there have been recent deaths and what we heard from the Minister of Transportation this morning is, “We're planning on a plan that we will plan to implement at some point in our government.” And, as you pointed out, it's been 10 years.

So can you tell me why, in that 10 years, this government—through numerous accidents and people dying—why they're still planning to plan to have a plan to plan to do something rather than actually making the investments that need to happen in northern roads to actually save lives?

MPP Jamie West: It's a little bit baffling why the government hasn't done more. I think part of the problem is that the Premier very often forgets that he's no longer on city council in Toronto and that there's a whole world

of Ontario beyond the 401. There's a lot of information about what happens in Toronto, but there's a world beyond that and there are people dying on those roads.

You look at the amount of money they spent on the Ring of Fire ads, for example, so much so that people think that the Ring of Fire is open and people are working there. If you go up to the Ring of Fire, there's not even a dirt trail, let alone a road to the Ring of Fire, let alone a mine.

The government is not being serious about what they're trying to do. Here's one easy thing you could do: You want to save a couple of lives in northern Ontario? Make sure that the private companies that the previous Conservative government endorsed and rolled out to do the road maintenance—make sure they actually maintain the roads. Make sure they put salt and sand on the roads so people aren't pulled into the ditch and dying. Make sure they're not put on standby until the storm ends, even though there's more than a foot of snow on the ground. Put them out on the road so it's safe. When I drive from Sudbury to Toronto, I'll tell you, when I hit Barrie, there are so many snowplows out there, it looks like a disco. There are just blue lights flashing everywhere. You see a snowplow in northern Ontario on a highway, it's like finding a unicorn.

That's what you could do.

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

Mr. Ted Hsu: I have a question about my colleague from Sudbury wondering what it will take for the government to fix Highway 69. I've been to Sudbury many times. On one of my visits there—I remember it was the same day as a big donor fundraiser by the PC Party right in Sudbury. I'm just wondering—maybe the member even remembers that—what was on the plate at that dinner if it wasn't Highway 69.

MPP Jamie West: For some reason, the Conservatives don't invite me to their fundraiser dinners, although I think I'd be really entertaining.

Now, all parties fundraise. I have a feeling, though, the Conservatives have a lot more maximum donors. I think sometimes that when you have those maximum donors, when someone has five grand to hand over to you, maybe you listen to them more than, say, a party like the New Democrats, where average donations are about 30 bucks. I think we have a better ear to the people who are struggling to make ends meet.

I'm not talking about just people making minimum wage; I'm talking about miners who are struggling to make ends meet. I'm talking about construction workers who can't afford to build houses that they're building. A lot of people are struggling out there.

For those of you living in Toronto, when you go grocery shopping—I get ripped off in the north, but you're getting ripped off here. Your prices are all like two bucks more than what I'm paying for in Sudbury.

Why isn't the government pouncing on that if you want to help people? I think it's because they're more likely to have Galen Weston come to a fundraiser than you are to have one of the cashiers in Galen Weston's grocery store.

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

A very quick question and response.

Hon. Trevor Jones: Madam Speaker, I have a lot of respect for the member from Sudbury. But I'd like to know if the member for Sudbury is willing to apologize in this House, in an open forum, to the beautiful people who built Sudbury, his community—I've been to it many times—the beautiful people that built Chatham-Kent-Leamington, the people that are now seasoned. They've retired; they've resigned. They might need additional supports, additional care, so they might need an additional home, a place to call home—a retirement home, a village, a community—some place with supports, not just a bed.

Is the member from Sudbury willing to apologize to the people that built our nation—they'll need a retirement home to live in, with care—in this House, with his members and colleagues today?

MPP Jamie West: I've got one second.

Frankly, no. I apologize for you for supporting private—

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

Interjections.

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

Hon. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to bring the volume down a bit and provide a few comments on Bill 98, Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act.

I want to take a page, if I can, from the member for Newmarket-Aurora, who talked about the communal water systems piece. I've been MPP now for 16 years, and I'll be very transparent. We have a company in our riding called Newterra, and I think politicians of all political stripes have visited this company because they provide communal water systems all over North America, all over Canada.

I'm glad that the member for Newmarket-Aurora shone a light on the issue of communal water systems. Not only did her motion receive support of this House, but I'm so very pleased that part of our narrative in Bill 98 is the fact that it acknowledges that there are systemic barriers that are in place, limiting the options that municipalities have to build new communities.

As the member noted in her speech earlier today, communal water systems and waste water systems are great systems that serve multiple homes. They provide the opportunity for, when new communities are built, whether they be in a remote area or a rural area—that it provides a great option for those that cannot currently access a municipal water system.

There's been a bit of misinformation that's out there, and I want to try to correct people's records when they refer to this. Like all public utilities, they are and they remain a very highly regulated, safe, effective way to provide servicing to new communities. Furthermore, as the member noted in her speech today, there are tremendous safeguards, wonderful provincial backstops that these systems both meet but also exceed to provide a very safe, financially sustainable system when they're properly maintained and operated.

1630

It's very important that we continue this conversation, but, because this is such a priority for the government, Speaker, with your indulgence, I move that the question now be put.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): The government House leader has moved that the question be now put. I'm satisfied that there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House.

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

All those in favour of the motion that the question be now put, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion that the question be now put, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

Vote deferred.

2026 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 2, 2026, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

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

Mr. Ted Hsu: Consider this picture: This government is spending public resources on private favours and political branding, and it's using its majority to hide from scrutiny when it does this. If that's not enough, it's using its majority to give itself more power. It's making it easier now for money to buy influence. Since they have lots of reasons to fear losing power, this government is using its spending power to run ads just to look good so they can keep driving the gravy train. This is a toxic brew that Donald Trump would relish.

Let me elaborate: private favours like the \$8-billion greenbelt giveaway, for which a criminal investigation is still under way.

More influence: When this government took power, the donation limit was \$1,200, and now it's \$5,000, so lots more opportunities to buy \$1,000 tickets to fundraising dinners.

More power: Special economic zones allow granting exemptions to any law or regulation. There was a lawsuit launched recently on the constitutionality of Bill 5 from last year which created these special economic zones. They are a lobbying and political donation magnet, irrespective of the constitutionality.

Political branding: The Auditor General has pointed out that there have been millions of dollars spent on feel-good, zero-information, publicly funded ads for the PC government just to make them look good.

Now, the government is hiding in the dark. In the budget bill, freedom of information will be changed. Lots of documents involving ministers or their political staff will now be turned all blacked out so we can't find out about these things. I've gotten documents like that where

there are enormous sections blacked out. This government is literally making it easier for themselves to hide in the dark.

More hiding in the dark: The lights are out in this chamber most of the year. Last year, we only sat for about 50 days. This government is barring MPPs from assembling right here to question the government, to debate the government—or elsewhere in this building to hold committee hearings. All of these things, Speaker, should make Ontarians wonder if Ontario needs protection from their government.

Let's talk a little bit about wasted money, because this government's record is to pay more to deliver less—more for alcohol, retail expansion; more for Ontario Place; more for fantasy tunnels; and less value for taxpayers. I've already talked about the \$8-billion greenbelt giveaway.

Alcohol expansion: The Financial Accountability Office says the decision to expand alcohol sales, especially accelerating that rollout, will cost Ontario about \$1.4 billion by the end of this decade and about \$600 million just to do it quickly, something that really isn't on the priority list of Ontarians. Oh, and the kicker is that now it's harder to recycle your empties.

Ontario Place: The Auditor General found estimated redevelopment costs rose to over \$2 billion. As an example of that, taxpayers are going to pay, potentially, about \$400 million for parking. And stories keep coming out, even in the last few weeks, about the financial soundness and undercapitalization, the lack of equity and liquidity of this foreign partner for the redevelopment of Ontario Place. What I mean by that is you can ask the following questions: Do they generate profits to pay lots of employees? No. Do they have money in the bank? No. Do they have technical know-how and experience? No. Do they have finance lined up? No. But nevertheless, this government signed a contract—it was a great friend—and put a couple of billion dollars of our money at risk with this company.

And then the last example I want to give is the Bill 124 backfire. The government tried to legally cap salary increases by doing an end-run around collective bargaining. They lost, and now we pay millions of dollars in legal fees, appeals, settlements and bureaucracy to sort out the Bill 124 mess, which still comes up from time to time in my constituency office. This all could have been avoided by following the law and not trying to bend it to your own benefit.

I've already talked about advertising, but let me give you some numbers. For 2023-24, the Auditor General flagged five campaigns totalling \$60 million, and then, the next year, several campaigns totalling \$40 million. The Auditor General said that these ads were just aimed at a general audience and made broad, upbeat claims—nice visuals—just to boost the image of the government's performance, rather than giving people useful information about programs or services. So hiding the cost now of these "Protect Ontario" ads, which everyone has seen—they won't say what they've spent for the fiscal year that has just ended. I guess it's getting too embarrassing.

Okay. So this government wasted all this money. Here's something that makes it even worse: Who are they asking to make up the difference? The answer is the most vulnerable. One example is the changes to the Ontario Student Assistance Program. When quizzed, the minister said, "Oh, we need the financial sustainability of this program." Well, the question is, who are they asking to provide this financial sustainability? It turns out it's lower-income households; the ones who would have gotten grants are now being asked to take on loans instead of grants. There's maybe some merit to the general idea, but they're asking the lowest-income people to pay for it, and that is a problem.

Who else are they asking to take on a burden? Well, young people generally, because this government now has almost half a trillion dollars of debt that was projected for this coming year in their own budget. And this government is still in power; it's not even done yet.

Again, there's a need for housing, to deal with problems that are plaguing every community: addictions, homelessness. We are not providing enough money for the affordable housing and the supportive housing that's needed.

1640

This government is also centralizing power. We keep hearing about this every day. Whether it's power to create special economic zones and provide exemptions, provide the magnet for money and lobbying through the exemptions in special economic zones—just today, they're showing that they want to control school boards more.

But I want to talk about conservation authorities. I want to give an example from my riding. There's a church in Westbrook—the west end of Kingston, a somewhat rural area, where there's been a lot of home building recently. The Westbrook United Church, which recently celebrated its 100th birthday, recently had very serious flooding in their building. After 100 years, they had flooding. The question is, what happened?

The organization that is best poised to figure out what happened is the local Cataraqui conservation authority.

Now, the city of Kingston is looking for places to build more housing. It has a plan, now, to build even more housing in that area in the western edge of the city of Kingston, around Westbrook and Collins Creek.

So who's going to check this out to see what's the cause of this very unusual flooding at Westbrook United Church? I hope it's not some centralized provincial administration. I hope it's the local conservation authority with local knowledge and local experience that can quickly give a professional evaluation to make sure the city of Kingston's home-building plans are on the right track.

I'll point out that we've heard concerns from, for example, the rural affairs minister and the former leader of the PC party about this plan. I think the government should seriously reconsider this, but they really do like to centralize power.

The last thing I want to talk about in the time that I have is climate change and renewable energy. The government recently put out a rather lame claim of procuring renew-

able energy at 73% lower than the Liberal government, the past one. But they should realize that the levelized cost of energy globally for solar energy is down 89% globally since the FIT contracts were introduced in 2009. Claiming that you procured solar energy at 73% less than the previous government without its context is not quite fair. Well, let me say what I think it really is.

There's a famous book in popular mathematics, and people love it, because it's been reprinted many, many times. On the dust cover of the first edition, there's an amusing subtitle: "Now you, too, can ... confuse your political opponent." The title of this famous math book—some of you may know it—is *How to Lie with Statistics*. I'm glad to see the government is reading some math books because that book contains a lot of stuff we ought to put in the high school civics curriculum.

Now, here's a practical suggestion: We need to go beyond the levelized cost of energy so that political discussions of the relative cost of different sources of energy can have some sensible facts to start with.

Let me conclude with the following: In the bigger picture, this government has decided that it doesn't care about climate change; it doesn't need any plan or any goals for Ontario's contribution to protecting the climate.

This government, along with Donald Trump and other conservative governments who actively promote greenhouse gas emissions without considering alternatives and ignore climate change for political benefit—I want to say that years from now, forever and ever, they will go down in history as evil.

I said it when I was in opposition to the Stephen Harper government, and I'll say it again: evil.

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

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: The member opposite in his speech at the end there was nothing if not hyperbolic, and I appreciate that that is consistent from both his time in opposition federally and now here provincially as well.

I want to ask the member, though: One of the things I actually appreciated about the Liberals in the last election was that finally—after years of raising taxes, increasing regulation, increasing debt—they finally actually talked a little bit about cutting taxes, which, let me tell you, is a news alert to anyone who's watched the Liberals over the past 15 to 20 years. They have only ever increased taxes.

So I would have thought that when the member saw in this budget a reduction in the small business corporate income tax rate, when he saw a continuation of the cut for the gas tax, when he saw the accelerated capital costs allowance—I mean, after his tune last year, I thought he would have been happy. I'm wondering if the member opposite can share: Is he actually against these tax cuts that he was calling for merely a year ago, or what changed? Because that wasn't evil, according to you, a year ago.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Well, I'll talk about something that this member actually voted against, and that was a 50% cut to tax on small businesses proposed by my colleague from Don Valley West, the Ontario Liberal critic for finance.

We proposed it a long time ago, and this government—well.

I did say in a recent newsletter—I complimented the government on partly copying what the Ontario Liberal caucus has already proposed. But I think the member should go back and look at his voting record and see that he voted against a bigger small business tax cut than his own government proposed, but only probably because it came from the Liberal benches.

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

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to my colleague from Kingston and the Islands. He talked about these publicly funded ads basically popping up, because our government—not really providing a lot of information, but you've seen them: “Imagine a world where blah, blah, blah.” Imagine that, for example, the Ring of Fire is an active mine—those kinds of ads.

Two things stood out to me. He talked about how one year it was \$60 million and the year following was \$40 million, telling people to imagine an Ontario that was better, frankly, than what the Conservative government is doing. Where do you think you could spend \$100 million that would actually help the people of Ontario, instead of telling them that things could be better?

Mr. Ted Hsu: Well, thank you. Yes, we can only imagine how much the government spent in the past fiscal year on these feel-good ads that are meant only to promote the government. By the way, I have to compliment the government: You used AI very, very well in those ads—you know, the fake Ring of Fire mine that was in the picture—so I have to compliment you on all that fakery.

But, Speaker, what I will say is that you could spend it on health care; you could spend it on the education system; you could spend it on housing; you could just spend it on anything that people need who are struggling with the cost of living. That \$100 million is not pocket change. It could go a long way. The government should never be spending money where it's just to make itself look good and doesn't provide information. That should be a basic principle.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you for your debate on the budget today. We know that this government promised a middle-class tax cut in 2018 and has failed to deliver. We know that this government voted against the Liberal proposal to cut small business taxes by 50%. We know that this government voted against a Liberal proposal to take HST off of home heating and gas a number of winters ago. And we know that this government continues to vote against tax credits for parents to put their kids in sports.

So I'm wondering if you could explain for us, for a couple of moments, why this government continues to vote against common-sense Liberal tax cuts that would make life more affordable for Ontario families.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Well, Speaker, I think the fundamental reason is that just because it comes from the Liberal caucus, they tend to vote against things. Then, a few years later, they think about it: “Oh, that was a good idea. We'd

better borrow it and implement it,” which is okay, but you could have just voted for it in the first place.

Suppose we had voted for a small business tax cut years ago, when my colleague from Don Valley West, the Ontario Liberal finance critic, had proposed it. That would mean that small businesses would have had a runway of two or three years before the situation we're in right now to invest, to hire, to develop their businesses, and our economy would be stronger and probably the tax base would be bigger and the government deficit would be smaller.

That's what you get when you reject a good idea just because it comes from the Ontario Liberal caucus. And I have to warn the government that a lot more good ideas are going to come from the Ontario Liberal caucus and so I'd ask them, don't just vote against them because they come from over here; adopt them early.

1650

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I think the member mentioned that we really didn't talk about climate change at all, but that's kind of consistent. I think the word “environment” came up to talk about workplace environments.

We know that by ignoring climate change and not mentioning it at all, that doesn't mean it fails to exist. So when you think about fiscal responsibility and a reaction to the changing, dangerous weather that we have, what would you say the ghost of Christmas future's response will be to this government?

Mr. Ted Hsu: It's more than just ghosts that will be responding and sorry and angry at the current government that's in power right now. It's going to be real kids and grandkids and great-grandkids and generations and generations to come.

I think this government, maybe, is more persuaded by shorter-term things. So let me just point out that every year in recent years they keep budgeting a certain amount of money for fighting wildland fires and it always keeps being less than what is necessary to fight those fires. So I would, in response to my wonderful colleague, challenge the government to put a realistic number in their budget; to, for example, just take the average amount that was spent to fight wildland fires in the last three years and use that as your budget estimate instead of some lower number which then ends up being a higher number at the end of the year and just gets used up in the contingency amount.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I would like to thank my colleague for the presentation today on the budget motion.

Sometimes it seems to me in this place, it's almost as though we encounter situations of old wine in new bottles. As the member discussed the FOI process, I think back to the McGuinty era in Ontario politics where David Livingston, the chief of staff, as well as the Liberal deputy chief of staff, Laura Miller, used Laura Miller's partner to wipe hard drives, delete emails, all in a really failed effort to avoid the FOI process. It was something where the chief

of staff actually went to jail, Speaker. It was something where the Minister of Energy was held in contempt of Parliament.

Would the member like to discuss how this could happen to this government as well as his government in the past?

Mr. Ted Hsu: Let me just say, I think the rules should be followed. I've never been in government yet, but when I do get in government, I want to make sure that the government that I am in follows the rules.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: We know that the current government is the largest-spending, largest-taxing government in the history of Ontario. Second place is, of course, the only time New Democrats were in government, where they almost bankrupted the province, forced public servants to stay home, unpaid, and led to a decade of darkness under Mike Harris and the Conservatives.

So I'm wondering if my friend from Kingston can explain why running massive deficits year after year after year and failing to cut taxes for families is a bad thing.

Mr. Ted Hsu: I don't have much time, but I think the answer is pretty simple: When you borrow, you have to pay it back. So if you borrow it and you don't spend on things that increase the productivity of the people of Ontario, you don't have the productivity and ultimately the tax base to pay back the money that you borrowed to spend.

So that is the thing. You've got to make sure—if you just spend and you don't spend it wisely, future generations are going to pay. That's what's so bad.

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I want to start off by thanking the people of Kitchener Centre for electing me to be their voice here at Queen's Park. We had a lot of conversations in the community about what they wanted to see in this budget.

There are some good things. I appreciate the cuts to the costs of buying a new home, cuts to HST and development charges as well as cuts to small business taxes.

But when I was knocking on doors and talking to neighbours and to the people in my constituency office, they were worried about bread-and-butter issues. I like to call them roof-and-food issues, because 50% of Canadians are struggling to live paycheque to paycheque. That's not what I see addressed in this budget. For low- and middle-income folks, it's not an answer to the stressors they feel about affordability.

Indeed, it's a continuation of the extraction mentality: extracting dollars from low- and middle-income people to fund private equity and the wealthy insiders. I see budget buckets that go to PC donors, where you get money if you max out your PC donations. That means Progressive Conservatives, not President's Choice. It goes to rich investors; it goes to corporate giants. I see more for Loblaws. Galen Weston, the \$21-billion man, still gets his electricity subsidized by the taxpayers of Ontario.

These things need to stop. We need to stop spending money on things like airports, tunnels under the 401 and fantasy convention centre islands that mean nothing to rural people, mean nothing to people who live outside the GTA—new Ferris wheels. All of these things are wasteful vanity projects that I would expect from Donald Trump but not from the Premier of Ontario.

You can also get money if you're a highway. I don't think highways voted in this past election.

What people want is affordable places to live. Their rents have never been higher. They want to make sure they can go to the hospital and get good health care, that they can send their kids to school and their special ed needs will be met, and that their bills on energy won't go up 30%, like they did this fall, or that students won't end up in a debt sentence.

I think the most disgusting and horrible thing of all are the changes to the freedom-of-information legislation. Last year, Bill 5 created legislation that meant any cabinet member could get rid of all the rules if they wanted to if there was a business that wanted to do a project somewhere in Ontario—could be right here; could be where you live; could be somewhere north, south, east or west, rural or urban.

That was a set-up for a conflict of interest. That was what was said by the Integrity Commissioner. We are setting this government up for more conflicts of interest. Well, the best way to deal with conflicts of interest for this government is to hide the facts, and that's what I see in the changes to the freedom-of-information legislation.

This is a betrayal of public trust. We already know that trust is low for the public in government. They don't trust governments. That's why I see hundreds of millions of dollars being spent on advertisements. That money should be spent on what people need for their everyday lives. It really is awful to see this total betrayal of public trust by hiding the facts, by avoiding any accountability from this PC government, because we know that pretty much every member of the PC caucus is a member of cabinet so that's a bit of a gravy train there.

I feel like we've abandoned the trust of the people of Ontario, and I call on this government to stop acting like authoritarians, continue to have a government that builds trust, is accountable for their actions and tell this Premier to stop using his personal cell phone for public business. That's what it came down to. The Integrity Commissioner said, "You have to share your cell phone records because you're using your personal cell phone for public business," and he said, "I'm not going to do it." She said, "If oversight bodies get in the way, this government's attitude is, 'Change the rules,'" and that is a break of public trust.

I was the only MPP in this place that worked in Ontario schools since the pandemic. What we know is that the game has changed; that our schools and our kids are not okay. Our families are not okay, and they need help, but this funding formula didn't change to meet the moment.

I know that our ed workers need help now. They need more support, and we need to make sure that we have sick days paid for so that if a staff member's sick, that kid doesn't lose their literacy help, that spec ed teacher doesn't

go to fill in, in that classroom, because more and more kids are missing out on their special ed support because we aren't covering those sick days. In fact, I hear at boards, they go into deficit. If they fill that sick day, they will go into a deficit because that is not covered by this budget. We need smaller class sizes so that those teachers don't get burnt out and quit. We know we have a retention issue. We need help to deal with the mental health crisis of our students who are absent and struggling with their well-being. And we know that we need help for our teachers.

1700

A friend of mine said that she worries when she goes to the classroom, in an elementary school, that a student of hers will again throw a water bottle at her. She's also worried because a student wrote to her to say he was going to kill her, and he mentioned three different guns he was going to use to do it. This is a junior grade student. These classrooms are not being funded in a way that deals with these challenges, and I know this for a fact.

Another area is the closure and the lack of funding for our safe consumption sites. In my riding, ours was closed last year and it was devastating. Just the other day, I went to the market, and every block had somebody crippled over in an overdose-type physical state of being. And then, in front of my farmers' market—one of the most travelled, trafficked, high-density places in the whole week—there was somebody in drug-induced psychosis. The manager of the market is there trying to get the cops to come, because he is acting out in public spaces and hurting our downtown community, hurting our neighbours, and that's because he has nowhere to go. He has no health care. He has no housing.

We know that ER visits went up 67% where communities lost their CTS sites, and calls to paramedics went up 69%. That's data, and there are lives being lost. There will be more lives lost, and I don't think any of us in this room want more of that in our downtown. We want to make sure that people with mental health and addiction challenges have housing and health care, that they'll be okay, because this is not a reality I was used to before this government came into power.

We also need to deal with these encampments. It is a total tragedy to all of our municipalities that we are only spending \$53 million on homelessness supports, on supportive housing. That's 141 beds a year when we have 87,000 people facing homelessness in the province of Ontario—87,000, and the answer is 141 new beds. That is not the solution, it doesn't meet the moment and it's going to cost us more because we know that jail beds and hospital beds are 600%, 700%, 800% the cost of a supportive housing bed. I would prefer to live in a province where we addressed homelessness with grace, humanity and evidence-based solutions.

But we also are struggling in our housing department. This government's goal is 150,000 units a year. We see maybe 64,000 being the new projection. That's less than 50% of a goal. I have had goals. One of my goals was to be elected here, and we were successful. I know you have those goals of being elected here.

We can do better to make sure we cut red tape by ensuring we don't continue on with exclusionary zoning—that 70% of the province isn't just zoned for single-family dwellings; that we let people build big things that house multiple families. Right now in Toronto, I can bulldoze a wartime home and I can build a 4,000 square foot mansion, but I can't bulldoze a wartime home and build a sixplex of the same size. That means we are discriminating against low- and middle-income people and their housing choices. This is the fastest, cheapest and most sustainable way to build housing, and it is a deliberate choice to not follow the housing recommendations and do these very things of cutting red tape to infill. Instead, we see more sprawl, and we know that sprawl is twice the cost to a municipality than infill.

In our energy department, I see, again, shortcomings. We saw a 30% bump in energy rates per kilowatt hour this fall. We know that OPG has asked the Ontario Energy Board to lift prices 72.6% because of new nuclear power, and that will start in 2027.

When I talk to folks about affordability, they don't want another increase to their energy bill. I'm grateful to the minister for his announcement of opening up some renewable options—thank you; that was good. We did cancel 800 contracts from the former Liberal government; they were flawed. But we are left with a big gap. We know that nuclear is not going to be ready for 10 years, so we're going to keep gas plants running 24 hours a day because we didn't plan well for the time it's going to take for new nuclear to come on board, and those peaker plants were meant to be peaker plants, not 24/7 plants.

So let's keep doing more smaller projects so we can get more market competition, more people building more things on every empty rooftop in this province, because that's how Australia gets three hours of free energy every day. And it will lead to energy sovereignty, which we need now more than ever because of the attitude of our southern neighbours, who sell us our natural gas—hopefully they'll keep selling it to us at a rate that we can purchase it at—and enriched uranium. We are not being more sovereign by doubling down on gas and this enriched uranium pattern of nuclear.

I'd also like to encourage the government to invest in our health care sector. We still see nurses struggling to deal with high ratios. They feel a moral injury because they go home at night and they worry about that patient that they didn't quite get to, or they know they didn't do enough for them, but they had double what they really should have in terms of their nursing ratios. And we see a disparity between one nurse over here that works in a hospital, another nurse that works in the community, another nurse that works in long-term care, and it's a problem. It's an HR problem, let alone the privatization.

We should be looking at Scotland and England. Those are two jurisdictions that treated health care in very different ways. Scotland expanded operating rooms in the public sector, and they have lower costs and shorter wait times. The UK doubled down on private operating space; they have higher costs and higher wait times. We should

not be following a failed exercise. We should be following the example of Scotland and keeping our health care private—or public, sorry—keeping our health care public. And that public health care should go—

Interjection.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Yes, we'll keep your information private about your health care, but let's keep the dollars going to the public sector.

And our health care should be for the neck up as well. We see too many shortcuts in the mental health sector. As a social worker, I'm really worried about the increase in gambling addictions, the increase in pornography addictions, the increase in social anxiety. We see major issues—as a parent, I'm worried about my kids because of the battle I'm having with them over technology. We see this rolling out in our school system. We could be doing more to help kids with tech addiction in our schools, and we should be doing more to help kids in the community address these challenges of social media and the anxiety they're faced with every day.

I want to also say that there is not good news for folks who are on OW and ODSP. I want to thank Sally Palmer, a professor at McMaster University, who continues the call to say we need to double OW and ODSP. Folks who are living below the poverty line get sicker, they have more anxiety and it leads to them not reaching their full potential. It is less than \$800 a month if you live on Ontario Works. That will get you no place to live in the whole province. It will lead to more and more people looking to food banks, looking to hospitals, looking to jails as a way to ensure that they have somewhere to sleep and they have three meals a day. We should not be treating folks with disabilities like this. We know that a quarter or a fifth of our homelessness population has disabilities, and that speaks to the lack of community living spaces, and we don't see money in this budget to expand community living spaces. In my riding, we have 400 community living spaces, but we have 900 people on the wait-list. These are families that are just trying to get by day by day, a lot of caregivers who have to stay home to care for their loved one, and we know that that help just isn't there.

And we see more and more kids with autism or developmental disabilities arriving at kindergarten totally unprepared. We see them coming to school, and they haven't been potty trained. We should be spending money to expand help for kids in kindergarten to be ready for school and make sure that when they get an assessment and that psychologist says, "You need early intervention," that early intervention is there, because right now it's not.

So I really would like to see a better increase in the MCCSS budget. The only budget that is higher than the rate of inflation is the Ministry of Health. The rest of the budgets do not keep up with the rate of inflation, and, in fact, there are cuts across the board over the next few years.

What I would like to see is less random buckets that can be used for discretionary funding for Toronto vanity projects, more accountability on this government and more funding for the things people need. Most of all, when

we think of the future of our kids, I want them to have a livable planet, and right now there is almost nothing, if anything, to help our community adapt to climate change, whether that be flooding, forest fires or carbon emissions, and we can do better.

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

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MPP Jamie West: Thank you to my colleague from Kitchener Centre. You spoke about many, many things in the bill, but, at the end, you were talking about the need for kids to be successful in school. It made me think a lot about the schools in Sudbury and how there are many kids who have special needs who are supposed to have an EA with them full-time or half a day. Instead, what happens is you have several kids sharing an EA, and, as a result of that, parents are phoned to take their kids home.

I know your background before being elected. Can you expand on what this means for families, what it means for the kids and their success going through school?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: There are a few things there. They don't usually give you a supply for an EA, so even if—I call it the Hunger Games for education support. Every school, right now, is competing to have more complex kids to prove the case to get one, maybe two EAs to share across the board for kids, some of whom need one-on-one support.

We have gone away with low-ratio classrooms because they're expensive. But you know what's expensive? The cost to society when none of those kids get any help.

I think the phrase is, inclusion without support is abandonment. And not only are we abandoning that child who doesn't get the tailored support that they need to help them with their disability, but we're abandoning that teacher who is trying to deal with the IEP needs of more and more kids. Often 30% of their class has an IEP.

They're meant to teach different curriculums to different classrooms, and if they call in sick and nobody is there to support them, all the kids in the school miss out on their special ed class, because that special ed teacher goes to fill in for grade 2. That means a special ed teacher for the whole month of March might do their reading class one or two times instead of 20. So not only are we abandoning those kids who need individualized support, but we're abandoning the whole school for all of their special education needs.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you for your presentation. I apologize for my back.

You mentioned gambling and addiction issues. You mentioned screen time addiction issues. In many regards, the government is acting as the dealer for these things. They are allowing gambling ads to be bombarded to our kids. They are forcing kids to learn on Chromebooks and tablets and basically nothing but screens at school.

I'm wondering if you could give us some thoughts on how the government could take proactive measures in the budget to address those concerns.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you to the member for the question. I agree. We are totally abandoning young men in particular in terms of these particular addictions. I mean, these things are in your phone. Before, you had to drive 100 kilometres to go to the Flamboro Downs casino. And if you had a gaming addiction, they would not let you back.

Now this thing is in your pocket, and there are loopholes galore to make sure they keep you playing because you're worth more if you have a gambling addiction than if you don't. And I would challenge anybody in this place to find help for your child when they have a pornography addiction, gambling addiction, etc., because it doesn't exist—almost at all.

I want to thank my Ray of Hope folks. They are doing their best to meet the moment, but we have not seen increases.

And all those experts that work in that field—they're 30% less than in the private sector, if not more. So they leave. They leave to work in the private sector, and then we pay for it from our child welfare society budget and we have million-dollar kids because there is nothing in the not-for-profit sector.

So we're losing our experts. Practically, those supports do not exist and our government has not done nearly enough to prevent more and more young men—I think the calls to the helpline went up 300%. That should be an enormous red flag to all of us that we are abandoning young men in this moment and their well-being.

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

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I want to thank my colleague from Kitchener for your always very thoughtful and very humanity-based remarks. I always look forward to when you get up in the House to speak.

I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit more about housing in particular. What we've seen under this Conservative government is a historic number of people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.

I was just visiting one of the local shelters in my area for women and families, and they had actually asked for money that this government has denied them, so they're having to cut back services and can't service as many people and house as many people—temporarily give them shelter, I should say—let alone move them into some sort of housing in community because this government is not building the supportive housing or the deeply affordable housing that needs to be built.

I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit more, especially through your work experience, about—I believe you touched on the importance of, I say, investing in people in the front end. Because economically it is a much better decision when you invest in people in the front end.

Can you talk about, in your experience, what it means to be building that housing that is required—in some cases with supports, not just housing—as opposed to what we see this government doing, which is actually, in many cases, criminalizing people who are experiencing homelessness?

Those people are cycling through emergency departments, if they happen to be lucky enough to be in a community where the government hasn't closed the emergency departments. Can you talk about that a little more, please?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Yes. AMO's report says that we will be looking at numbers like 300,000 people homeless by 2035 if we carry on as we are.

My argument is the best way to deal with homelessness is to prevent it in the first place. The LTB is a hot mess. It is a hot mess. I encourage any member of the provincial government to spend a day at the LTB. You will hear story after story after story of seniors on a fixed income who got another AGI and now can't pay the rent.

It is awful to see that one of the number one groups affected by homelessness is our seniors because they live on a fixed income and they can't see their numbers go up.

I see folks dealing with renoviction. If you don't know who Michael Klein is, then you need to look him up. He is a repeat offender. He continues to target people who live in affordable housing to extract wealth out of them by renovicting them. I have building after building after building—they all get an N13 and there is zero accountability for this man, Michael Klein.

We need investment in the LTB, and we need to prevent some of these bad-acting landlords from continually making people homeless and from private equity for paying for double-digit dividends to their stockholders by AGIs. They don't want to pay for their own heating and cooling upgrades. They don't want to pay for the pavement. It's their asset. Why should tenants who already paid off the mortgage have to pay for that new asset?

You need to all spend a day at the LTB, and you'll see time and time again more and more dollars being extracted from low-income people.

In my riding, for every affordable housing—

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

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you to my colleague for that passionate debate on this budget. I also want to thank you for discussing nurse disparity. We see nurses who are being paid more in hospitals, and there's a significant disparity for those in the community and those in long-term care. A part of the solution to addressing our crises in hospitals is making sure that we have enough health care workers and staff in the community to prevent people from getting there. That includes things like mental health supports in the community, particularly in schools, where we are seeing a mental health crisis among young people like we've never seen before.

As a social worker, you bring a lot of expertise and credibility to this subject. So I was wondering if the member could expand on what mental health supports this government and this budget should be providing so we can start to finally address this crisis in schools?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Thank you for the question. First of all, I think our hospitals need adequate funding. I think it's a \$1-billion shortfall. And from my understanding, it's something like 60% of hospitals are taking out lines of

credit. So first we need to pay the bills for the folks that work in these emergency supports.

When it comes to mental health, we need adequate pay and staffing in our community. We have moved to a private system where people are spending 200 bucks an hour. If you have benefits, that's great, but it might only get you two or three sessions, if you're lucky.

We need more help in the community sector, but, really, once folks get that expertise, we see a major brain drain to the private sector, and this government is often to blame. They moved toward short-term brief models instead of funding complex attachment- and trauma-focused supports that we really need.

That's why we end up with million-dollar kids in our child welfare system: because they don't get the help they need early enough, and then they end up being difficult to house and they end up needing two-to-one support. We need that expertise in the not-for-profit sector, and we need more help in our schools.

Our teachers are not trained for this. My caseload would be 120 kids a year. We're not going to catch the next Tumbler Ridge shooter because we don't have the time to see the red flag—

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

Thank you.

Further debate?

Hon. Trevor Jones: It's an honour to rise today to speak to the 2026 Ontario budget motion. Speaker, I'll also note I'll be sharing my time with the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

Over the past year, we've seen significant change in the world. For generations, global trade created opportunity, certainty, growth for workers, families and businesses in Ontario. Today, that certainty is tested. It's tested by tariffs, supply chain disruptions and growing global instability. We need to be focused on protecting our businesses, protecting our farms and protecting our communities while building for limitless possibilities and unleashing our full potential.

I'm proud to represent the beautiful community of Chatham-Kent-Leamington, which is about 40 minutes south of Detroit, Michigan, on the shores of Lake Erie. It's a region built on hard work for generations of farmers, greenhouse growers, world-class freshwater fisheries and food processors who work hard every day to feed our province and feed families across North America and the world.

Agriculture and food production are the backbone of our economy. Our agri-food sector supports one in nine jobs, including my own, and contributes \$52 billion to Ontario's GDP. That's more than steel, auto, tech and mining. Our families, communities and livelihoods depend on it.

I've invested considerable time over the past year speaking with food producers at their kitchen tables, in their barns, in their fields, at high-tech production facilities and warehouses so I could see first-hand what challenges they're experiencing. They've told me about rising costs,

about uncertainty in global markets and about the need for stability and for support. We listened, and we're taking action.

Even in a challenging global environment, Ontario continues to attract considerable investment as a safe haven with a talented workforce. Communities across Ontario continue to welcome major commitments, like \$444 million from Ferrero Rocher, \$141 million from the Coca-Cola group, over \$200 million by Chapman's Ice Cream and more than \$533 million by Lee Li Holdings incorporated right here in the GTA. These are long-term investments in Ontario's workers, in Ontario's communities, in Ontario food production. They show that, even in uncertain times, there's strong confidence in what we're building here.

Ontario is the best place to do business in agri-food. Our government is focused on building a more competitive, resilient and self-reliant economy, one that could withstand global disruptions.

Food security, as I've said in this place, is national security. We need smart, responsible investments to remain food independent, to remain a leader as the world's most trusted brand. That brand is Ontario-grown, Ontario-raised and Ontario-made.

This budget focuses around a prudent and pragmatic fiscal plan, supporting key sectors like agri-food while ensuring we're not raising taxes, we're not raising fees on the people and on the businesses that keep this province moving.

My ministry is investing \$50 million over the next three years, starting in 2026-27, into Agricultural Research and Innovation Ontario, including \$41 million of an investment that I announced earlier in October of 2025. This investment supports a critical network of 14 research stations across the province. They represent every growing zone, every soil type and every area of beautiful Ontario.

ARIO helps translate research into practical solutions, whether it's improving yields, reducing input costs or helping farmers and growers adopt new technologies. It's about making sure Ontario food producers maintain a global competitive advantage. We're also investing an additional \$61.5 million into modern, state-of-the-art research and infrastructure, bringing our total investment to over \$100 million. That's significant. It's a commitment from our government to the people of Ontario who feed the world. It's an investment in Ontario's food independence.

Through partnerships like the Grain Farmers of Ontario and Mondelēz Canada, we're supporting research to improve efficiency and sustainability in wheat production—something Canada, and Ontario, is really good at—including advanced nitrogen management strategies to help farmers use fertilizer more effectively.

You've heard a few of our farmers and food producer friends talk about the fertilizer challenge, the four Rs: the right time to fertilize, the right amount of fertilizer at the right time and the right brand to make sure our yields do stand up to any of those in the world. This means better productivity, higher yields, lower costs and farms that

have a succession plan, because the next generation wants to take over that farm or that food production facility.

We're also supporting research to protect corn crops, giving farmers better tools and data to manage two of the crops' most significant risks. This work is being delivered through the Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance, a special partnership, a unique partnership between my ministry, the University of Guelph and ARIO. And behind all this there are the researchers, the technicians, the staff and all the great people across the province who are deeply committed to supporting Ontario agriculture.

I had a moment there, because I was thinking about several special friends we have in that ARIO network that recently toured a group of senators. A very confident young PhD student turned around and said, "This is the future of farming. This is the future of food production. This is Ontario." I couldn't have been more proud.

I've had the opportunity to meet many of our researchers, technicians, our academics, our industrial leaders who have decades of shared experience, who understand our land and the sector. They're focused on delivering real results. Like farmers, these are true stewards of the land and Ontario agriculture. Our government is so proud to support their work.

At home in Chatham-Kent-Leamington, these investments are making a real difference. This budget is also making important investments in infrastructure, health care, education—the things that matter to families. We're expanding access to local health care, and it's exciting.

The Fancy Family Hospital project, a new state-of-the-art facility with 536 beds, will provide exceptional care to residents across Windsor-Tecumseh, my colleague's riding, and across the entire region. At home in Leamington, at Erie Shores HealthCare, we're also expanding access to primary care, with capacity to support new patients in our growing, diverse community that also hosts thousands of international agricultural workers.

We're also continuing to invest in education, including a brand new public elementary school in Lakeshore, supporting families in another one of our growing communities. These are the kinds of investments that our communities and our residents have asked for across Ontario, because they support families. They help to build a stronger, more sustainable Ontario.

Speaker, this budget reflects the priorities that we were elected to deliver on, those priorities I heard at countless doors across Chatham-Kent-Leamington and beautiful Pelee Island. It recognizes the challenges we're facing, but more importantly, it takes real action to address them. We're protecting our food supply. We're protecting our food independence. We're strengthening our economy. We're making the investments needed to ensure Ontario remains competitive, resilient and ready for the future.

This budget is about people: the farmers, ranchers and growers who get up early every morning, not for want of thanks or praise or recognition, but out of duty. The workers in our food processing plants—I saw some of my favourites just in the last couple of weeks: FGF Brands in Toronto, employing thousands of people and making those

beautiful baked goods this country has; Highbury Canco in Leamington; Cavendish Farms in beautiful Wheatley; and Great Lakes Food Company in Chatham-Kent. Thousands of families rely on these jobs, and we rely on the trusted, delicious and safe food that they produce.

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Speaker, it's our collective responsibility to make sure that food producers, and the businesses that support them, have the supports they need for now and the long term. That's exactly what our budget is delivering, and that's exactly why I'm very proud to support it.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): I recognize the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

MPP Paul Vickers: I want to say thank you to my minister for him sharing some of his time with me.

It's always a privilege to rise in this House on behalf of the people of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, and the privilege feels even greater when we are discussing something as important as our provincial budget.

Madam Speaker, when the budget was tabled last month, it wasn't long until our local media wanted to contact me to get to my opinion on the \$244-billion budget. I told them that this budget meets the moment because the moment we are living in requires our province to be here for Ontarians and to have their backs. This budget does exactly that.

Everyone knows we are living through economic uncertainty. Our businesses are awaiting the outcome of the CUSMA review later this year, and many workers know their livelihoods may hang in the balance. To respond to this, we have worked hard as a province to diversify our economic relationship with our fellow provinces and with places all around the world. We have also worked hard to make it easier to do business here in Ontario. This budget builds on those efforts.

I was very pleased to see this budget reduce the small business corporate tax from 3.2% to 2.2%. This means that 375,000 small businesses operating in Ontario will be eligible to keep up to \$5,000 more that they work hard for. This allows them to invest in equipment and grow their business, to do more with their hard-earned money. This, in turn, grows Ontario.

Many of these businesses operate in our agricultural sector. In Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, our agricultural sector is robust. I know this first-hand, both as a dairy farmer and as the former director of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture for our region. Every single day, farmers across Bruce and Grey, and across Ontario, work hard to feed Canadians.

As the minister has just alluded to, the budget enhances our agricultural sector with key investments in ARIO and supports the new Ontario Poultry Research Centre in Elora with \$10.5 million in new funding to grow our robust agrifood sector.

Another industry that Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound powers is clean energy. After all, we are located in the Clean Energy Frontier, an area that both the Minister of Rural Affairs and I are proud to represent. Our government believes in the nuclear sector that supports so many

livelihoods. Our support includes advancing early-stage planning for the Bruce C project, which stands to be the economic development project of the century for our region.

And finally, I am pleased to see the planned pause on HST for new construction homes. Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound has a strong residential construction sector, with many talented builders and tradespeople. Many of them have told me that because of the global trade disruptions, 2025 was the slowest year they had seen in a long time. I know this HST pause, paired with our long-standing commitments on housing, will help this sector reach new heights. I am confident that this budget makes the investments in our economy that are necessary to power growth and create good jobs in this province.

Now, Madam Speaker, governments in Canada have long known that a strong economy is what powers our social safety nets. Part of the Canadian identity, and of life in this province, is that we have a strong social safety net to support a high quality of life. I was very pleased to see this budget recognize that and invest in these priorities, not the least of which is our health care system.

It has recently been brought to my attention that in Ontario, our median age is 39.9 years old. In Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, our median age is just over 49 years. Having a median age that is a decade older and a decade wiser than the provincial average means that a reliable health care system is very important to our residents and our communities. I correspond with many constituents about our health care system, so I am glad to see that the 2026 budget targets investments in many of the priorities that they bring to my attention.

I hear from the CEOs of our three hospital corporations in my riding about the grey tsunami. It's impacting the ability to deliver medical services in our region. Having an aging population places two different strains on our health care system: Of course, it means there is more demand for medical services, but it also means that we have a smaller labour pool to pull from to fill the key vacancies in health care. I was very pleased to see that an extra billion dollars is being invested in our hospital sector. This is important funding that will provide long-term certainty to the cornerstone of our health care system.

But, Madam Speaker, the investment that stood out to me the most is an additional \$1.1 billion we are investing in home care services. Home care is a health care service that I think is so important, because it enables aging in place. As I mentioned earlier, I correspond with constituents about our health care system on a regular basis. One suggestion that I hear often is that we need more options to age in place. Our seniors want to be in their own homes for as long as they can. They want to enjoy their independence. For many, home care is what makes that possible.

I was pleased to see our government step up with additional funding for home care. I know that this will make a positive difference in the lives of many of my constituents. It helps those who need home care to be able to live at home longer and receive the care they need, and

it also provides relief for the family caregivers who are so important to help support aging in place.

This government has invested in many health care solutions made for our rural communities, such as the Learn and Stay program, and by creating additional seats in the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. We know the greatest barrier facing our system is the labour shortage in many care occupations. A key part of solving these pressures in our community is our community college. In my riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, Georgian College is the link that connects many local residents to opportunities in health care, the skilled trades and a variety of other opportunities.

Madam Speaker, everyone in this chamber is aware that the federal cap on international enrolment placed a great strain on our post-secondary education system. Rural campuses feel this too. That is why I am pleased to see the government step up with a \$6.4-billion funding package over the next four years to stabilize this important sector in light of these pressures that the federal cap has imposed.

But don't take simply take it from me. Take it from Maureen Adamson, the CEO of Colleges Ontario, who noted that this package is a "game-changer." Take it from the president of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, who calls it an "investment in Ontario's productivity and long-term prosperity." Ontario's economic and educational leaders agree and know this government values the role of a skilled workforce.

I have had the pleasure of touring our local college campus, Georgian College in Owen Sound, on multiple occasions. It is so inspiring to see students working hard to fill gaps in our local labour force. Students can take their studies in nursing, ranging from the PSW certificate to the four-year bachelor of science in nursing degree program. They can study power engineering and the skilled trades. They can take business administration and even marine navigation from the only marine training institute in central Canada. This campus is a prized jewel in our community, and I know the \$6.4-billion investment in the post-secondary sector will go a long way to help make this sector resilient in the future.

I will close by noting that we know Ontario is facing such uncertain times. Communities across the province are feeling the challenges in different ways. When I reflect on this budget, I see a budget that invests in Ontarians in the right ways and invests in our key economic drivers to make sure we protect our economy into the future. It invests in our health care and social services to ensure that the care and support that Ontarians need is there for them. It also invests in infrastructure and our workforce so we can call it the best place for business and workers to thrive in. Thank you for the opportunity.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I listened to the member and his speech—actually, both of them—and I appreciate, always, their words in the chamber.

One of the things that I've been looking for in legislation—and it's not just me; it's actually the people of Brampton. Now, this government brags about electing all these members to Legislature from Brampton, and the one issue that they keep talking about—

Interjections.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: You can clap for yourself.

The one issue that they're talking about over and over again is the fact that they pay the highest auto insurance rates in the known universe. Every single summer, we get the Premier and their team talking about the fact that they're going to be bringing relief.

When is this government going to stand up in here and do something to actually improve auto insurance for the people of Brampton and the rest of Ontario? Because we're waiting and waiting, and all we have are empty promises.

Hon. Trevor Jones: Thank you to the question from Humber River–Black Creek. It's not necessarily my area of expertise, but like you, I'm willing to listen, to learn and take action, especially with good ideas.

It's a good idea. We looked at the whole chain: of crime, of incidents, of areas of interest and who's vulnerable. What we've done through this budget—and long before that—we've invested over \$45 million in anti-auto theft; to targeted response; better analytics, use of data; smart, intelligence-led policing systems that are fed and used by community. So the community supports are listened to and acted upon.

We're making the appropriate investments to take action to reduce those instances of theft, vandalism and damage—again, smart engineering to improve road safety and safer communities, and a more secure Ontario. That's why we're supporting this budget.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: I thank the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness.

Minister, a few years ago a derecho, which is a big windstorm, swept through eastern Ontario. It destroyed barns, silos, and caused hundreds of millions of dollars of damage for homeowners, for municipalities—in particular, for farmers. As the minister just reminded us, this government always has barrels of money to support industry in southwestern Ontario and Toronto, but in their time of desperation, farmers and homeowners in rural eastern Ontario were left without anything, and years later, they have still not received any budgetary support from this government.

I'm wondering why this year's budget continues to ignore hard-working farmers and residents of eastern Ontario in Sarsfield, in Navan, in Rockland and Casselman who suffered enormous financial damage as a result of this storm and have never received any compensation from the government.

Hon. Trevor Jones: Thank you for the question from the member from Orléans. I've taken some time to speak to those eastern region townships, those eastern region farmers and agribusinesses. Recently, I was actually in the

area and spoke to the owner of the Fortune family. It's a maple farm. We talked about the loss of maple trees and the competitive nature of maple syrup businesses. This is farming. There's a value proposition there.

We have exceptional business risk management tools that are the envy of Canada and North America. We have good insurance. We have crop insurance. Agricorp and our professionals are there on the ground in the area. The lands are insured. The crop output is insured. The buildings, of course, are insured. Those insurance packages and that suite of services are there to support.

Can we do more? Are we learning from our producers? Of course we are. Which is why recently, we added to our business risk management suite: \$100 million to make sure that production insurance is there for the farmers who need it and rely on it.

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

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: My question today is for the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. I was very fortunate to be able to spend some days with the committee that toured around and heard directly from the people of Ontario—our constituents, our stakeholders. I'm so impressed that so many of their priorities have made it into this budget.

You referenced home care—another \$1.1 billion. You think about the \$66 million for the \$750 cards, putting that money right in educators' hands so that they can have the things in their classrooms that they need to facilitate student success; the 30% cut to small business tax rate which, as a former small business owner, I have to say really warmed my heart.

There are a number of really incredible things in this budget, so I wanted to ask the member, which parts of this budget do you think will be most impactful for everyone back home in Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, and what are you hearing from your constituents?

MPP Paul Vickers: Thank you for that question from the member for Bay of Quinte. I think, with our age of population, I have to go back to the health care dollars that are being invested into our hospitals, that are being invested into our health care system. Those are the things that our members of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound really need, because obviously our median age is a little bit higher than average. I think those are the things.

And the other one: Helping age in place. I think that's special. I think that's really helping people realize that they can stay where they want to be; they don't have to go to a retirement home or nursing home any earlier than they want to. I think those dollars will make the biggest difference because you never see a person that wants to stay in home—never a bigger smile on their face when they realize that they can achieve that.

Thank you for that question.

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

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: We see in the budget there's a cut of \$121 million for firefighting. But what we didn't see in the budget is that—we heard the government is going to

be buying some—we call it “bombardier.” The plane that grabs—bombardier.

Interjections.

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: Water bombers—thank you. The water bombers: I think there were six. But when the government had a budget talking about the Northlander, it was in every budget, but we haven’t seen these bombers that they ordered—or have you bought them? We haven’t seen that in multiple budgets. Are they bought or aren’t they bought? Because the question needs to be answered. We need them; we know we’re going to have fire season at our door. Everybody is predicting heavy, heavy fires. So have they ordered the bombers, or are they not ordered, or what’s going on with this? Because there’s nothing in the budget talking about bombers.

Hon. Trevor Jones: Thank you to the member from Mushkegowuk—James Bay. Merci beaucoup.

Sometimes in this place—you know I’m an advocate and champion for farmers and food, but I really appreciate the work of Ontario Corps and the Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Response, and we value the people that fight the fires: the wildland firefighters. Many of our professionals and volunteers in communities across Ontario started in wildland firefighting, including a friend of mine who’s now a fire chief of a professional fire service.

The procurement—and I’m going to verify with our colleague to make sure I give you the right response—has been completed; the order has been made. They’re being fabricated and manufactured right now. Those water bombers are coming. Just like we’re investing in the people that fight the fires, protecting them, giving them the best equipment, the best training, the best supports after the emergency happens, through Ontario Corps, we’re making sure those equipment investments are made as well. Thank you for the question. We’ll verify it.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: For the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, I’ll ask him a question about marine training. I think marine training is really important. This government is the first government in the history of Ontario to have a marine strategy. I think that’s wonderful, and that’s particularly important for people in Essex county because we have a coast guard station in Essex county—a lot of shoreline; more shoreline than the typical area. Also, nearby in Wheatley, we have a freshwater fishery, which is important to our area as well.

So I would like to ask the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound to talk a little bit more about marine and about marine training.

MPP Paul Vickers: Thank you for that question from my member for Essex county, and I think it’s really important that we realize how much more we could do with the Great Lakes. We’ve got this body of water here that could transport so many products up and down the seaway. Get the trucks off the road. Think of how much grain could go up and down the seaways. But to do that, you need people to be able to steer the ship. You need people to work on those vessels. That’s why it’s so im-

portant for Georgian College, which offers this program. They’re the only ones in central Canada to offer a program like that, and it’s so important that we have the ability to train people.

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I’d like to encourage people: If you’re looking for a job, there’s not a better job than getting on those ships and moving the products up and down the St. Lawrence. It’s a great opportunity.

I was fortunate enough—I was at the college, and they allowed me to steer one of the ships through the Hamilton Harbour. And you know what? I’m not bragging, but I didn’t do too bad of a job. I think they took it a little easy on me. But I think what really helped me was learning how to back up a hay wagon on the farm. Because anybody who has ever tried to back up a hay wagon knows you just don’t make it go where you think it’s going to go. So I think that helped me.

But I really thank you for that question and bringing the—

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

Further debate?

MPP Jamie West: I’m very happy to speak about the debate today.

I want to thank our shadow minister for finance. Because for a lot of people, their lives are very busy and they’re trying to work several jobs, or they’ve got kids in hockey and dance and all these different things, and the budget feels overwhelming. It’s a large document that’s dropped and you kind of get the high notes out of it. I really appreciate that our shadow minister for finance made this report card on the Ontario budget 2026.

It just has five questions, the things I think that matter most to people at their homes:

Does it lower the cost of rent and groceries? If there’s a grade, I’d give it an F—no.

Does it fix health care and education? Again, another F—no.

Does it build the homes you can afford? F—no.

Does it create good jobs and opportunities? Maybe a D—but, mostly, no.

And does it spend your money responsibly? I wish there was a grade below F.

The Premier and his brother—I think one of the most famous things that they’re well-known for was, “The party with the taxpayers’ money stops now.” I remember that. I remember when his brother was the mayor, hearing this all the time, and it resonated with a lot of people because they feel like there isn’t responsible spending.

And we’ve seen that. I mean, the roughly partisan, kind of feel-good ads—government ads are supposed to tell you about a program that’s happening. It’s supposed to remind you to renew your licence, tell you about rebates you can take advantage of and stuff. But most of the government spending on advertising has been about, “Imagine an Ontario where you actually can own a home”—but unlike the one you’re in where you can’t. And “Imagine if the Ring of Fire was open”—it’s not, but imagine it was.

There's been \$60 million spent on that, and last year, \$40 million on it. And there are a lot of people who think, actually, the Ring of Fire is open because of it, but it's not.

And so why would we give them a low grade on all of this? Well, just breaking today, on the FAO report—I'll just read the quote: "This latest report from the FAO shows that Ontario's debt will soar to half a trillion dollars in just 18 months." Yikes. "They have no credible plan to balance the budget, and we're now paying the price with record-high interest payments."

And we see this. You have a budget—and this is fascinating; I hope I have time to get into it. But there's a laundry list of stuff that, if you're trying to be fiscally responsible like people are—people are feeling ripped off when they go to the grocery store—then maybe the party that brags about being the party of small government wouldn't have the largest cabinet of all time. They wouldn't have multiple members who are ministers, associate ministers, parliamentary assistants—the largest probably, I think, of all time, but certainly the largest in my lifetime.

You also wouldn't see these massive cuts, because I find it surprising you have in the budget, for example—it's hard to keep a straight face because this feels like I'm on SCTV or something, right? This is Mayor Tommy Shanks with his budget. The government is going to build a second Ferris wheel in Niagara Falls. And I heard in the previous rounds of budgeting debate how someone said, "You don't understand what an investment is." I was like, "Can we solve the whole budget if we just had 75 Ferris wheels?" I don't know how much money Ferris wheels bring in, but I don't think it's enough to justify building other ones.

I'm going to list some of the cuts in here:

- \$147.9-million cut to education, which is verified by the FAO again;

- \$69.2-million cuts to post-secondary education;

- \$118.9-million cuts to the Attorney General—that's probably why a lot of those cases are being thrown out: Police officers work really hard to build the case to bring people to court and then it times out because there is not enough funding in the courtrooms to keep them going;

- \$39-million cut to energy and mines;

- \$160-million cut to finance;

- \$56.3-million cut to infrastructure;

- \$344.7-million cut to municipal affairs and housing;

- \$175.5-million cut to natural resources;

- \$219.9-million cut to public and business service delivery and procurement;

- \$121-million cut to emergency forest fighting; and

- \$1.7-million cut from francophone affairs.

After a while, that just becomes a blur of numbers. It's just cut after cut after cut. What we'll hear—and we hear it all the time—is "record investment." Well, it's because of the massive cuts in the past, then you do a slight increase that doesn't keep up with inflation and it's record investment.

When we talk about OW, for example—OW has never gone up, but ODSP did. ODSP went up, but below the

inflation level. The Conservative government will talk about how they've invested more than any government before, but people on ODSP still can't afford to put food on their table or a roof over their head.

Just so I don't run out of time—I don't want to forget this. In the middle of the budget—and this definitely is a budget issue, I'm sure, on page 139. That's buried in the budget. It's 231 pages in total, so it's a little more than halfway through the budget. It says, "Protecting Ontario with Stronger Safeguards for Public Information." This is about the FOI agreement. It's not really a budget-related item, but I can understand why the Premier wants FOI to be further restricted.

The Premier is famous not just for saying the party with the taxpayers is over, but he's also famous for saying, "I do business on my personal cell phone." He says it all the time. In fact, in question period, we ask him why he's trying to restrict freedom of information. In his answer, because he's a genius, I guess, he'll say, "I do business on my personal phone all the time."

They fought this in court, and they lost in court because if we're doing business, we're supposed to be transparent with all the business we do on our business phones. We're supposed to do business on our business phones. He lost that court challenge, and, I guess because the Premier is afraid of going to jail because there's an RCMP criminal investigation about the greenbelt scandal, he's decided to pass a law that's going to be retroactive—doesn't even start going forward.

People in Ontario are not super thrilled about this. The Conservative government knows this because they buried it inside the budget bill. They didn't table it on its own. The people—as they like to remind us, we work for them. It's why we knock on all these doors and we say, "Hey, will you trust me with your vote?" We don't say, "Hey, will you trust me with your vote? I might do some sketchy stuff, and if the RCMP comes after me, I want to hide it."

Interjection.

MPP Jamie West: It's a weird thing to say at the door, absolutely, but I wouldn't put it past you. I mean, one of your members actually did tell people—it was recorded on a Ring doorbell. When they asked about the greenbelt grab, he said, "Oh, that's fake news. That's AI." So who knows what you're saying at the door?

I want to talk about the budget. I think, if I was the Premier, one of the things I'd want to hide from people with freedom of information is the fact that I only showed up at Queen's Park 21 days last calendar year. That would be embarrassing for me as a Premier. I think telling people in the middle of the budget, "Well, we've got to protect Ontario. The best way to protect Ontario is with a second Ferris wheel"—

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): I recognize the member of Essex on a point of order.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: The standing orders prohibit members from referring to the absence of other members.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): The member of Essex is quite correct. One shouldn't refer to the absence of other members in the Legislature.

Please continue, member from Sudbury.

MPP Jamie West: Yes, that's fine. It wasn't the intent of what I was saying, but thank you, Speaker. I apologize if I've offended the member. Let's talk about stuff that's in the bill, honestly.

I've talked about this a couple of times today already, about Highway 69. In 2018, the Premier told the people of northern Ontario, Highway 69 would be four-laned. They were going to complete the work that was happening. He didn't keep that promise. In fact, in the budget during that term, there were zero dollars put towards Highway 69.

Then, in 2022, there was another election and the Premier again promised the people of northern Ontario to four-lane Highway 69 because people were dying on that highway—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): My apologies for interrupting the member from Sudbury.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos): The hour being 6 o'clock, this House now stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
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Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Gualtieri, Silvia (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
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Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Sport / Ministre du Sport
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Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
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Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
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Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée des Petites Entreprises
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Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
Watt, Tyler (LIB)	Nepean	
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
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Vacant	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough- Sud-Ouest	