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Jeudi
23 avril 2026

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 23 April 2026

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 23 avril 2026

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers / Prières.

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. Steve Clark: I'd like to thank the opposition members for collapsing the budget debate last night, and because of that, I would like to announce that this evening's night sitting has been cancelled.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTING ONTARIO'S WORKERS
AND ECONOMIC RESILIENCE ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 POUR PROTÉGER
LES TRAVAILLEURS ET LA RÉSILIENCE
ÉCONOMIQUE DE L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 22, 2026, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 105, An Act to enact the Strengthening Talent Agency Regulation Act, 2026 and to amend various Acts /
Projet de loi 105, Loi édictant la Loi de 2026 visant à renforcer la réglementation des agences artistiques et modifiant diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I think I was halfway through a word yesterday when that was it, the session was ended and it was time to pass to something different. I'm happy to be here this morning to continue my remarks about Bill 105, the Protecting Ontario's Workers and Economic Resilience Act. I had gone through some of the 170 pages of this bill and made comments. I won't repeat what I already talked about about this bill, but I will move on.

I want to talk about WSIB benefits ending at 65 and few people would be allowed to continue to have benefits past 65. As you know, Speaker, I worked in rehab for a long period of time and dealt with a lot of injured workers, mainly miners because of where I live, and a lot of them get seriously injured when very young—seriously injured where they will be in a wheelchair for the rest of their lives; seriously injured where they will be severely handicapped for the rest of their lives. How does a 25-year-old worker who gets seriously injured at work prove to WSIB that they had the intention to work past 65?

The bar is set so that it's a step forward, but a step forward that won't be accessible to so, so many seriously

injured workers who need money—we all do—who need to continue to have access to the health care benefits that are covered by WSIB, which they continue to use for the rest of their lives. They continue to need special equipment to be able to live independently. An electric wheelchair is very expensive. Lots of things we use in rehab are partially covered or not covered at all.

It's the same thing with amputees. If you get seriously injured at work, you lose a leg—I don't wish that upon anybody, but I've worked with many people who have, unfortunately, faced that. WSIB pays for different prostheses so that they can bike, they can run, they can just do what they need to do. Now all of this disappears at age 65. They no longer are covered. They no longer have access to the health benefits that come with being covered by WSIB unless they prove that they had intention to work past 65.

So a step in the right direction, Speaker, but that will still leave a lot of workers who did nothing wrong—they got injured at work. They deserve to be supported. This is what WSIB was meant to do. But at age 65, we push them out the door and they're left on their own. This is wrong. The small step will do some but not enough.

Restoring the earnings: It was Mike Harris, the last Conservative government, who took the earnings from 90% to 85%. I'm quite happy that the earnings will be back up to 90%. That's something that should have come years ago.

And I'm out of time, which is too bad.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Questions?

M. Anthony Leardi: J'aimerais poser cette question à la députée de Nickel Belt. Nous avons eu une discussion sur le prochain ombudsman et, dans le projet de loi devant nous, il y a la proposition que le prochain ombudsman soit bilingue en anglais et en français. J'invite la députée à offrir son opinion sur cette proposition.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Speaker, let's put things into perspective: This government decided to cancel the French-language commissioner and move his office under the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman has been there—Paul Dubé, who was a bilingual man, has been there. The transition was tough. Now an ad went to recruit a new Ombudsman that says bilingualism is an asset.

The recruitment has been done. The date to apply is past. Now, in 10 years from now, when we recruit a new Ombudsman, we will make sure that that position is filled by a bilingual person. Is it a good step? Yes, but way too late. Nobody thought about this when the ad went out just before Christmas, that the ad should have said mandatory bilingual? You are in charge of the French-language commissioner. You are in charge of a French department,

and nobody thought of making it mandatory until it went into the papers, until it went into the media because I complained about it. Is it a good idea? Yes, absolutely. But it shows one more time how low this government cares about francophones, that they do this, but it won't come into effect for another 10 years.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to congratulate the member for Nickel Belt on her remarks.

Recently, the Workers Action Centre did a report called *The Crisis of Wage Theft in Ontario*. They reported that, over the last 10 years, \$200 million has been stolen from workers' wages because of the lack of enforcement and other measures to protect workers from wage theft.

This bill provides or requires employers to pay for the uniforms of some employees in the province. Do you think Ontario workers would rather be protected from having their wages stolen by their employer or their uniforms paid for?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I really don't understand why the Ontario government would subsidize companies like EllisDon that made \$5.6 billion in Canada; 50% to 70% of this comes from Ontario. We will subsidize the uniforms of those workers. But for all the gig economy, for all of the precariously employed people who are the main victim of salary theft by their employers, very, very little is done.

Those employees are vulnerable. They need government protection. We are in a position where we can help them, where we can enforce some of the laws that we have and make laws to make sure that, if the gig economy is to continue, we protect those workers and we protect the meagre salaries that they get, but none of that is in the bill. Instead, we're going to give money to EllisDon so maybe they'll make a \$6-billion profit next year.

0910

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

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you to the member from Nickel Belt for her remarks this morning. My question is around the current CaRMS system, the residency matching system.

In my riding of Burlington, there are a large number of students who have gone abroad—specifically, it seems to be Ireland—to study medicine. As part of this legislation, we're looking at tweaking the CaRMS system so that students like the ones in my riding who grew up in Ontario, went to Ontario universities, their families paid taxes here in the province of Ontario, want to come home and practice here.

Part of this legislation is about prioritizing Ontario-connected international medical graduates. I just wanted to understand the member from Nickel Belt's position on what we can do or their thoughts on the proposed legislation about bringing Ontario international medical graduates—

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: One of the main reasons Ontario's health care system is as good as it is, that we have tertiary care system programs that only exist in Ontario, is because of the talents of the physicians and everybody else who works within the system. I want a system where the brightest minds who want to come and work in Ontario get selected.

When hospitals and different people select who they want as an intern, they look at those people. They look at how successful they are, how bright they are, how dedicated they are, how they are going to help our system in time. If this person is an international medical graduate, they should be welcome in Ontario. We want the brightest to be at the top of the list of who gets an internship in Ontario.

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

MPP Wayne Gates: Thank you for your presentation. You spoke a lot about WSIB and injured workers. I've probably spoken about this now for 10 or 12 years. The biggest issue facing injured workers is that they go to work, they get paid a fair day's wage for a fair day's work and they get hurt on the job. Then, WSIB decides to deem them, which means that they say you can do this phantom job over here and then they reduce their benefits.

My question to you is: Why would we have seven Working for Workers bills and at no time have they ever addressed the issue of deeming, which forces injured workers into poverty?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is incomprehensible that we still haven't fixed that. WSIB was put in place so that you didn't have to hire a lawyer and go against your employer and prove that—all of this is meaningless if you're forced to live in poverty.

Nobody chooses to become paraplegic at work and live the rest of their life in a wheelchair. If you were a miner, you worked underground, you made \$130,000 a year, and now they say, "Oh, you could answer calls. You can't walk anymore, but you're able to answer calls at \$18 an hour." No. This is not what WSIB was supposed to do, but this is what they do: They deem you fit for a job that pays barely over minimum wage. This is wrong. Everybody in the NDP has spoken out against this. When are we going to be respectful of those workers and pay them what they're worth?

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

M. Anthony Leardi: Vu que dans le Nord c'est un peu plus difficile d'attirer des gens pour travailler dans le monde de la santé et d'attirer des médecins, est-ce que ça serait une bonne idée, comme prévu dans le projet de loi, de donner un peu d'effort et de « reconnaissance » à ceux qui ont un lien fort avec l'Ontario pour, peut-être, garantir que ces gens-là vont rester dans le Nord et devenir des médecins pour le Nord. Que pense-t-elle, la députée, de cette question?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Je dois dire que dans le nord de l'Ontario, la discrimination, ça n'existe pas. Dans plusieurs

des petites communautés que je représente, une personne de race noire, on l'appelle docteur.

Pour nous, on veut les personnes les plus qualifiées choisies pour travailler dans le nord de l'Ontario. Est-ce qu'on a des problèmes de recrutement? Oui. Est-ce que le gouvernement pourrait en faire plus pour nous aider avec nos problèmes de recrutement? Absolument. De nous faire dire le 16 juin qu'on a de l'argent pour embaucher des « locums » pour l'été—le 16 juin, tout le monde sait déjà ce qui va se passer pour tout l'été.

Il y a beaucoup de choses qu'on pourrait faire, mais de bloquer les gens à l'international de venir en Ontario, ça, ce n'est pas une bonne solution.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Good morning, everyone. It's nice to see you.

This is truly getting old, this bill. I'm rising again to speak to yet another omnibus bill with some really great sections woven in to some sincerely horrendous ones, and that seems to be classic with this government.

But I am an eternal optimist, so I'm going to kick it off with the good: schedules 1 and 5, the Employment Standards Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act, respectively. Most notably, these schedules ban employers from requiring that employees pay for their uniforms as part of mandatory equipment for the job. These are great provisions.

Ontario has dangerously high unemployment numbers, especially for youth. We know that. We had an opposition day motion on that to help youth, which unfortunately this government chose not to support.

Ontarians already expend so many resources to find a job: travel time, money, effort spent drafting résumés, cover letters, preparing for interviews, background checks, obtaining certifications. Simultaneously, the affordability crisis rages on. So, for an often-expensive uniform and/or safety equipment that cannot be repurposed or reused—which actually, as a side note, would contribute more textile waste to our already overflowing landfills. You know I have a private member's bill that I already introduced—you were captivated with it—on textile waste, and I'm sure you're worried about our landfills reaching capacity, especially Green Lane, which is Toronto's landfill, by 2034. I'm sure that keeps you up at night and you have a solid plan for waste diversion. But uniforms—why community members cannot continue forward in their employment is unfathomable and inequitable—and that this government is doing something to make employment more accessible.

I would like to take this opportunity, while we are on the subject, to discuss the ways we can bolster these provisions. The train of thought that resulted in these adjustments is a good one. Thinking intersectionally, extending consideration beyond the obvious processes around gaining employment to look at how we ensure one maintains employment and that their work environment is safe and fair.

Let's take it a step further. I encourage this government to examine how they can further support people seeking employment and current employees through building better and more affordable connected transit to get people where they need to be: offering bike-share that is informed by an understanding of the first and last miles—and, of course, we need physically separated bike lanes to keep people safe, if that's is how they choose to commute to their employment; instituting more transparent job postings; jobs that actually pay a living wage; jobs with child care options and with opportunities to upskill.

0920

Schedule 8: the Strengthening Talent Agency Regulation Act. I know that the Minister of Labour was mentioning that ACTRA was here the other day supporting this, so that's great. In the same vein of addressing unemployment and maintaining employment in safe and fair working conditions, I'm thrilled that entertainment workers will be more protected and experience more stability and predictability in their work, specifically pay schedules and set fees.

Ontario has some of the most talented performers in the world. In and around my riding of beautiful Beaches—East York is a hub for talent with many theatre companies like the Coal Mine Theatre; the Second City comedy club; collectives like East End Arts, Beach Chorale, Beaches Art and Crafts, Sing!, the Beach Guild of Fine Art and venues. We also have major events with the Fox Theatre, History—which is the Live Nation facility that I happened to help put in back in the day—Woodbine Park, and of course our famous Beaches Jazz Festival. Anything we can do to support artists is a good thing. It is imperative that these communities to are able to produce their arts. Rest assured their rights will be protected.

Schedule 9: the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act. Building on the importance of workplace safety and fairness, this schedule permits workers to receive loss-of-earnings payment beyond the previous cut-off at 65 years of age, increases the WSIB loss-of-earnings benefit rate and mandates WSIB coverage for all residential care facilities and group homes, whether they are private or public. In an affordability crisis, people are forced to work longer just to afford living expenses, and they should not be penalized or left unprotected for this.

Schedule 2—now we're not going to be positive: the Environmental Assessment Act. I'm sure that when you decided to include this schedule, you knew you would be hearing from me. Just when I thought there was nothing left to kill on an environmental protection front, you've already picked all the meat off the bones and now, I don't know, you are crushing the bones or pulling out the marrow. You are just desecrating any type of environmental oversight.

This schedule empowers the government to prescribe a new class of environmental assessments, which would excuse a whole slew of projects, including highways, railways and energy transmission lines, from comprehensive environmental assessments wherein impacts on the natural environment like ground water, surface water, species at

risk, climate change and more is assessed. Socio-economic environment considers odour, noise, dust, litter and the general economy. We know that systematically low-income and marginalized communities are disproportionately impacted by environmental threats, including noise, poor air quality, odour and emissions caused by close proximity to major roadways. This coincides with worse health outcomes, less mobility, isolation and more.

We cleaned up air quality in Ontario massively when the coal plants got closed and now, we are just trying to go backward, it seems. This is what the government will continue to perpetuate by completely removing the requirement to engage in environmental assessments for these projects. Why can we not find a way to build necessary infrastructure at a pace that reflects its need but does not completely violate the well-being of communities? This government has not found a way to do that—not yet. There's always a little glimmer of hope, maybe.

Cultural environment examines potential effects to cultural and archaeological resources. Built environment looks at surrounding land use, transportation networks and traffic. This is exactly what I'm talking about—the One Project, One Process approach is really just the government's way of saying that they can only deal with one project, one process, one problem at a time. Removing the environmental assessment requirements means that this government must plan around creating whole communities. We need to think about how we can connect neighbourhoods, businesses and parks.

Landfills: This schedule would allow the government to bypass an environmental assessment when they are proposing to increase a landfill service area, fill rate, or consult with the public in the Environmental Registry of Ontario, the ERO.

That's right, you heard it first: Bigger landfills holding more waste may be coming to your backyard, but definitely not with your input. And we've seen that when we debated the bill about Dresden. I'm sure your communities would have something to say about that.

We really need to focus on waste diversion. Moreover, these landfill changes will not be subject to natural environment, socio-economic, cultural environment and built environment impact considerations without the environmental assessment.

Public consultation: Gutting environmental assessments is not limited to landfills. This government seeks to alter the fundamental environmental assessments by removing the requirement to publish and consult on a ministry review; the opportunity for the public to request a hearing before the Ontario Land Tribunal—OLT—while maintaining the minister's authority to refer an application or matter related to an application to the tribunal for a hearing and decision on their own initiative; remove the requirement for cabinet approval of the minister's decision on the application for approval to proceed, while providing the minister discretion to refer an application to cabinet for a decision.

When the minister of red tape introduced the bill this week, she stated that the comments received in the ERO

were often not used in the amendments of the bill. Wow, that's really telling. There are hundreds and thousands of comments all the time, not just one line, but genuine, thoughtful comments. Simultaneously, their colleagues claimed that feedback has informed bills in depth—so you're kind of talking out of both sides of your mouth there—that the government's bills are a response to consultation. So I question how both can be true.

I beg the government to genuinely ask themselves, truly reflect on what have you done to earn Ontarians' trust. What have you done that makes Ontarians feel like you are listening?

Your bill claims that there will be ample opportunity for Indigenous consultation, but do you remember Bill 5? I was in committee and they begged for you to come up north to do your consultations there. Instead, they had to pay thousands of dollars to come down all the way to Toronto to speak to us at committee. That is not thoughtful or genuine consultation.

Twenty-four First Nations came to Queen's Park from thousands of kilometres away for weeks to depute, to protest, to voice that Bill 5 was an affront on the duty to consult.

The OSAP cuts: Thousands of students rallied outside of Queen's Park. They were not asked about how their government could best support them.

The greenbelt: Did you speak to farmers before? I don't think so. Did you ask the stewards of the land? Definitely not, but then you had to reverse it because you didn't do it right the first time.

When do you listen? When you do listen, it's only to a select few: your friends, your donors and your supporters. So when you say that you will consult, you must evaluate the amount of trust in this government that this demands from the public.

I'm not against efficiencies or changing a system. I want to get 'er done. But truly changing to make it better for you? You've not shown that you can be trusted.

Your rap sheet includes, but is certainly not limited to, selling off the greenbelt, completely exempting certain zones from regulatory oversight, time-allocating countless bills, bypassing public feedback on bills and skirting debate, buying a private jet for almost \$30 million during an affordability crisis, pausing the affordable housing mandate, investing in a strip club with public funds and, most recently, legislating shielding the Premier, ministers and their staff from any obligation to disclose their records under the freedom of information act.

Schedule 6, the last one I will speak about, is the Ombudsman Act. I am definitely with and I really valued the comments from my colleague from Nickelback—Nickel Belt, sorry, Nickel Belt. They were bang on.

M^{me} France Gélinas: You're not the first one to make that mistake.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I just have the songs in my head.

How is this a red tape concern? Please explain to me how baking bilingualism into the Ombudsman Act is in

service of red tape reduction, because what I see here are some of the most glaring examples of red tape.

0930

Schedule 6, enshrining in the Ombudsman Act a requirement for the Ontario Ombudsman to speak English and French, was undoubtedly an afterthought slapped into the nearest bill they could find because if it were a serious thought, it would have been done right the first time. In this government's press release, the decision is framed as "strengthening access to French-language services."

Let's review how we got here. In their first fall economic statement, the Premier and his government cut French-language services. Two key features of Franco-Ontario: This government cancels the French-instruction university in Toronto promised during his campaign and rolls the previously independent French Language Services Commissioner under the umbrella of the Ombudsman's office, much to the outrage of the Franco-Ontarian communities and their colleagues in the Quebec government. If you are genuine in supporting Franco-Ontarians, you would leave the French Language Services Commissioner as an independent officer. That's number one. Well, the fall economic statement is an announcement of priorities, so this particular statement confirms that right from the get-go, French language and Franco-Ontarians would not be prioritized.

But this is not the end of the offences—no. The 2024-25 French Language Services Commissioner's report reveals the systematic deviation and discreditation of Ontario as a genuinely bilingual province. Namely, the report details the many times the duty to provide active offer was neglected in everything from road signs, court services, government websites to public consultations and more. "Active offer" specifically outlines the legal obligation that services must be offered in French from the first point of contact without request. Not only were French-language speakers repeatedly unable to easily access French services, but a regulation meant to provide limited exemption to certain types of publications from offering French options was abused to skirt responsibility.

Regarding the adjustment to the Ombudsman Act laid out in Bill 105, the story is more of the same: French language and creating an inclusive society that lives the spirit of bilingualism is not a priority for this government, and can and will be sidelined based on the government's poor discretion.

The Ombudsman hiring process began in November 2025. The committee is comprised of members from all parties. We reviewed hundreds of résumés and worked with HR. There were countless opportunities for this government to declare that the next Ombudsman be bilingual, but nothing—crickets—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Sorry to interrupt the member.

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.

I recognize the member from Essex.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Please continue the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I return to the member from Beaches–East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: That was a surprise. Thanks for that.

Where was the Minister of Francophone Affairs during this whole process? That is a good question.

People expended their time, money and resources applying for this position, a position that many did not have any shot at in the first place because this government failed to think through the needs of Ontario. They failed to consult with each other and those with expertise on important issues. They failed to pay attention to what was going on around them, and to honour a promise to the Franco-Ontarian community.

The thing that makes the circus even more wild is that the government claims that they know best to the point that they have made a habit out of removing the power and decision-making capabilities from the hands of councils, conservation authorities, city planners and school boards because, according to the government, they weren't "efficient," they weren't "responsible," and there was "too much red tape" and "duplication."

Because this government handled this process, they initiated a costly program—check; drew out and delayed the process—check; shifted responsibility from ministry to ministry—check. Then they started all over again when they decided to add bilingualism as a requirement to the Ombudsman Act.

So I guess I do not understand why this bill is under the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction with this section. I suppose that is exactly what happens when people and the systems and programs that were designed to meet and protect the needs are viewed as red tape to cut, crumple or throw out.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Schedule 4 of the bill in front of us right now talks about making regulations "governing the admission of graduates of a medical"—I'm literally reading from schedule 4—"a medical school outside of Canada to an Ontario medical residency program, including prescribing processes" for that. We call that CaRMS, Canadian Resident Matching System.

I think the member from Beaches–East York is somewhat familiar with the proposition in front of us. It's to encourage Ontario-linked individuals to get into the process and get them a residency and perhaps even to give them a little bit of preference. I invite her to offer her observations on that proposition.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much to my fellow member from Essex, Ontario. Yes, I think this schedule 4, although I did not mention it in my speech, is a good step forward, for sure, so thank you for doing that.

I would just say, if you truly believe in supporting health care and ending our health care crisis, you might actually do things like sign off on the phase 2 development project for Michael Garron Hospital, which is in my riding. They have been waiting over three years for you to sign off on it. It will take probably 10 years for it to be built once you do sign off. Unfortunately, the last time I asked the Minister of Health about signing off on it, she just smirked at me.

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you to the member for Beaches–East York for your remarks on this bill.

One of the things that Bill 105 does is extend WSIB coverage to 29,000 workers in residential care facilities and group homes. Obviously, every time more workers in Ontario have access to protection in cases of injury, that's a good thing, but there are still 1.5 million workers in Ontario who don't have access to WSIB. If we look at another care profession, child care workers have no protection. We know that's a profession that's already having difficulty retaining and recruiting workers. Their wages are very low. In many cases, there is no wage grid that allows them progress throughout years, and then they have no protection against injury when it occurs.

Does member think that the bill should go much, much further, that the government should actually provide protection to the 1.5 million Ontarians who still have none?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much to the member from Ottawa West–Nepean. That's a great question.

I'll throw this government a teensy, tiny bone on this bill. There are some good things in it, but, as usual—it's interesting. Sometimes, they take baby steps. This is a baby step. Everyone should be covered. It's 2026. We know we want to take care of Ontarians in general, but especially in the workplace, especially child care workers, who are doing God's work, essentially, taking care of our future generations. But they take baby steps with some things and then they just ram through, like a bull in a china shop, with other things. It kind of defies logic, but I'm with you: They all need to be supported.

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

Mr. Ted Hsu: I'd like to ask my colleague about schedule 2, which changes the Environmental Assessment Act. I wanted to ask her a couple of things. What is motivating the government to do this? And how does removing the requirement that the government review comprehensive environmental assessments affect the average person living in Ontario?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you to my fine-feathered friend and colleague from Kingston and the Islands for your great question. What it does to Ontarians, by removing the Environmental Assessment Act, it actually is a very dangerous move and it puts them more at risk. If you're removing environmental oversight from landfill sites, that's very dangerous.

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We know that this government does—first of all, they're allergic to the words “climate change,” I've said that before. But they also do things under the guise that it will speed up building housing, because they think anything to do with the environment slows it down, which is completely unfactual. We know the green development standards have not slowed down any type of housing, including in Toronto, where we were 51% higher on our housing starts with the green development standards.

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

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I would like to ask the member across, on francophone services. Speaker, our government has continued to strengthen access to French-language services, including expanding the six designated areas under the French Language Services Act, and we know now that the Ombudsman can work much more efficiently in both languages. The member opposite, should you be supporting this motion?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: To the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore, thank you very much for the question. I'm glad you gave me more time to talk about this, because section 6 gets under my skin—because it's too late. You should have done it in the first place. If respecting Franco-Ontarians was so important to you, you would have kept the French Language Services Commissioner as an independent officer, number one. The fact that you didn't, you threw that role into the Ombudsman area, is completely disrespectful.

Number two, if this were so important to you to have the Ombudsman bilingual, you would have said so at the beginning of the process in November 2025. You wouldn't have waited until the process is basically over and we have to start all over again because of your mix-up.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A reminder to speak through the Chair.

Question?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Still on section 6, where the Ombudsman—in a bill that has to do with Ontario workers and has nothing to do with the Ombudsman. The position in 10 years from now will have to be posted as bilingual.

How does that make you feel and how do you think the francophone population in Ontario feels that a government who took away the French Language Services Commissioner, the Black Thursday of November 15, saw 40,000 Franco-Ontarian on December 1 push back against the government decision—and then sees a government who thinks about making the position of Ombudsman bilingual after the process has already gone. Do you think that this makes Franco-Ontarians feel good?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much to the member from Nickel Belt, who has been such a strong advocate for Franco-Ontarian communities.

I don't understand because, actually, there are many MPPs across the floor who do speak French, that are bilingual—I think that's great, but where were their voices when we first started the Ombudsman process in November? Where were the voices when we formed the

selection committee, when we put out the job advertisement that did not say bilingual, when we had all the résumés come in—hundreds—who wouldn't want to be the Ontario Ombudsman, right—and then we start the interviews?

It is so disrespectful. It's disrespectful to people who applied. It's disrespectful to the Francophone community.

Thank you for sharing about Black Thursday. I'm sorry to the francophone community for what has happened.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: The member from Beaches—East York had said that perhaps the Minister of Health was grinning at her. If the Minister of Health was grinning, the Minister was probably grinning because of the completion of the new eight-storey hospital tower at Michael Garron Hospital, which the Ministry of Infrastructure spent approximately \$500 million on, which was a fantastic addition to Michael Garron Hospital and I'm sure is a spectacular, spectacular accomplishment.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. A very quick response from the member from Beaches—East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: The Minister of Health was not grinning, she was smirking, and she even drew a smirky picture afterwards and waved it.

Thank you for that first installation, but their ER is over capacity and they need help, and you're not giving it to them.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate? Further debate? I recognize the member for Essex.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. There was just a little delay on my part because I was double-checking with the whip.

I wanted to start off with somewhat of an anecdote, which will touch directly upon the very important provisions in the bill before us today. I'll start my anecdote by observing that the member from Windsor—Tecumseh yesterday ordered pizza for our caucus. It was fantastic pizza, and it was a lot of pizza. And I'm calling it pizza because that's what it is. My understanding is that other people refer to this as "Windsor pizza." After a bit of discussion, I understood why that was.

Of course, I had always known it as pizza because I grew up in Essex county. Eventually, as time went on, I learned that other people referred to it as "Windsor pizza." And this is how I learned it: I went to law school. We sat down to eat some pizza. We opened the box and I said, "Oh, dear, a terrible mistake has been made. They made the pizza wrong. We should send it back and tell them to make it right." And everybody stared at me blankly. I said, "What's the issue here? I know what's right and wrong. We need to send the pizza back and have them make it properly." People questioned me about that, and I explained to them how pizza is made. They said, "Well, that's Windsor pizza. We don't make Windsor pizza." That's how I learned that there was pizza, and then there was pizza.

We discussed that a lot during law school, and that could take up an entire day of discussion in itself, but I'm going to skip that part of law school. I'm going to go to the part where I graduated, notwithstanding the long discussions regarding culinary preparations. When you finish law school, you have to do something called articling, and articling is something like an apprenticeship for law students. Some people refer to that as your articling year. People refer to the people doing their articling year as articling students. Colloquially, you can call an articling student a "lawyerling." Sometimes we call them "lawyerlings."

When I was a lawyerling, I got an articling position at a law firm called Fazio Martini, which sounds like a delicious drink but it's actually a law firm, or was at that time. When you start out as a lawyerling, as an articling student, they typically give you tasks which are not complicated so that you can get some experience under your belt and prepare yourself for more complicated tasks.

In those days, I was assigned to go to landlord and tenant court, which used to be held in a courtroom. Today, it's held at a tribunal, but back then it was held in a courtroom. As a lawyerling, I went down to the courthouse and I sat down in landlord and tenant court and waited for the judge to arrive. Judges hated doing landlord and tenant court because they perceived it as being perhaps below their experience. I certainly didn't see it that way, but I think some judges saw it that way. We calmly waited for the judge to come in, and then the judge entered and climbed up the very high dais to sit in the judge's chair.

Madam Speaker, you're sitting on a dais today, but the judge's dais is much higher than that.

And so, the judge climbed up onto the dais and sat in the chair, and immediately got a scowl on his face. He was very dissatisfied with the chair. He started complaining that the chair was uncomfortable; it was not ergonomic. He stood up and he literally, Madam Speaker, grabbed the chair and shoved it, and it went bang, bang, bang down the dais, down the steps. It created a big commotion. The courtroom staff were shocked. I was shocked. The other lawyerlings were shocked. The judge stormed out of the courtroom demanding a new chair. Eventually, the courtroom staff, after doing a considerable amount of scurrying around, found an ergonomic chair, put it on the dais and called the judge back. The judge reconvened the court, and then we started calling cases.

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Case after case after case, that judge tore a strip off of every single articling student that appeared in front of him. And then it was my turn, and he tore a strip off my back. I replied with something that might be interpreted as impertinent, and he interpreted it that way and it didn't land well. This judge, he adopted the fiercest scowl on his face—he looked like a gargoyle hanging off of Notre-Dame cathedral. He scrunched himself up like that and he said this to me: "Mr. Leardi, you're going to learn law the way I learned law—the hard way."

That, Madam Speaker, leads me into the topic of today's debate, which is how we train professionals in the province of Ontario. In this particular bill, we talk about

professionals, and they are medical professionals, and in this particular bill, we talk about graduates, and they are medical graduates. Doctors also go through a form of apprenticeship after finishing their medical schooling; it's called residency. It's a form of apprenticeship—I call it that, anyway.

Doctors applying for residency go through a process called CaRMS—Canadian residency matching system. As the system exists today, if you're a graduate from a Canadian medical school, then you have no problem applying to CaRMS. CaRMS is broken up into two rounds—there's a first round and a second round—and if you're from a Canadian medical school, you can apply to both rounds.

If you're not a graduate from a Canadian medical school, you can still apply; however, there are fewer opportunities open to you. International medical graduates can still apply, and they can still get a residency position in Ontario.

However, there's a slight issue with the system. People raised in Ontario, who might have gone to high school in Ontario, who might have done their undergraduate degree in Ontario, who are permanent residents of Ontario and who have a very powerful connection with Ontario—whether that powerful connection is through residency or citizenship—might need to go outside of Canada for their medical school education. And if they want to come back and do their residency in Ontario, they're not treated like they're from Ontario; they're treated like everybody else who got their education outside of Canada.

I don't think that's quite fair, and I don't think it serves the needs of our province. Because what we really want is to make sure that people who do their residency in Ontario stay in Ontario and don't leave after they finish. We want these newly trained doctors to stay in Ontario and not leave Ontario. That's why this piece of legislation is in front of us.

I'll make specific reference to schedule 4, because schedule 4 seeks to address this issue. The proposal still breaks down the application process for CaRMS—Canadian residency matching system—into two rounds, round 1 and round 2.

The first round is proposed to have a certain number of seats reserved for people who got their medical education in Canada, and then a certain number of seats to be reserved for people who got their medical education outside of Canada but have a strong connection to Ontario. That's round 1.

Then, in round 2, there's the proposition that the seats will be reserved, again, in certain proportions: a certain proportion for people who got their medical education in Canada; a certain proportion for people who got their medical education outside Canada but who have a very strong connection to Ontario; and people who got their medical education outside of Canada, regardless of their connection to Ontario. And of course, everybody will have more opportunity under the system because of the progress made by our government. There will be more opportunity

because our government has increased the number of students being trained in our various medical schools.

In addition to that, we are expanding the number of medical schools in Ontario. Of course, when you expand the number of people being educated at the medical schools, that means you're going to have more medical school graduates, which means you're going to have more people into the system, and that gives more opportunity out there for people to pursue that course of professional development. When fully implemented, our government's plan will add approximately 340 additional educational spots for people to pursue a medical education. That is a very big increase, and it should come as welcome news.

In addition to that, we are increasing the number of residency training positions that will be available. Also, when fully implemented, we will be adding more than 500 residency positions. A residency position, of course, is the apprenticeship process that a medical graduate goes through after graduating from the medical school—and then goes into the apprenticeship process called residency. There will be over 500 more spots when fully implemented, and that, of course, creates more opportunity for everyone. It creates more opportunity for those individuals who have a medical degree from a Canadian university, and it creates more opportunity for those people who have their medical degree from a university outside of Canada as well. So everybody benefits, but the primary beneficiary, of course, is going to be the patients of Ontario.

These are changes being proposed by our government in Bill 105, which is the bill that we are speaking about today. These changes are practical. They are fair. We are protecting Ontario's health care system. We are protecting Ontario's medical students and making sure that we have a reliable pipeline of talent going into the future.

I will also take this opportunity to talk about a few of the other accomplishments of our government in the field of the Ministry of Health.

First, I'd like to talk about the remarkable increase in the number of nurses who have been registered in the province of Ontario. Since taking office in the year 2018, this government has registered approximately 100,000 nurses in the province of Ontario. I was kindly asked about that yesterday, and when you calculate the net benefit—because of course, there are always people entering the profession and exiting the profession. Some people exit the profession for retirement. Some people exit the profession for other reasons. And some people enter the profession. So we will talk about the net new increase of nurses in Ontario. And the net increase of nurses in Ontario is 15% since this government took office in 2018.

In addition to that, this government has seen approximately 20,000 doctors enter Ontario since taking office in 2018. That is also a very excellent achievement.

I would also like to take an opportunity since this bill also talks about schedule 7, the Retirement Homes Act, to touch a bit on that and this government's accomplishments in that area.

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We've heard the member from Peterborough discuss the benefits that have accrued to his riding as a result of the efforts made by our government. The member for Peterborough correctly observes that in his riding alone, this government has added an additional 800 resident spots for people in various retirement homes and long-term-care homes. Those 800 spots exceed all of the spots created by the previous Liberal government in their entire 15 years of governing the province, which I believe is quite a remarkable achievement.

But there's going to be more because in my riding of Essex, we have two new homes being built. One is being built in the town of Belle River, which will add a net increase of 80 spots, transferring 80 spots from a former home in a town which is now going to be transferred to Belle River. The 80 spots will be, of course, upgraded into a modern, state-of-the-art facility and add an additional 80 spots, for a total of 160 resident spots for people in the town of Belle River, for a net gain of 80 in that location.

Then, in the town of Amherstburg, the same thing is happening. Another home is being, let's say, transferred into another use. Those 80 spots are being transferred to Amherstburg, and an additional 80 spots are being added, for a net gain of 80 spots, for a total of 160 retirement home resident spots in the town of Amherstburg. So I just wanted to touch on those accomplishments at that time.

Finally, I want to turn my attention to what I had alluded to earlier in my speech. In the final analysis—withstanding the words of the gargoyle-esque judge in the landlord and tenant court on that particular day—I did not wind up learning law the hard way; I wound up learning law my way. Eventually, after receiving guidance and initial training at other law firms, I moved on and I founded my own law firm.

As a sole practitioner lawyer, I gradually built up my law practice and became, with time, moderately successful at it. I hired an assistant. I hired articling students of my own—lawyerlings of my own—who I then trained and hopefully gave good guidance and a fair amount of mentoring to. They entered the system—in this particular instance, the law system, the legal system. I'm proud to say that many of them are still practising law today.

That's how these systems work: They go from university training to training under the mentorship of an existing professional to the final stage, where you go off on your own and practise on your own and then maybe even train people yourself. The medical system operates in a similar fashion, where people who study medicine at university graduate and then do a period of training and then go off on their own, either as individuals or in a group practice and then maybe even train people under their own wing. That's a good thing. It should continue to happen.

As a sole practitioner lawyer who then eventually hired lawyers as well as part of a small, boutique-type practice, we did do long hours of work. It was quite routine for us to work past the regular hours that other people work. We

worked until 8 o'clock at night, 9 o'clock at night, 10 o'clock at night. So during last night's discussion, when other people were observing that it was dark outside, I didn't find anything particularly unusual about that because I routinely work to 8 o'clock or 9 o'clock or 10 o'clock at night. I did that when I was a lawyer and continue to do that today.

I do think that, perhaps, not everybody should be required to do that, and it was clear that we did force some members of this House—not all, but some members of this House—to stay up past their bedtime. That's an unusual thing, but I can say, in the final analysis, the pizza was very good. I fuelled myself up, and that helps you get through the dark hours of the night.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: The member talked a little bit about the changes for retirement homes in this bill. We all know that retirement homes—if you make a complaint, it is an industry-driven agency that handles your complaint. We all know that in retirement homes, they are allowed to increase the cost of everything but rent every 90 days, and many of them do. Whether it is the cost of food, the cost of cleaning your place or doing the laundry, many of them increase. People put in complaints and say, “Why does the cost of living here keep increasing and increasing?” The industry-driven complaint mechanism says that it's allowed, and that's the end of it. Do you figure this is a fair way to deal with the 70,000 frail, elderly people who live in retirement homes?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I appreciate the question from la députée de Nickel Belt. There is a complaint mechanism in place, not only for what she just mentioned, but also there are government-appointed inspectors who go into the various homes across the province of Ontario. You can file a complaint with a government-appointed inspector who will then determine whether or not that particular home is in compliance with government regulations and laws. That is a frequent mechanism that can be used if you choose to use that mechanism.

Many people discuss these issues directly with staff and management at the various facilities, and many, many disagreements are resolved in that fashion as well. So yes, there's more than one mechanism to resolve these issues, and everybody should try to use the mechanism that's right for them.

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague from Essex for his very riveting remarks this morning. I always enjoy when the member from Essex rises in the House to speak.

I was wondering if they could elaborate—I know he spoke extensively, because he is the parliamentary assistant to health, on some of the changes in the Ministry of Health we're proposing through this legislation. But I

know the Minister of Red Tape Reduction and our entire government have worked hard to reduce costs for small businesses and Ontarians, putting more money back in their pockets, reducing regulations. I was wondering if the member from Essex can share with this place how this bill, if passed, will build upon those great successes.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: What a great question from the chief government whip. He's probably heard me before talking about my experience as a boutique lawyer in the province of Ontario.

When the government increases costs or increases compliance—we'll call it compliance; it's really regulation—small businesses either have to eat the cost or pass the cost on to their customers. In the case of my law office, we tried to come up with very inventive ways of trying to make sure that things got done without having to pass the cost on to the customer, on to the client, and sometimes that's just impossible. Sometimes the only way you can do that is to pass the cost on to the client, which makes, of course, things more expensive for everybody and sometimes defeats what you're trying to accomplish.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: Through you, Speaker, to the member from Essex: In the bill now, within six months of certification, if there's not a collective agreement reached in union negotiations within six months, there could be a decertification vote.

I used to bargain first collective agreements for a living. I did it for about three years for SEIU. There's almost never a collective agreement within six months. So I'm wondering if the member could tell me: Did the government fail to do its homework or is this just a blatant attack on unions?

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Mr. Anthony Leardi: The member has asked me quite a complex issue, and I suppose I could answer it by making reference to the law. But I remember once that the member accused me of using legal mumbo-jumbo. I don't want to use any legal mumbo-jumbo. I just want to say that the certification process can't go on forever. Nobody wants it to go on forever, and there has to be a point in time when people decide whether or not they're going to become a member of a union or a member of a different union. There has to be a cut-off date to be fair to people who choose to join a union. You have to be fair to people who choose to join a union, so there has to be a cut-off date.

We could have a long discussion about where the cut-off has to be. I'm sure people would have fair opinions on where it has to be, and I'm sure this discussion will continue, but to be fair to union members, there has to be a deadline.

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

MPP Bill Rosenberg: My question to the member for Essex: Speaker, Ontario families need more doctors. We need a physician workforce plan that brings talent home

and keeps it here, especially in the communities that need doctors most. Can the member explain how the proposed CaRMS revisions prioritize Ontario-connected international medical graduates and strengthen our physician pipeline?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I want to thank the member for that question. I know that this is an issue that's going to be particularly important for his riding because it's those types of ridings—rural ridings, northern ridings, communities that need assistance in attracting doctors—those are precisely the ones who are going to benefit from these provisions the most. Because what these provisions do is they say, if you happen to be a permanent resident of Ontario and you have a strong connection to Ontario and you just happen to have gotten your medical degree from outside of Canada, we're not going to treat you negatively just because you got your medical degree outside of Canada. We're going to recognize that you have a strong, strong connection to Ontario and you want to come back and stay in Ontario and become a doctor in Ontario.

So we're going to do that. We're going to recognize people who have a strong connection to Ontario and give them the benefit that they did not previously enjoy.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: This bill, as the member pointed out, prohibits employers from charging employees for the purchase of their uniforms or for laundering their uniforms, which is great for the employees who will be covered by that schedule.

However, the bill also allows the Ministry of Labour to reimburse employers for the cost of required protective headwear. So my question is, why is this government subsidizing major employers like EllisDon by enabling the compensation of those employers for the cost of required protective headwear?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Yes, it's great progress to make sure that a required branded uniform is not adopted at the cost of the employee, that a required branded uniform must be paid for by the employer. That's progress.

As I've said in previous remarks in this chamber, we have introduced previous legislation which we have colloquially dubbed Working for Workers. And I had said that we would continue introducing Working for Workers legislation. I had really gone on a crusade, saying we would have 13 and 14 and 15 and continuing and continuing, because we're going to continue making progress.

We've made progress since 2018. We've shown that progress over the last eight very short years of government, and I'm quite confident that we're going to continue making progress, maybe not specifically as the member from London West—who, by the way, is a very great conversationalist and I give her that compliment. It might not be specifically what she requested today, but it will certainly be progress and it will continue over the course of this government.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): There is not time for another round of questions and answers.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ARMENIAN GENOCIDE ANNIVERSARY

Mr. Aris Babikian: As the grandson of survivors of the Armenian and Greek genocides, I am honoured to rise in this House to pay tribute to the memory of one and a half million Armenians and one million Greeks who were victims of state-sponsored and premeditated crimes against humanity.

Tomorrow, Armenians around the world will mark the 111th anniversary of the Armenian genocide. As a member of the provincial Parliament, I join Armenians globally and all those who stand for truth and justice in commemorating the memory of one of the most heinous crimes of the 20th century.

April 24 is not only a day of solemn remembrance. It is also a moment of responsibility. It reminds us that historical injustice must never be forgotten or ignored, and that preventing genocide requires principled leadership and unwavering commitment to the truth.

I am proud that Canada, including the House of Commons, the Senate of Canada, the government of Canada and the provinces of Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta, has recognized the Armenian genocide, and remains committed to upholding human rights, preventing crimes against humanity, and strengthening international accountability.

May this day serve not only as remembrance, but—

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

WELLAND JACKFISH BASEBALL TEAM

Mr. Jeff Burch: I'd like to give a shout-out to the reigning Canadian Baseball League champions, the Welland Jackfish, as they prepare for their home opener on Saturday, May 16. The evening promises to be a memorable one, featuring an all-new pre-game plaza party, a championship banner giveaway for fans, an official banner unveiling and post-game fireworks.

Last season marked a record-breaking milestone for the organization as they welcomed over 67,000 fans for the first time in franchise history. I've had the pleasure of meeting many of the players and staff, and they are champions both on and off the field. Their deep connection to the Welland community is evident in their ongoing support for local food drives and community initiatives.

Their commitment goes far beyond the diamond. Recently, at the 52nd Welland Sports Awards Night, Welland Jackfish majority owner and team president Ryan Harrison accepted the special recognition award as the team's director to honour what they have contributed to the community.

Congratulations to the entire Jackfish organization. We look forward to another record-setting season.

DON VALLEY EAST
COMMUNITY SURVEY

Mr. Adil Shamji: For the past two years, my office has conducted a community survey to better understand the needs of my constituents in Don Valley East. It's how I make sure that their voice is reflected in my voice every time I rise in this chamber.

This year, our survey revealed that 61% of my constituents rank health care as their number one priority, with 39.6% of them saying their top local concern is improving access to family physicians and their hospital. Another 16.6% reported that prescription drug costs are affecting their household budgets, and 28.9% said rising costs have forced them to delay medical or dental care.

These are astonishing numbers that the Premier and members of this House need to hear. My constituents aren't asking for alcohol and convenience stores or a tunnel under the 401; they're asking for health care that's accessible, reliable and meeting their needs, because right now, it isn't.

That's why this government must work faster to publicly integrate nurse practitioners; to adopt pharmacare; to fund our hospitals, including Michael Garron Hospital; and to introduce a real retention strategy for health care workers that are overworked and far too often underappreciated.

Thank you to everyone who is participating in our community survey. Your voice is heard and directly shaping the work and advocacy that I do here on behalf of Don Valley East.

VOLUNTEERS

MPP Billy Denault: This week is National Volunteer Week, and I want to say a big thank you to all the volunteers in my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

In my first year in office, I've had the privilege of travelling to many organizations to honour and acknowledge the role volunteers play in our community. They truly are the backbone and lifeblood of what makes rural Ontario shine. From Legions to Lions, Optimists to Kiwanis, they embody the community spirit in every activity they take part in.

1020

Palmer Rapids Lions Club, Renfrew Lions Club, Arnprior Optimists, Arnprior Rotary Club, and the Legions in Arnprior, Pembroke, Petawawa, Calabogie, Renfrew, Chalk River and Barry's Bay—I have had the opportunity to attend celebrations with them all, and many more community organizations. But true to form, it's the people within these organizations who make the difference in small towns across my riding.

I also want to acknowledge today the passing of a super volunteer in our community, Rev. Leo Hughes of Arnprior, who passed on April 11, 2026. His kindness, care and compassion rang out on every Remembrance Day, at the cenotaph, on the 11th day and the 11th hour. His voice etched into every boy and girl, every man and

woman who attended, as the words rang from his heart like a melody.

To the Hughes family, I extend my deepest sympathies. May his example remind us of our duty to serve our communities with honour, compassion, care and the heart, as he did.

DR. ANDI JONES

Ms. Catherine Fife: On March 10, Dr. Andi Jones passed away after a courageous battle with cancer. Andi gave so much to her community of Penetang. Andi was a teacher and mentor to so many in family, sports and emergency medicine, including as the team physician for the under-18 Canadian women's national hockey team.

Dr. Jones dedicated more than 24 years to the Georgian Bay General Hospital as an ER doctor. She was the first full-time female emergency physician at the hospital, paving the way for future generations of women in emergency medicine. They dedicated a room to her at GBH.

My friend Jeannie MacGillivray said this about Andi: "Her intelligence, tenacity and generosity are what made Andi such a phenomenal teacher. To be an exceptional teacher, one has to be willing to give so much of oneself. She was a natural."

She was also an exceptional friend, daughter, sister, wife, and loving parent.

In Jeannie's eulogy, she wrote:

"Jack, Case, Cal and Tate (and Olivia and Soph)—you are so loved. Her love for you was palpable and fierce. She loved each of you so uniquely that her voice had a different tenor when she would speak about each of you.

"A love that profound doesn't dissipate or fade—it's etched in your DNA, it's the essence of your being and will always be part of who you are. So when life is hard, remember that love and draw the strength you need from it."

Sincere condolences to Andi's loving husband, Dan, and parents, Tom and Lindy, family and community. Thank you for sharing Andi with us.

THE LEARNING ENRICHMENT FOUNDATION

MPP Mohamed Firin: Madam Speaker, today I rise to recognize and celebrate the Learning Enrichment Foundation, a Toronto-based charitable organization that has served one of our city's most diverse communities for more than four decades. Established in 1978 and headquartered in Mount Dennis, the Learning Enrichment Foundation has grown from a small community initiative into a cornerstone of York South–Weston.

Each year, LEF provides licensed child care to over 2,000 children and families and supports more than 6,100 individuals through settlement services, language training, and employment and skills training programs.

Programs like the Family Well-Being Program give parents and caregivers tools to strengthen relationships and prevent youth violence, while the youth program

empowers people through mentorship, leadership training, career counselling and recreational activities.

LEF's social enterprise bicycle assembly and repair program—BAM—provides affordable bike repairs and, through a partnership with the Air Canada Foundation, has given bicycles and helmets to children in the local community.

Looking ahead, LEF is continuing to build economic resilience as they are redeveloping properties into a 14-storey mixed-use development in the riding that will put community and economic development at its heart. Once completed, it will offer 149 units of affordable housing and approximately 30,000 square feet of community space, creating a vibrant hub where residents can live, learn, work and shop.

Madam Speaker, I'm proud to stand with the Learning Enrichment Foundation and thank them for more than four decades of dedicated service to the community of York South–Weston.

FORT ERIE RACE TRACK

MPP Wayne Gates: I rise today to stand up for workers, families, and small businesses who rely on the Fort Erie Race Track. For over a century, this track has supported good local jobs—from the trainers and jockeys to the farmers who supply feed and equipment. It's one of the largest employers in Fort Erie. But today its future is at risk.

A \$35-million funding agreement developed with the OLG and Ontario Racing is being delayed by one stakeholder, Woodbine Entertainment Group. The CEO of the Fort Erie Race Track pointed out that the delays from Woodbine are at the direct expense of the remainder of Ontario's 13 horse-racing venues. The concerns raised are serious. The one person that controls Woodbine, Jim Lawson, can't be allowed to jeopardize the future of the Fort Erie Racetrack.

We're hearing about restrictions that prevent horses from moving freely between tracks and scheduling decisions that pushed the Prince of Wales Stakes out of the peak summer season. The letter from the Fort Erie Race Track warns that these actions aim to weaken and eventually close the Fort Erie Race Track. Workers at the track haven't seen a purse increase in nearly a decade. Raising costs are pushing them to the brink. They shouldn't have to relocate. This is their livelihood. Fort Erie is their home.

I'm calling on the government to finalize the agreement as intended, protect jobs, and ensure a fair and balanced horse racing industry. Supporting the Fort Erie Race Track means supporting Niagara.

VOLUNTEERS

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: It is Volunteer Appreciation Week, and I cannot think of a better way to recognize all the outstanding volunteers in my constituency of Newmarket–Aurora. My riding is home to so many non-profit organizations, all of whose work would

not be possible, would not get done without the hundreds of volunteers that make it work.

This year's theme is "Ignite Volunteerism." This is an opportunity to spark new energy, reconnect with community members and recognize the vital role volunteers play in strengthening the social fabric of our community.

My office and I owe an endless debt of gratitude to volunteers for their years of support at my signature community events like the annual community barbecue, the seniors expo, non-profit appreciation gathering and community events like this weekend's Run for Southlake and York Pride parade, as well as the Canada Day parade and the Santa Claus parades.

Volunteers make our community kinder, stronger and more supportive. Thank you all, all you amazing volunteers in Newmarket–Aurora, who make a great difference.

PALLIATIVE CARE

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Palliative care is so important to each and every one of us. Everyone that lives will one day face death. This is a common reality for all of mankind. I am proud to be a part of a government that has made record investments in palliative care. Hundreds of new hospice beds have been funded across the province since we formed government in 2018, bringing Ontario's total to 768 beds.

Just in my riding, we have two hospice projects currently under way, and last week the Townsend Smith Foundation announced that they would be moving forward with a new name: North Halton Hospice. This change makes the organization's mission crystal clear, and that mission is to bring a hospice to north Halton. With the property conveniently located on Trafalgar Road in Halton Hills, between Georgetown and Milton, North Halton Hospice is well placed to fill an essential need in our community.

Our government has stepped up to support the creation of 10 beds at the North Halton Hospice, representing millions in capital funding. I have been and will continue to be a strong supporter of bringing palliative care to our communities. On May 2, the North Halton Hospice will be hosting their hike for hospice event starting at 10 a.m. In Halton Hills, there will be two hikes, one starting at Prospect Park in Acton and the other at beginning at Norval United Church on Danby Road. If anyone is interested in participating and supporting this important cause, you can register at northhaltonhike.ca.

I want to thank executive director Kim Kohlberger, the board of directors and the countless volunteers and donors for their tireless work supporting the North Halton Hospice. I am confident that as a community we will—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Members, if I could have your attention please.

MICHAEL GRANT

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): It is with mixed emotions that we share that after 36 years of outstanding

service of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, PSO constable Michael "Mikey" Grant is retiring tomorrow.

Michael is widely respected for his professionalism, reliability, positive spirit, and of course is well known for his contagious laughter. He has also proudly served part-time in the local reserve Queen's York Rangers regiment. He is deeply valued and will be truly missed.

1030

Mikey, we extend our gratitude and best wishes for a well-deserved, fulfilling retirement. We love you, and we will miss you.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Oh, that smile. We're going to miss that too.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

MPP Mohamed Firin: I'd like to introduce, from the Learning Enrichment Foundation, Amina Yassin, Fei Tang, Elizabeth McBain, Montsy Bassas, Michelle Trigiani, and the former Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Honourable Laura Albanese, who was also an MPP for York South–Weston.

MPP Jamie West: I've spoken about the Patel family, who died in the fatality on Highway 69. Kush Patel, their son, is here, as well as Jay Mahida, Minal Mahida, Pankaj Patel, Hardip Vaghela, Hardipsinh Mahida, Suketu Patel, Puneet Mehta, Parixit Patel, Deep Mahida, Devan Patel and Arsh Patel. Thank you for coming to Queen's Park. They're going to be having meetings with members from the government side.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'd like to introduce some friends from Dufferin–Caledon. From the NDP riding association, we have President Andrea Aloe, Lynda McDougall and Brenna Flynn. Welcome to Queen's Park. Welcome to your House.

MPP Billy Denault: This morning, I'd like to welcome to the gallery constituents of mine from my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and family members of page John Lepack from Arnprior. Please welcome Tiffany; his dad, Jason; his sister Lucy; and his grandparents Tom and Pam. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: I'd like to welcome members of the Catholic Women's League of Canada's Ontario provincial council to Queen's Park: Colleen Martin, Hilarion Mitchell, Karen McDonald, Lisa Henry, Linda Squarzolo and Susanna Lubowitz. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I would like to introduce page captain Henry's mother, Karla; his dad, Chris; and his brother James.

Congratulations, page captain Henry. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to wish a warm welcome to June Muir and Maxine Deleersnyder from the UHC Hub of Opportunities. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I'd like to introduce some amazing people from Kayanase and Ogwehoweh

Skills and Trades Training Centre, Grand River Employment and Training—especially jazzy Jordon Myers and energetic Erin Monture.

Welcome to your House.

Mr. Steve Pinsonneault: I'd like to welcome my new executive assistant for my constituency, Arlene Morrell, here today; my new executive assistant here at Queen's Park, Shan Dhanoa; and Jeanue Chung, my retiring executive assistant. I wish him all the best in his new endeavours.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: I'm happy to welcome my good friend and the best man at my wedding, Elijah Gortson, to the Legislature today.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I would like to introduce a non-partisan, non-political resident group from Sudbury: Jay Mahida, Minal Mahida, Pankaj Patel, Hardip Vaghela, Hardipsinh Mahida, Suketu Patel, Parixit Patel, Deep Mahida, Kush Patel, Devan Patel and Arsh Patel.

Thank you for coming to Queen's Park.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I'm delighted to welcome June Muir and Maxine Deleersnyder from the UHC Hub of Opportunities. Welcome to Queen's Park.

And to the parents of Windsor West's page, Dr. Darren Cargill and Amy Seibel: Welcome back to Queen's Park.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to welcome Linda Squarzolo from the Catholic Women's League, who came down from my riding to visit.

And I'd like to remind everybody that 16 days ago, Vinod and Shilpa Patel died on the two lanes of Highway 69. In the gallery with us today, we have their son, as well as many of their friends from Sudbury, who came down to let the Legislature know what it feels like when you lose a loved one on Highway 69. I'd like to welcome Jay and Minal Mahida, Pankaj Patel, Hardip Vaghela, Hardipsinh Mahida, Suketu Patel, Puneet Mehta, Parixit Patel, Deep Mahida, Kush Patel, Devan Patel and Arsh Patel. Thank you for being here today.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member from Peterborough–Kawartha on a point of order.

Mr. Dave Smith: I'd just like to correct my record. Last night in my speech, I said that there were 1,200 people who had been consulted on the budget. There were actually 900 individuals that came and spoke to us directly, 1,000 written submissions and 12,400 electronic submissions.

KEZIA MAMAKWA

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm sorry to have to share this with the House today. But over the last few years, we've had the great pleasure of welcoming the member from Kiiwetinoong's mother, Kezia, here into the Legislature. Sadly, after an illness last night, Kezia Mamakwa passed away.

I just wanted to say, on behalf of everyone here, we're sending our thoughts, our prayers, our love to MPP Mamakwa, the member for Kiiwetinoong. We're with you. We'll miss her.

QUESTION PERIOD

GOVERNMENT JET

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, my question is for the Premier. "No one is as scrutinized as I am"—those were the words of this Premier. It's pretty much all he's been saying for the last few days as he's been going on his private jet pity party tour of Ontario.

While he was setting the people's money on fire with a plan to buy a luxury private jet, people in this province were worrying about how they were going to afford their groceries or their rent. Students—who he has cut OSAP program funding for—are having to change their plans about whether to go to university or college.

I have to say, it was really astounding to see this Premier force his own members—his government cabinet members—to get up and defend this day after day after day this week. I'm wondering if the Premier will finally stand in this place, apologize to the people of Ontario and tell them exactly how much they're on the hook for.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: The Premier has said, repeatedly now, he listened to the people. He understood that this was not the time to purchase the jet. The jet has been sold back to Bombardier for what Ontario had paid for it.

When we talk about affordability, let's take a look at the budget. The NDP have an opportunity to vote in favour of this budget. This budget, with the actions that we're taking in it, this year alone, will save the people of Ontario \$12 billion. That is money that goes right back into the pockets of the hard-working people of this province. It's because we heard loud and clear, when we were travelling Ontario with the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, affordability is one of the biggest issues facing people of Ontario. That's why this government has taken those actions.

I encourage the members opposite to vote in favour of the budget today.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, Speaker. I'm very sorry the Premier couldn't stand in that place and speak for himself and defend this himself. Every other member of his government, apparently, has to wear this—fair enough, because apparently, the cabinet all approved it. They all signed off; that's what we heard.

What a terrible decision. And if it was only the one decision—but it isn't. This is part of a pattern with this Premier and this government. When it comes to things like money to fix the leaky roofs in our kids' classrooms:

“Sorry, we’ve got nothing.” When it comes to patients being treated in hallways, or now storage closets, in our hospitals: “Sorry, we’ve got nothing.” But when it comes to, I don’t know, a spa in downtown Toronto or some other vanity project of the Premier’s, and now a luxury personal private jet, they have endless amounts of cash, of taxpayer dollars to burn.

1040

So I would ask the Premier, I would like to know exactly which members of his cabinet—who signed off on this?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Premier of Ontario.

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Madam Speaker: Let’s talk about affordability here—they don’t believe in affordability—which they are going to vote against: tax cuts for small businesses, corporate income tax. For 375,000 small businesses, we’re giving a tax break. Each business will get \$5,000. They’re going to vote against that.

They’re going to vote against the \$4 billion to establish the Protect Ontario Account Investment Fund to help businesses in face of the tariffs. They’ll vote against that.

They’ll vote against the additional \$325 million for primary care, bringing four-year investments to \$3.4 billion. They don’t believe in that. They would rather play politics than help the people.

They don’t believe in an additional \$300 million to community sport and recreation infrastructure funding. They don’t care if there’s recreation or any sport.

They don’t care about the \$66 million to give teachers a \$750 supply card—

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: You’re darn right I do. I care that our kids don’t have pencils in their classrooms right now.

Let’s talk about affordability, shall we—a budget that doesn’t even mention rent or groceries, a budget that is only about passing laws that will prevent Ontarians from being able to find out the truth. That’s what’s in this budget.

Changes to the freedom-of-information laws: That’s what this budget is about. This is a budget that is about protecting the Premier and his phone records. Because guess what? We all know that this Premier has been up to something. We all know it. The RCMP knows it. The courts know it. They’ve ordered him to release his phone, but no, he doesn’t want to do that.

So let me just ask the Premier again: I want to ask him, when did he go to his cabinet about this luxury jet purchase and when did they first learn about it?

Hon. Doug Ford: Let’s talk about the freedom of information that every single government in this country—we’re duplicating. The federal government, your colleagues up in Ottawa—we’re doing exactly the same. But what they aren’t saying is 95% of all information will be able to FOI.

Just because you don’t give your number out, but you gave my number out there to everyone—which is good,

because I get more people calling me for support because you don’t return phone calls. I return the phone calls.

But what I’m not going to do, Madam Speaker, is give personal information about health records that people send me, about personal issues or having family problems. I’m not going to hand that out to the public. I know you have no problem handing out personal information, but I will not be handing out personal information.

We’re duplicating exactly what the federal government is doing and every other province in this country. So it can’t be that bad, can it? If your colleagues—

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

GOVERNMENT JET

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, if he is so proud of those changes to the freedom-of-information laws, why are they passing it in the middle of the night under the cloak of darkness?

I am getting pretty tired, and I tell you, what I’m hearing from Ontarians is how tired they are—how tired they are of this Premier and his excuses, this whininess. “Everybody but me has a law to protect them. Everybody but me has a private luxury jet.” That was not true, Speaker. Every other province, every other Premier, does not have a private luxury jet.

What I would really like to know, and I would love the Premier to table this today: I would like to know how many times he has chartered a private plane over the last eight years and who he’s brought with him.

Hon. Doug Ford: She doesn’t even know the Premiers, by the way, but anyway.

Madam Speaker, let me tell you: What we did do is we chartered a plane down to Texas. And I’ll tell you what happened. We went to three cities—13 appointments—in two days and one morning. But guess what we brought back that they could never bring back? We brought \$6 billion of investment back to Ontario, thousands and thousands of jobs. Because they don’t understand business. They’ve never understood business, ever, in their entire lives. You would be a disaster. We see with the NDP: tax and spend.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I’m going to go back to the Premier, Speaker. This is embarrassing for the Premier, I have to say. It really is.

I will tell him, my dad used to say to me, when I kept the door open too long in the winter: “We’re not trying to heat the outdoors.” But that’s exactly what this government is doing with Ontario’s debt: \$16 billion out the window on interest—\$16 billion.

You want to talk tax and spend? This is a Premier who is leaving the next generation of taxpayers with endless debt while he decides that the priority is not to fix their schools or to treat their elderly or to help out the nurses and the teachers—everybody who is so burned out. No, no. He wants to build a luxury spa. He wants a private

luxury plane with recliners and I don't know what else. Again, he asked for Blu-rays last time; I don't know if there are Blu-rays on this one. He wants a shiny toy and he's really mad that he had to return it to the toy store.

I would like to know, Speaker, from the Premier: When is he going to stop whining about not getting what he wants?

Hon. Doug Ford: Madam Speaker, isn't it a little rich they're pretending to be prudent fiscal managers? You have to be kidding me. On one side, they're saying, "Spend more, more, more taxpayers' money," and on the other side they're saying, "How dare you have \$16 billion?"

Let me tell you something, we have the best finance minister we've ever had. We're at a AA credit rating. As every other province has collapsed, we have a path to balance. We're investing \$230 billion into infrastructure. We're building the schools and the hospitals and the roads and the highways. That's what we're doing, and they vote against it every single time. That's their mentality.

I can tell you, we have saved businesses and taxpayers \$12 billion. We've never raised a tax. There's a million more people working today than there was when you two were in power, because you chased every company out of this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Final supplementary.

Ms. Marit Stiles: The Premier needs to stop feeling sorry for himself. It is extraordinary. I will also point out that Ontario has never had a debt like this in history. He's so busy having a party on the taxpayers' dime, it's extraordinary.

People out there are struggling to pay for their groceries. I meet people every day now who are mature students, single parents who went back to school and are having to stop that because they cut OSAP; seniors losing their homes because their rent is through the roof because they ended rent control. Yet he thinks that it's time to get a gravy plane. Oh, yes, I remember when he used to talk about ending the gravy train, but now he's sidling right up to the trough. The people of Ontario, they see through it.

I want the Premier, again, to apologize, just apologize. And I would say also—because I've got to say, I do not believe that there won't be some additional cost to this complete boondoggle—will he pay the difference?

Hon. Doug Ford: I apologize for the NDP for voting against the \$1 billion for autism. I apologize for the NDP and the Liberals for destroying our province for 15 years and putting 300,000 people out of jobs.

The \$332.5 million through Operation Deterrence: They all talk about protecting communities, but they vote against our police. You don't like our police. You stood there and said, "Defund the police." The other previous leader said she's scared of the police.

We support our police. That's the difference. We're tough on crime. They vote against our bail conditions. They vote against getting more crowns. They vote against getting more judges. They vote against everything—no solutions.

As we are still an economic powerhouse around the world—think of this, Madam Speaker: Out of 220 countries when it comes to the GDP, we're number 20 in the entire world, just Ontario alone—\$1.2 trillion of business, and we're—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier, but before I get started, I read the news this morning, and between the Premier and the Solicitor General, there seems to be a lot going on in Home Depot parking lots. So maybe they could get their act together.

Last night, under the cover of darkness, this government was covering up the cover-up, rushing through the gutting of our rights to freedom of information in this province.

So Speaker, a simple question: Just what is the Premier trying to hide?

1050

Hon. Doug Ford: Do you want to know something, Madam Speaker? Maybe he should do his hotline up to Ottawa and ask. We're duplicating exactly what the federal government is doing. We're duplicating exactly what the federal government has done for 15 years, that he knows.

At the end of the day, 95% will be FOI, and that's no problem. FOI everything; I have no problem with that. But we're duplicating what your cousins are doing up in Ottawa. We're duplicating what every single province is doing across the country.

But there's a double standard. They say one thing and then they change their mind. They're prudent fiscal managers; then they're saying, "Why aren't we spending enough money?"

Again, we're seeing billions and billions of dollars being invested here because we've created the climate, the conditions, for countries around the world to come and invest and create thousands and thousands of new jobs.

No matter if it's mining or if it's our energy policies, we're leading the world. We're leading the world—

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

Mr. John Fraser: I'd just remind the Premier—it's not in his notes, but there are 9,000 fewer manufacturing jobs in this province than there were in 2018.

Here are the things we found out about this tired and out-of-control Ford government—things that we learned from freedom of information about these folks: the \$8.2-billion greenbelt scandal; the Skills Development Fund and millions of dollars for strip club owners, the Ford family dentist and ministers' best friends; and also the fact that the Premier and the Solicitor General can't seem to keep criminals behind bars. It's like the Keystone Kops over there. What's going on?

Ontarians know these things. They deserve to know these things. And after last night—actually, after lunch-time today—they won't.

So Speaker, back to the Premier: Just what is it you're trying to hide?

Hon. Doug Ford: Again, I want the leader of the third party to call his hotline up to Ottawa and say the same thing to the Prime Minister or all their ministers.

And by the way, I actually agree with what they're doing up at the federal government because—try to get a cell number off the Prime Minister's line, or get it off one of their ministers, or get it as they just bought \$753 million of jets for their ministers. There seems to be a double standard going on.

The other area—the leader of the third party says, “My dentist, my dentist.” I talked to him outside, and he goes, “I know it's not your dentist, but it sounds good. That's my job.”

So what's he saying? One second, privately, he's saying, “I know it's not your dentist, but I'm going to say it anyway.” What credibility does he have? He has zero credibility. That's what he's all about. It's politics.

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

Mr. John Fraser: So how did we get here? The Premier was ordered to turn over his personal cellphone records. He challenged it, it went to court and he lost—again.

The Premier needed a workaround, right? “I need a workaround.” I don't know who he went to over there—maybe the finance minister—and he said, “We need to get freedom-of-information laws. What can we do? We've got to hide it somewhere. We've got to bury it in the budget. We've got to make sure that people don't see it.”

Then the Premier rips it out of committee without a word being spoken about the budget. Not a word—nada, zilch.

And last night, under the cover of darkness, he's covering up the cover-up. And now, by lunchtime today, it will be law, and it will be retroactive. I know you know what that means Premier—retroactive.

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

Mr. John Fraser: You're changing the laws retroactively, so there must be something really, really, really bad on your cellphone. What is it?

Hon. Doug Ford: They want to get confidential constituents' information, which is confidential, that we all swore an oath—we all swore an oath. When someone contacts you, you don't advertise it on the front page of the papers and the news. They believe we should; we should break that confidentiality that we got elected on, that we swore an oath on.

But what we're focused on—we're focusing on the economy. We're focusing on making sure that we're creating hundreds of thousands of jobs—150,000 jobs on our nuclear build-out. By the way, we're leading the G7. We're leading the world. We're leading the world when it comes to our critical minerals. We're looking at tens of billions of dollars in the north because we're moving forward, creating more jobs. We're creating more manufacturing jobs than any time in the history of this province.

Again, Madam Speaker, we have seen \$230 billion invested in this province that has never, ever been done, ever—not the federal government, no other province except Ontario.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Mr. John Fraser: Nice try, Premier. You bought a \$29-million jet while we're half a trillion dollars in debt. But that's not what this is about.

Let's talk about the Premier's phone records. The Premier does government business on his personal phone, and that's wrong. He knows it, so why does he do it? Why does he do it, Speaker? He does it because he doesn't want you to see the people who call him and text him, and what they have to say. Because it will show that the Premier—this government—treats taxpayers' money like it's his personal piggy bank. It's there for him to use to reward friends; wealthy, well-connected insiders; donors; whoever he chooses. He doesn't want you to see those things. That's why he does it on his personal phone. We have government phones for a reason. That's why you use them, Premier.

The real question here is, just what are you trying to hide, Premier?

Hon. Paul Calandra: A parliamentary phone is not FOI-able.

Hon. Doug Ford: Yes.

Well, let's talk about this again. We're focusing on jobs; we're creating jobs. We're adding more health care workers. We're adding 100,000 registered nurses, 20,000 doctors, and building 50 new hospitals or sites to the tune of \$60 billion. We're spending \$80 billion on creating the largest transit system expansion in North America.

We're spending \$30 billion on building roads, highways and bridges that they voted against. They don't believe in transit. They don't believe in increasing health care. We've increased health care, including long-term care, to \$100 billion. Let me put that into perspective, Madam Speaker: \$50 billion under them. No one has ever spent more money on front-line health care workers, on hospitals than this government.

We're going to continue supporting the people of Ontario as they have no solutions. They just sit there and talk and talk and talk.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, the Premier's phone holds the proof and he doesn't want you to see it. It's proof of all his backroom deals—proof of favours for friends, proof of millions of dollars to a strip club owner. The Premier wants to do everything under the cover of darkness. He wants to sneak around on you. He wants to keep us in the dark.

Just how bad are the things on that phone that you've gone to this length to protect it?

Hon. Doug Ford: You know something? It's getting a little tiring, actually, listening to the leader of the third

party go on and on and on about the plane and this and that.

Well, let me tell you, Madam Speaker—and I have no problem with this. I have no problem with this, but I'm the only Premier in the history of this province to fly commercial. As he was sitting there flying around with Dalton McGuinty—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Hon. Doug Ford: —on Dalton McGuinty's charter plane. He knows it. He flew on those planes endless and endless times, as I was trying to save the taxpayers money.

I sold the two planes which I—by the way, I have no problem with the previous Premiers flying around because it's part of the job. But unfortunately, when they were flying around, they were losing jobs. When I fly around, we're creating jobs. That is the difference.

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

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Mr. John Fraser: Premier, you own the plane. You bought the plane. I know you think you sold it, but you own the decision, and I'm glad you're owning it right now, because you're not actually apologizing.

Speaker, this is how bad it is. We are gutting freedom-of-information laws, and we are doing it under the cover of darkness. They're going to cover up the cover-up, and it's being done at lightning speed. By lunchtime today, the Premier will think that he got away scot-free, just like those 150 criminals that he couldn't keep behind bars. But he should know he'll get apprehended—maybe not instantaneously, but we'll get him.

So why doesn't the Premier just surrender his cellphone records?

Hon. Doug Ford: When we're talking about criminals that administratively got out—do you know what I did, Madam Speaker? I looked before 2018, and there were hundreds and hundreds of people that got out under your watch. We looked at the numbers. But we're correcting the problem; they never corrected the problem.

By the way, Madam Speaker, with him and his buddy Dalton McGuinty and Kathleen Wynne, who spent millions and millions and millions of dollars on travel, as they spent millions and millions of dollars on meals and travelling around the world, guess what I spent? I spent nothing, zero. Let me see your expenses under Dalton McGuinty, your buddy, and Kathleen Wynne. I'll show you mine because I have spent nothing.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Ms. Marit Stiles: When this Premier flies too close to the sun on his private jet, he changes the rules so he can do whatever he wants.

Thanks to FOIs—the freedom-of-information requests—we were able to learn how many taxpayer dollars this government spent—wasted—for example, on advertising for this harebrained Ontario Place scheme. Thanks to FOIs, we, the people, were able to find out what members

of this government were doing when they were using code words to hide their greenbelt dealings. Thanks to FOIs, this Premier is under an RCMP criminal investigation for selling out the people of Ontario.

So I want to know, from the Premier: What are you hiding with these freedom-of-information changes?

Hon. Doug Ford: Madam Speaker, I can tell you one thing: I give my phone number out to everyone, and everyone calls me. Now, I wouldn't go as low as the leader of the opposition, because she gave out my number to everyone—all her cronies, all the radical, left-wing loonies out there. She posted it—"Call him, call him." I wouldn't give her number out because she wouldn't answer a phone call. I encourage her to give my number out because I will deal with the issues at hand. That's the difference.

Again, no Premier in the history of this country has given his cell number out to actually help people, to talk to them about confidential information. I am sure if I told these people, "I'm going to post everything that you gave me," I'd have more lawsuits than you can shake a stick at because it's confidential. We swore an oath to protect any information coming from our constituents, unlike the leader of the—

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: No Premier in the history of this country or this province has been under RCMP criminal investigation for selling out the people of the province, and that is why this Premier is changing the law. The Premier is changing the law to hide the details of his dealings with the greenbelt developers. And who knows what other schemes he's come up with.

I know that the Premier says he likes to hand out his cellphone number. He says, "Call me any time." Speaker, it was decided in a court of law—a court of law—that this Premier is using his personal cellphone to do government business. He has admitted it. He has admitted it, right now, just again, a million times. But now you're going through every possible hoop to avoid it.

I want to ask the Premier: Does he understand that when the RCMP comes—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Premier of Ontario.

Hon. Doug Ford: Madam Speaker, we're going to focus on driving the economy. We're going to focus on fighting Donald Trump and the tariffs.

I'm down in the US, actually. I'm going to Utah to build relationships with governors. I'm going down to South Carolina to build relationships with governors to bring more businesses back, as they put blockades and barriers for businesses. And they want to increase taxes—all of them do. We've never increased taxes. Do you know something? We've actually put money back into peoples' pockets, until they can go out and maybe afford to go for dinner or even put a renovation on their home.

That's what we're doing. As all you do is sit there and chirp like a canary, all we do is keep saving taxpayers money.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Before coming to this House, I spent 30 years as a journalist. I know how critical freedom of information is, and those laws—how important they are to holding governments to account. They are how people get to the truth.

But now—and I know the Premier is tired of all the questions, but the time is limited on how much more we can ask, Premier. You're about to pass this legislation that limits access, that avoids public committee review, that makes it harder for Ontarians to see what's actually happening behind closed doors. The time is—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: This is coming from a Premier who recently went on live television, boasting about giving out his number, claiming to be open and accessible. Speaker, with a government that has a new scandal every week, Ontarians don't need a new number; they need transparency.

Speaker, to the Premier: Why does this Premier, who claims to be accountable, make it so very hard—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Premier of Ontario.

Hon. Doug Ford: Do you know something, Madam Speaker? Do you know why the member is down here? It's because CP24 didn't want her anymore—bottom line, simple. That's why she's down here. She was just a promoter for a Liberal agenda, an NDP agenda when she was doing interviews. Do you think there could be anything else? That is the facts. That is the truth.

Interjections.

Hon. Doug Ford: It hurts, doesn't it? It hurts when you aren't wanted. There's a reason why you're—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

The member for Don Valley North has been warned. The member for Toronto Centre has been warned. I'm cautioning people on the language and personal attacks.

Back to the member for Toronto—St. Paul's.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Let's just talk about the cellphone again, Madam Speaker. He's happy to give out his number to anyone who asks, but he doesn't want Ontarians to see exactly what is on it. It sure seems like another stunt from this government. Say one thing on TV, post another on social media and then do the opposite behind closed doors.

So again, I'm going to ask the Premier: If he has nothing to hide, why is he working so hard to hide?

Hon. Doug Ford: Madam Speaker, do you know why I get more phone calls than anyone in the world? In the world—not North America, not Canada, in the world. Because I get phone calls from their ridings because they can't get a phone call back from the MPPs. I get it from their ridings. And guess what, Madam Speaker? I take care of every single person that calls me. Their issues—I take care of it. So again, that's the reason I give out my cellphone number.

What they want to do is take that weapon away from me because they know it hurts them. When I return every call—guess what? Do you know who they're voting for next time? They aren't voting for them; they're voting for us.

Because it's about customer service excellence. That's what we're focused on: returning phone calls, putting money back into peoples' pockets, creating more jobs, supporting our front-line health care workers, supporting our front-line educators with a \$750 purchasing card. That's what we focus on, but they're going to vote against it all today—watch.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: My question is to the Minister of Transportation.

For years, commuters across Ontario were stuck in gridlock while the previous Liberal government made promises it did not deliver on.

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When our government took office, we brought forward a concrete plan to build the transit infrastructure our province needs. At the centre of that plan is the Ontario Line, a new rapid transit line, running through one of the fastest-growing regions in North America. This project will not only improve mobility but also support job creation and drive economic growth across this great province of ours. Today, that plan is becoming a reality: construction is under way and meaningful progress is being made each and every single day.

Speaker, can the minister update this House on how our government is advancing the Ontario Line and reducing commute times across the greater Toronto area?

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

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you to the member from Newmarket—Aurora for that great question, her leadership and her hard work with this government, Speaker. The Liberals promised better transit but delivered years of delays. Our government is taking a different approach. We're focused on getting results and delivering for the people of Ontario.

Today we're seeing real progress with the construction actively moving forward at every station along the Ontario Line. This 15.6-kilometre line will include 15 new stations connecting riders to GO transit services at East Harbour on the Lakeshore East and Stouffville corridors, TTC lines 1 and 2 at Queen, Osgoode and Pape stations, and the Eglinton Crosstown LRT at Don Valley.

Speaker, our government is delivering on its commitments under the leadership of this Premier. We're moving forward with one of the largest transit expansions in North America and building a stronger and more connected Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Newmarket—Aurora.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the parliamentary assistant for this important update.

The scale of what's being achieved with the Ontario Line is significant by any standard. Crews are tunnelling beneath one of North America's most densely populated urban areas and constructing highly complex, state-of-the-art stations. But this effort goes beyond a single project. It reflects a long-term commitment to building the transit network our province needs to support growth and remain competitive.

Speaker, can the parliamentary assistant explain how the Ontario Line fits into our government's broader transit strategy and what it means for Ontario's future?

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you again to the member from Newmarket–Aurora. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct: The work being carried out by our engineers beneath our streets is truly impressive. Tunnelling through a dense, active city, constructing 15 highly complex stations and integrating a brand new rapid transit backbone onto the existing network is an achievement Ontarians can take pride in. With the Ontario Line expected to serve 390,000 riders each day and remove 28,000 cars from our roads, it will transform how people move across the greater Toronto area.

But this project is part of a much broader effort. Our government is investing \$70 billion in infrastructure across Ontario and building a system that's designed to serve not just today's needs, but the next generation as well.

GO TRANSIT

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the Premier: People in Oshawa want to get where they're going, but it is getting harder and it is taking longer. Metrolinx isn't delivering what Durham needs and has cut our Lakeshore East express train service. This Premier's priority has been to take over an airport and extend the runway so he could land a \$29-million private luxury jet, while in Oshawa people are hoping just to land a parking spot and a seat on the train.

Speaker, the Lakeshore East express service is gone and my question to this government is: Will it be restored? And if so, when?

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

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Since we've been elected, we've made historic investments into the Lakeshore East line. Actually, since 2018, we've increased weekly rides by over 225 trips. That member knows that there's construction along the entire line to improve service for the future. We continue to work with the community there to deliver the best GO rail transit service that we can for her members and for her community.

The investments that we are making today will ensure that continues for the future and for future generations. Last year, we hit a record: over 76 million people on GO transit; UP express, up over 10% year over year. That's because we're making investments. People are believing in public transit and we're getting them where they need

to go quicker and faster. And we'll continue to do that, especially on the Lakeshore East line.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Investing in a jet doesn't count as investment in transit—side note.

Last night, this government rushed through legislation to change FOI laws to hide the Premier's phone records under the cover of darkness—rushed it through during a late-night sitting. They have no problem with express when it suits them, but real people just have to wait, eh? The Premier gets his jet plane, but real people can't have their fast train.

This Premier said every single one of his cabinet ministers approved his celebrity jet. Three of those cabinet ministers live in Durham region. And so, my question is, since all these ministers were all too happy to support the gravy plane, would they be willing to support our Lakeshore East express train?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Madam Speaker, the irony—every one of those 225 additional trips that we put in since 2018, that member has voted against those increases in investments.

In fact, for the residents of Durham, when they were able to participate in the One Fare program, thanks to this government's investment that is saving her commuters over \$1,600 a year—back into their pockets—the NDP, the Liberals opposed those investments into public transit. In fact, I can't find a single project that those members have supported when it comes to public transit.

Madam Speaker, \$70 billion of investments, with a significant amount of those investments going to the Lakeshore East line, with over 225 net new train rides per week on that line—that member has voted against that increase in service every single time.

We will continue to make the historic investments into public transit, into the Lakeshore East line, despite that member's opposition when she has the opportunity to vote in support of that in this House.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Mr. Adil Shamji: Has anyone ever watched Con Air? It's a 1990s film in which a bunch of criminals take over an airplane and use it to try and escape from prison. Con Air could have been the title of last week's multiple scandals in politics after we learned from a freedom-of-information request that the Premier lost 150 convicts, with six still on the loose, and at the same time tried to buy a \$29-million private jet for his personal use. It's the Con Air affair, folks.

Now, the captain of Con Air has said he's not sorry for losing the convicts. He hasn't really even said he's sorry for buying the airplane. What he has said sorry for is merely failing to communicate the purchase to Ontarians.

What else has he failed to communicate? And is he rushing to change freedom-of-information laws so that we don't learn more about his Con Air affair?

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

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you, colleagues.

Madam Speaker, I think the Premier, who answered, I think, 15 questions in the House—there's a common theme there. Do you know what the common theme is? That we're building Ontario: a \$1.2-trillion economy, a million more jobs, cutting taxes, making infrastructure investments, making investments in social infrastructure and making sure that this province prospers. Because you know what pays for all the infrastructure, the health care, the education, the social services and the colleges and the universities? It's the economy. It's the economy, stupid.

You have an opportunity on that side of the House. You have an opportunity to support Ontario, support this budget, vote for this budget. That's what you should be focusing on.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I'll ask the finance minister to withdraw.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I withdraw—second time only.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Don Valley East.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Madam Speaker, the Premier bought a \$29-million private jet without telling Ontarians, without putting it in the budget and without a plan.

The CBC is reporting that all Premiers in Confederation use commercial flights for their travel, with only infrequent use of chartered aircraft. Only one Premier bought his own plush, personal, private luxury jet so he could look down on Ontarians while he burns through their cash. That Premier got caught. So now, he's sorry—not for the purchase, but for his messaging.

Well, Ontarians have a message. They overwhelmingly oppose his changes to freedom-of-information laws, but the Premier is not listening. He skipped public hearings and he rushed through the debate last night under the cover of darkness. If the Premier is truly sorry, why is he ignoring Ontarians when they call on him to reverse his proposed changes to freedom-of-information laws?

1120

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Madam Speaker, it's the economy. It's the economy. I'll leave that other word out—that wasn't for the member. That was just general, that we've heard that before, and you forget that at your peril, Madam Speaker.

You know what? We did 35 consultations right across the province. We talked to the people of Ontario and debated this budget bill for months, putting everything out there, including in the House. And you know what? We had one message from the people of Ontario, and that is, people want us to get things done. They don't want us to just talk, talk, talk, which is what that member opposite is doing: talk, talk, talk.

This side of the House is act, act, act. That's what the people of Ontario want us to do. That's why we're going to vote for this budget.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Deepak Anand: Speaker, my question is to the Associate Minister of Small Business. Small businesses and self-employment account for more than 3.5 million jobs in our province, leading innovation and bringing critical goods and resources to the economy.

Since the budget was released, I've heard from job creators about how thankful they are that we are supporting small businesses as a cornerstone of our government's plan to protect Ontario. From our local coffee shops to independent pharmacists to manufacturers, small businesses are essential to our neighbourhoods to build a stronger, more competitive Ontario.

Speaker, through you to the associate minister, elaborate on the measures proposed in this year's budget and how our government is ensuring that businesses can create jobs and grow Ontario for years to come.

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you to the great member from Mississauga–Malton for the question but also for being a fierce advocate for his small businesses in his community.

Unlike the previous Liberal government, we have never raised a single tax, and we have amazing, hard-working people and businesses in our province. In fact, we're lowering our taxes. Through the 2026 budget, we're cutting the small business corporate income tax rate by 31.25%, putting \$1.1 billion back into the pockets of mom-and-pop shops right across our province. That's money they're going to reinvest right back into their businesses.

Speaker, our government is proud to stand up for Ontario's hard-working small businesses by cutting taxes, keeping costs down and making our province the best place to start and grow a business.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member from Mississauga–Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the associate minister for sharing how our government is helping small businesses weather economic uncertainty through \$1.1 billion in tax relief. These savings carry significant weight for our small businesses during this period of economic uncertainty. I know that main street shops and local businesses in our community are happy to see that our government is continuing to reduce taxes, keeping costs down. Rather than stalling their growth, we're here supporting them.

Speaker, we know that a more competitive economy rests on the shoulders of our hard-working, innovative and dedicated entrepreneurs today, as we vote in favour of supporting job creators. Through you, Speaker, can the associate minister further highlight the impact of these tax reductions on Ontario's local entrepreneurs?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The associate minister.

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you, Speaker, and again to the member for the question. This tax cut to just 2.2%, the second one to the small business tax rate alone since we formed government in 2018, will save about 375,000 businesses up to \$5,000 a year. It builds on our government's

other actions to reduce the cost of doing business, altogether saving businesses \$10 billion this year alone. We're also proposing to lower the cost of capital investments by providing \$3.5 billion in tax relief through accelerated write-off measures to encourage businesses to invest in their operations and grow.

Unlike the Liberals, this Premier and this government are unleashing Ontario's full economic potential and will continue to do whatever it takes to make our businesses succeed, create jobs and serve their communities.

They should take a page from this Premier and this government because we are visiting our small businesses, we're listening to our small businesses, we're shopping at our small businesses—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for St. Catharines.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: This question is to the Premier. Getting the former General Motors property in St. Catharines cleaned up has been a decade-long battle for local residents and environmentalists. On top of the pending investigation into contaminated stormwater being stored on the site, there are new reports of a mysterious dust being blown into neighbourhoods, homes and in their properties from a rubble pile on the land. With the site's track record, this is a major red flag.

To the Premier: Will you commit to immediately conducting an air quality assessment around the property and the piles of rubble on the property, and provide a clear timeline on the pending stormwater investigation?

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Our government is truly committed to protecting our air, ensuring that we continue to lead the way with our stringent environmental standards.

The air quality in Hamilton has improved significantly since the mid-1990s, with large reductions in many pollutants. We continue to focus on heavy emitters in the Hamilton airshed as they work to improve pollution-prevention practices that reduce air emissions and meet increasingly stringent local air standards.

We'll continue to partner with organizations like Clean Air Hamilton, the community and all their local industry to drive strategies that better protect air quality and address the unique local challenges the member described.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Member for St. Catharines.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: To the associate minister: I do appreciate your comments about Hamilton, which is a half hour from St. Catharines, and your work that you're going to do with our community. However, for the residents living beside the site, "We're looking into it" or "We've looked into Hamilton" doesn't exactly ease their concerns when dust is literally blowing into their homes and the stormwater investigation has been dragging on for years and years.

Speaker, can the associate minister confirm when the air quality assessment will actually begin on the property, not at some undefined point in the future? And will he commit to providing transparent public updates of every stage of both the air testing and stormwater investigation so the residents can sleep at night, barbecue in the summer and don't have to guess about their public safety?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to certainly send my apology to the member opposite. St. Catharines is definitely not Hamilton.

It's important that we listen and understand the situation at hand. We are here to listen, to work with all the local stakeholders, and ensure that the site comes into line and is brought back to a place where the public can truly enjoy the property and have the community's mind put at ease.

Thank you so much for the question.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Ted Hsu: I'm going home tonight and I'll have to face my constituents' questions. In case they ask, I need to ask the Premier about the six criminals whom his government released by mistake and who are still on the run. So can I rule out the six as either car thieves or carjackers?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Solicitor General.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: To my colleague across the way, it's very simple. I've said this yesterday, Madam Speaker: When an inmate is discharged improperly, there's a protocol that is followed. We're working to bring the number of improper releases to zero.

While we inherited a major problem—the Premier spoke about it earlier today—we're working to fix it. We're working to fix it by making sure that the 3,300 new correctional officers that we've hired as part of that contingency have administrative oversight.

I spoke also this week of making sure that the opposition knows that we are bringing in technology that will allow, in real time, a court to speak to a correctional institution. That's important because we want to minimize errors.

God forbid there's a public safety risk—the police services of a jurisdiction will never hesitate to issue a public safety announcement.

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

Mr. Ted Hsu: Well, no answer. Wouldn't it be ironic if one of those guys stole that car from the Solicitor General in the Home Depot parking lot?

1130

People are going to ask, right? The people in Scarborough are going to ask about the six criminals this government still has on the run. Can we rule out home invaders on the run? And does this government have drug dealers on the run?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Madam Speaker, I don't think it behooves the opposition to strike fear in commu-

ities when the police services of jurisdiction are the experts. It's very, very simple, Madam Speaker. It's very simple. God forbid there is a public safety risk anywhere in the province. It doesn't have to be only for one thing or another.

Police services of jurisdiction—let me remind the member opposite: It may be his police service in Kingston. It may be other municipal police services. It may be the OPP. It may be First Nations. The police services are the experts and they will never hesitate in making sure that a public safety announcement is released. In the absence of that, one can assume their communities are safe.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Ric Bresee: I'm proud to rise today. My question is for the Minister of Health. Our government recognizes that strong primary care is the foundation of a healthy community. The people in my riding and the people all across Ontario want to be able to connect to a family doctor or a primary care team close to home and receive timely, coordinated care that meets their needs.

In recent years, communities across Ontario have seen meaningful progress through collaboration between local providers, Ontario health teams and provincial support, helping to expand access for people who were previously unattached to care. Speaker, we know that our regions continue to grow. We know that sustained provincial investment is essential to ensure primary care keeps pace with demand and remains accessible for everyone.

Through the Speaker: Can the minister update the House on how our government is supporting and strengthening primary care all across this province?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston.

Mr. John Jordan: As the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and the member for Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston, I've seen first-hand how provincial investments in primary care are making a real difference for families in the region. Through our government's historic \$3.4-billion primary care action plan, we are expanding team-based primary care and connecting more people to a primary care provider.

To serve my riding and the MPP for Hastings–Lennox and Addington's as well, we've invested nearly \$1.5 million to support the Frontenac, Lennox and Addington Ontario Health Team in attaching up to 3,500 residents to primary care. We're also supporting innovative, community-driven solutions like the Spruce Health Hub, which brings together nurse practitioners, mental health professionals, physiotherapists and other providers to help local clinics care for more patients.

These investments are improving access, reducing pressure on emergency departments and ensuring people can get the right care close to home. Team-based care: That's exactly what strengthening primary care is all about.

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

Mr. Ric Bresee: Thank you to the parliamentary assistant and the member for Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston for the answer. It is really encouraging to hear about the progress being made for your riding and for my riding, which is your neighbour. But Ontarians want reassurance that today's investments will help to build a sustainable primary care system for the long-term future. In particular, people want to know that work is under way not only to attach more patients today, but to train, recruit and retain the next generation of primary care providers to serve their communities for years and years to come.

Speaker, continued innovation, workforce expansion and local partnerships will be critical to ensuring that families can reliably access primary care for a long time. Will the parliamentary assistant speak further about how our government's investments are helping to grow and sustain primary care capacity in communities all across this province?

Mr. John Jordan: In Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston, we are investing not only in patient attachment today, but also in training and retaining the next generation of primary care providers. Through our primary care action plan, we are supporting new and expanded primary care teaching clinics in partnership with Queen's University, helping to train family physicians, nurse practitioners and inter-professional teams while expanding access for patients in the community.

In Ontario, we've already attached over 330,000 people to ongoing primary care, surpassing the province's 2025-26 attachment goal of 300,000. This puts our province on track to connect every Ontarian to a primary care provider by 2029. These investments build on successful local initiatives already connecting thousands of residents to care and are paired with provincial efforts to expand medical training seats and remove barriers for internationally trained doctors.

Together, this work is ensuring that families across Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston will continue to have reliable, connected access to high-quality primary care.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

MPP Catherine McKenney: This government has never, not once, built housing at the level needed to reach its own goal of 1.5 million homes by 2031. They have tried everything except what works. They removed rent control and rents went up. They handed strong-mayor powers to municipal governments, and the housing didn't follow. They appointed regional chairs. They sold off the green-belt and they got an RCMP investigation.

There is a model that works. It's called a public builder. It's how this province built affordable housing at scale before, and it's how we can do it again.

Speaker, through you, to the Premier: When will this government stop protecting private profits and get back into the business of actually building affordable homes?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Graydon Smith: We continue to work with our housing service providers and municipalities, finding opportunities all across Ontario to make sure that homes get built, but we can't do it alone. We need to work with the home-building community—again, with our service providers—and we are seeing record numbers of rentals being built in this province.

Of course, we can't ignore the changes that we have made: the historic changes to the removal of the HST on new home builds, the plan with the federal government to remove \$8.8 billion of development charge costs in communities. These are all things that are incenting home building and homebuying in Ontario. We know the phone is ringing off the hook in sales offices as we speak.

As we continue to, again, work with service providers and other municipalities and non-profits and many, many groups throughout Ontario to get more homes built, we know it's having a very positive impact for the lives of many people in Ontario.

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Let's all take this opportunity to welcome and wish our friend from Windsor–Tecumseh a happy birthday.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I'd now like to ask the pages to gather in the chamber. Go ahead.

It is time to offer our sincere thanks to the outstanding group of legislative pages who have been with us for the past two weeks.

To our pages: Your reliability, your dedication and professionalism have played an important role in supporting the work right here in this chamber. We have truly been fortunate to have each and every one of you join us.

As you leave Queen's Park, you take with you new friendships, a deeper understanding of parliamentary democracy and memories that will last a lifetime. We are confident that you will continue to achieve great things—and perhaps one day find yourselves back right here in this chamber as either a member or maybe as staff.

Wherever your journey takes you, we wish you the very best. For now, I wish you a safe return home and every success as you conclude the school year in the weeks ahead.

I invite all members to please join me in thanking this exceptional group of legislative pages.

Applause.

DEFERRED VOTES

BETTER REGIONAL GOVERNANCE ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 POUR UNE MEILLEURE GOUVERNANCE RÉGIONALE

Deferred vote on the motion that the question now be put on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 100, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 and the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 / Projet de loi 100, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités et la Loi de 1996 sur les élections municipales.

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

The division bells rang from 1140 to 1145.

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

On April 16, 2026, Mr. Smith, Parry Sound–Muskoka, moved second reading of Bill 100, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 and the Municipal Elections Act, 1996.

On April 22, 2026, Mr. Rae moved that the question be now put.

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

Ayes

Allsopp, Tyler	Ford, Doug	Pinsonneault, Steve
Anand, Deepak	Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Quinn, Nolan
Babikian, Aris	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Racinsky, Joseph
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Gualtieri, Silvia	Rae, Matthew
Bressee, Ric	Hamid, Zee	Riddell, Brian
Calandra, Paul	Hardeman, Ernie	Rosenberg, Bill
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Jones, Sylvia	Sabawy, Sheref
Cho, Stan	Jones, Trevor	Sandhu, Amarjot
Ciriello, Monica	Jordan, John	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Clark, Steve	Kanapathi, Logan	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Coe, Lorne	Kerzner, Michael S.	Saunderson, Brian
Cooper, Michelle	Khanjin, Andrea	Smith, Dave
Crawford, Stephen	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, David
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Mulroney, Caroline	Smith, Graydon
Darouze, George	Oosterhoff, Sam	Smith, Laura
Denault, Billy	Pang, Billy	Tangri, Nina
Dowie, Andrew	Parsa, Michael	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Downey, Doug	Piccini, David	Tibollo, Michael A.
Firin, Mohamed	Pierre, Natalie	Williams, Charmaine A.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): All those opposed to Mr. Rae's motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gilmour, Alexa	Rakocevic, Tom
Bell, Jessica	Glover, Chris	Sattler, Peggy
Bourgouin, Guy	Gretzky, Lisa	Schreiner, Mike
Bowman, Stephanie	Hazell, Andrea	Shamji, Adil
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Hsu, Ted	Smyth, Stephanie
Burch, Jeff	Kernaghan, Terence	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Clancy, Aislinn	Lennox, Robin	Stiles, Marit
Fife, Catherine	McCrimmon, Karen	Tabuns, Peter
Fraser, John	McKenney, Catherine	Tsao, Jonathan

French, Jennifer K.
Gates, Wayne

McMahon, Mary-Margaret
Pasma, Chandra

Vanhof, John
Wong-Tam, Kristyn

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 57; the nays are 33.

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

Mr. Smith, Parry Sound–Muskoka, has moved second reading of Bill 100, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 and the Municipal Elections Act, 1996. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

All those opposed to the motion will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1149 to 1154.

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

On April 16, 2026, Mr. Smith, Parry Sound–Muskoka, moved second reading of Bill 100, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 and the Municipal Elections Act, 1996.

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

Ayes

Allsopp, Tyler	Ford, Doug	Pinsonneault, Steve
Anand, Deepak	Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Quinn, Nolan
Babikian, Aris	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Racinsky, Joseph
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Gualtieri, Silvia	Rae, Matthew
Bresee, Ric	Hamid, Zee	Riddell, Brian
Calandra, Paul	Hardeman, Ernie	Rosenberg, Bill
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Jones, Sylvia	Sabawy, Sheref
Cho, Stan	Jones, Trevor	Sandhu, Amarjot
Ciriello, Monica	Jordan, John	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Clark, Steve	Kanapathi, Logan	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Coe, Lorne	Kerzner, Michael S.	Saunderson, Brian
Cooper, Michelle	Khanjin, Andrea	Smith, Dave
Crawford, Stephen	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, David
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Mulroney, Caroline	Smith, Graydon
Darouze, George	Oosterhoff, Sam	Smith, Laura
Denault, Billy	Pang, Billy	Tangri, Nina
Dowie, Andrew	Parsa, Michael	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Downey, Doug	Piccini, David	Tibollo, Michael A.
Firin, Mohamed	Pierre, Natalie	Williams, Charmaine A.

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

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gilmour, Alexa	Rakocevic, Tom
Bell, Jessica	Glover, Chris	Sattler, Peggy
Bourgouin, Guy	Gretzky, Lisa	Schreiner, Mike
Bowman, Stephanie	Hazell, Andrea	Shamji, Adil
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Hsu, Ted	Smyth, Stephanie
Burch, Jeff	Kernaghan, Terence	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Clancy, Aislinn	Lennox, Robin	Stiles, Marit
Fife, Catherine	McCrimmon, Karen	Tabuns, Peter
Fraser, John	McKenney, Catherine	Tsao, Jonathan
French, Jennifer K.	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Vanhof, John
Gates, Wayne	Pasma, Chandra	Wong-Tam, Kristyn

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 57; the nays are 33.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Interjections: No.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Which committee do you want this bill referred to?

Hon. Graydon Smith: Infrastructure, culture and heritage policy.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The bill is therefore referred to the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy.

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

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

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

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

The division bells rang from 1157 to 1202.

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

On April 22, Ms. Khanjin moved third reading of Bill 97, An Act to implement Budget measures, to enact, amend or repeal various statutes and to revoke various regulations.

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

Ayes

Allsopp, Tyler	Ford, Doug	Pinsonneault, Steve
Anand, Deepak	Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Quinn, Nolan
Babikian, Aris	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Racinsky, Joseph
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Gualtieri, Silvia	Rae, Matthew
Bresee, Ric	Hamid, Zee	Riddell, Brian
Calandra, Paul	Hardeman, Ernie	Rosenberg, Bill
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Jones, Sylvia	Sabawy, Sheref
Cho, Stan	Jones, Trevor	Sandhu, Amarjot
Ciriello, Monica	Jordan, John	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Clark, Steve	Kanapathi, Logan	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Coe, Lorne	Kerzner, Michael S.	Saunderson, Brian
Cooper, Michelle	Khanjin, Andrea	Smith, Dave
Crawford, Stephen	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, David
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Mulroney, Caroline	Smith, Graydon
Darouze, George	Oosterhoff, Sam	Smith, Laura
Denault, Billy	Pang, Billy	Tangri, Nina
Dowie, Andrew	Parsa, Michael	Thanigasalam, Vijay

Downey, Doug
Firin, Mohamed

Piccini, David
Pierre, Natalie

Tibollo, Michael A.
Williams, Charmaine A.

INTRODUCTION OF GOVERNMENT BILLS

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

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.
Bell, Jessica
Bourgouin, Guy
Bowman, Stephanie
Brady, Bobbi Ann
Burch, Jeff
Clancy, Aislinn
Fife, Catherine
Fraser, John
French, Jennifer K.
Gates, Wayne

Gilmour, Alexa
Glover, Chris
Gretzky, Lisa
Hazell, Andrea
Hsu, Ted
Kernaghan, Terence
Lennox, Robin
McCrimmon, Karen
McKenney, Catherine
McMahon, Mary-Margaret
Pasma, Chandra

Rakocevic, Tom
Sattler, Peggy
Schreiner, Mike
Shamji, Adil
Smyth, Stephanie
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Stiles, Marit
Tabuns, Peter
Tsao, Jonathan
Vanthof, John
Wong-Tam, Kristyn

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 57; the nays are 33.

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

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

Third reading agreed to.

PREMIER'S COMMENTS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the leader of the third party on a point of order.

Mr. John Fraser: Point of order, Speaker: In response to the member from Toronto–St. Paul's in question period, the Premier said some very unparliamentary and hurtful things that are beneath the office that he holds, and I think that he knows what the right thing to do is.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): There being no further business, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1206 to 1300.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated April 23, 2026, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 110(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

BUILDING BILLY BISHOP AIRPORT ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 SUR LA CONSTRUCTION DE L'AÉROPORT BILLY BISHOP

Mr. Sarkaria moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 110, An Act to enact the Building Billy Bishop Airport Act, 2026 / Projet de loi 110, Loi édictant la Loi de 2026 sur la construction de l'aéroport Billy Bishop.

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): Does the member wish to explain the bill?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: The Building Billy Bishop Airport Act would authorize the province to assume responsibility currently held by the city of Toronto, under the tripartite agreement governing the airport, in exchange for fair compensation.

The proposed legislation marks an important step forward in the province's plan to support the long-term modernization and expansion of Billy Bishop airport.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

M E INVESTMENTS INC. ACT, 2026

Ms. Sattler moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr47, An Act to revive M E Investments Inc.

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

First reading agreed to.

NEPALI HERITAGE MONTH ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 SUR LE MOIS DU PATRIMOINE NÉPALAIS

MPP Wong-Tam moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 111, An Act to proclaim the month of April as Nepali Heritage Month / Projet de loi 111, Loi proclamant le mois d'avril Mois du patrimoine népalais.

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): Does the member wish to explain the bill?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Very briefly, Nepali immigrants had started to arrive in Canada following the beginning of diplomatic relations that were established between Nepal and Canada in 1965. And then we started to see significant movement in migration in 1996 until today.

Now Canada is home to thousands of people of Nepali origin and ancestry, with the highest concentration of those individuals living in Ontario. Nepali Ontarians have built a strong community, especially in the greater Toronto area, Ottawa, London, Windsor, Hamilton, Guelph and Kitchener-Waterloo regions.

This bill would proclaim the month of April in each year as Nepali Heritage Month. I hope to have the support of this House.

PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I'm tabling the following petition to stop the privatization of health care and support staffing ratios. This petition was from ONA, the Ontario Nurses' Association.

This petition calls on the Ontario government to mandate safe staffing ratios for nurses and health care professionals across the entire health care system. We know that the current understaffing leads to burnout and unsafe working conditions, forcing nurses and other health care professionals to leave their jobs, pursue other jobs or retire prematurely. Understaffing has had a devastating impact on patient care and forces emergency department closures across the province.

Safe staffing ratios are a proven solution that reduce burnout for nurses and health care professionals. They also reduce instances of violence and improve the quality of care for patients.

I'm so proud to support this petition. It is time that Ontario joins other provinces and mandates safe staffing ratios for nurses and health care professionals.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: The petition I have here is from the community of Moose Creek and surrounding areas of the united counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry, who have banded together to mourn the loss of Amanda Maloney on March 29, 2025, who was killed trying to navigate a dangerous turn on provincial Highway 138. This tragedy has highlighted the pressing need for enhanced safety measures on this unsafe highway that registered 44 collisions, according to MTO statistics, in 2022. And many more have been reported since.

There are 7,500 electronic signatures and the hard copy signatures I possess today—people urging the MTO, in collaboration with the united counties, to make much-needed safety improvements, especially at the intersection of Highway 138, MacNeil Road and Dyer Road.

I fully support this petition, will affix my signature to it and send it to the Clerk's table with page Lucas.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Adil Shamji: I'm pleased to present a petition this afternoon that originated in the riding of Northumberland—Peterborough South. It originates with a number of constituents in that riding who are outraged at the conduct of their MPP, particularly in relation to the rollout of the Skills Development Fund. They're concerned that the Auditor General issued a report in October 2025, finding that the process to issue grants was not fair, transparent or accountable. They're concerned that the minister was heavily involved in selecting recipients and are concerned that some of the grants may have gone to friends, family or donors of members of the government.

They are therefore calling on the Ontario government to fully co-operate with the Integrity Commissioner's investigation, immediately suspend any further ministerial override of civil servant recommendations, release a complete and public list of all SDF recipients and their application scores and, finally, to reform the Skills Development Fund to ensure a fair, transparent and accountable process, free from political interference.

I'm pleased to affix my signature to this petition and hand it to page Catherine.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank Jerry Peng, an alumni of Fanshawe College in London, who has organized a grassroots movement called Save OSAP London. As part of that, he collected hundreds of signatures on petitions. I will be presenting one of those petitions today.

It is calling on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to stop the cuts to OSAP. The petition notes that students are facing sky-high rents, grocery bills that just keep getting bigger and, with this government's cuts to OSAP grants, they are being asked to take on a mountain of debt in order to attend college or university. This, of course, will make it harder for those students to enter a career after they graduate, to buy a home, to think about planning a family or just building a stable life. We know that increased student debt is a particular hardship for under-represented and marginalized students. It discourages participation in post-secondary education.

For that reason, the petitioners are asking the Legislative Assembly to reverse the recent changes to OSAP, restore and expand non-repayable grants for students in financial need and to work with students to ensure a fair, affordable and accessible post-secondary education system.

I couldn't be more supportive of this petition. I will send it to the table with page Owen.

1310

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: This petition is entitled "Don't Cancel Our Language Classes!" These petitions have been coming in and coming in ever since this government made

the move to get rid of the trustees at the Toronto Catholic District School Board and appoint a supervisor, of course, to make cuts.

One of the cuts that they made of the many cuts was to get rid of this international languages program, the opportunity to learn a third language—heritage languages, many of them. This is affecting 44 schools in the Toronto Catholic District School Board, nine in my area, with over 20,000 students affected. These programs exist in school boards across the province. The people who have signed believe that these international languages are important. They're a great opportunity for our kids and our students, and we all want to see these language programs reinstated. It's the right thing to do.

I'm very proud to sign this petition and hand it to a page to bring to the desk.

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

MPP Wayne Gates: I'm tabling the following petition to stop the privatization and support staffing ratios from ONA, the Ontario Nurses' Association. This petition calls on the Ontario government to mandate safe staffing ratios for nurses and health care professionals across the health care system.

Current understaffing leads to burnout and unsafe working conditions, forcing nurses and health care professionals to leave, pursue other jobs or retire prematurely. Understaffing has devastating impacts on patient care and forces emergency departments to close. It happens in Fort Erie quite regularly.

Safe staffing ratios are a proven solution that reduce burnout for nurses and health care professionals, reduce incidents of violence and improve quality of care.

I'm proud to support this petition and sign it for my good friend the page from Windsor, my hockey buddy right here.

EDUCATION FUNDING

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I have a petition here entitled "Reduce Class Sizes in our Public Elementary Schools."

Speaker, \$6.35 billion has been cut from the public education system since the Conservatives formed government in 2018, which has resulted in much larger class sizes, a huge increase in violence in the schools and inadequate special education and mental health supports for students. We know that larger class sizes negatively impact the quality of education that students receive. It reduces access to teaching resources and significantly diminishes teacher-student interactions, which is detrimental to students who need additional support.

The vast majority of parents, students and educators in this province support smaller class sizes and want the best education possible for their students. Ontario, as we know, has an internationally recognized public education system that we should be protecting and building on in this province, not making cuts to.

This petition calls on the Legislative Assembly to commit to making all the necessary investments in public education to lower class sizes, increase the supports for students and ensure that students have all of the support that they need in our schools.

I fully support this petition, will sign it and send it to the Clerk.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I have a petition to raise social assistance rates led by Sally Palmer.

It talks about Ontario social assistance rates being well below Canada's official market basket measure poverty line and far from adequate to cover the rising costs of food and rent. It talks about ODSP recipients living below the poverty line, and both they and those receiving the frozen OW rates are struggling to survive at this time of alarming inflation.

The undersigned call on the Legislative Assembly to double social assistance rates for OW and ODSP.

I will affix my signature to the petition and send it to the Clerks' table with page Ella.

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank the many health care workers and patients who count on health care workers in the London area who signed a petition calling on the Legislative Assembly to stop privatizing our health care services and to support staffing ratios. This is a petition that would mandate safe staffing ratios for nurses and health care professionals across the health care system.

We know, Speaker, that current understaffing leads to significant burnout and unsafe working conditions. As a result, we are losing health care workers as they go to other jurisdictions or they change careers or they retire early. That, of course, we have all seen, has a devastating impact on our services available at emergency rooms—hallway health care that is exploding in this province.

Safe staffing ratios are a proven solution—they are in place in other provinces—that would help reduce burnout for nurses, health care professionals, reduce instances of the violence that many health care workers face on the job and improve quality of care.

I'm very proud to support this petition. I will affix my signature and hope to see this government move to join other provinces in mandating safe staffing ratios.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I have a petition calling on the government to raise social assistance rates. This petition points out that social assistance rates are well below Canada's official Market Basket Measure poverty line and far from adequate to cover the rising cost of food and rent. Individuals on Ontario Works, or OW, receive \$733 a month, and those on ODSP receive \$1,408. I would like to

see anyone in this place find a place to live for that amount or be able to buy groceries, when we see the cost of groceries rising.

There was an open letter sent to the Premier and two cabinet ministers that was signed by over 230 organizations which recommended that social assistance rates be doubled for both Ontario Works, OW, and Ontario Disability Support Program, ODSP. Speaker, the small increases to ODSP have still left people with disabilities living well below the poverty line. Both they and those receiving the frozen OW rates are struggling to survive at a time of alarming inflation. Research has shown, in the outcomes of the 2017-19 Ontario Basic Income Pilot, that providing people with a stable, more adequate income led to improved health and employment incomes.

Speaker, this petition is signed by many across the province calling on the government to immediately at least double ODSP and OW rates. I fully support this and will add my signature.

UNIVERSITY FUNDING

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank Professor Tom Peace at Huron University in London for bringing petitions to my office that are signed by many, many Londoners that are calling on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest in Ontario's future by bringing operating funding for Ontario universities at least close to the Canadian average.

We know that currently, Ontario provides the lowest per-student funding for post-secondary education in the country. It has been that way for decades, Speaker, and this chronic underfunding has resulted in significant pressures on our post-secondary education sector.

The government's own blue-ribbon panel recommended that the government make a significant investment in post-secondary education. The government has ignored that, and even their recent budget allocation comes nowhere close to the amount of funding that is recognized as being needed and that would even raise Ontario from the bottom in terms of per-student funding.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTING ONTARIO'S WORKERS AND ECONOMIC RESILIENCE ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 POUR PROTÉGER LES TRAVAILLEURS ET LA RÉSILIENCE ÉCONOMIQUE DE L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 23, 2026, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 105, An Act to enact the Strengthening Talent Agency Regulation Act, 2026 and to amend various Acts /
Projet de loi 105, Loi édictant la Loi de 2026 visant à

renforcer la réglementation des agences artistiques et modifiant diverses lois.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am proud to rise today on behalf of the people I represent in London West to speak to this bill.

1320

You know, London is a community in Canada that now leads all other Canadian cities in terms of the jobless rate. We have the highest joblessness in Canada. People who are struggling to find work, people who have been laid-off in the health care sector, in manufacturing, in education—those workers could sure use some protection.

They might look at the title of this bill, you know, Protecting Ontario's Workers and Economic Resilience Act, and they might think, "Great. This bill is going to speak to the real concerns that we have, that Ontario workers have. It's going to provide that protection that workers have been calling for for many years, but in particular, with the economic crisis that we are now facing because of the Trump tariffs."

But when they open this bill, they won't find the hope that they are looking for. They will see, instead, an omnibus bill, a kind of a grab bag of measures that lacks any serious focus and actually includes some very harmful new measures.

Given the limited time that I have available to speak to this bill, I'm going to focus only on a couple of the schedules that are included. I'm going to start with schedule 1. Now, this schedule prohibits employers from charging their employees for branded uniforms, to either pay for those uniforms or to launder those uniforms. It will definitely be helpful to those employees who have been forced to purchase those uniforms in order to work at that workplace.

There is a concern, however, that the government has said—the minister has said—that there will be a consultation going on about certain exemptions for small businesses. Currently, the definition of a small business is up to 99 employees. Obviously, there is a worry that the exemptions could end up excluding many workers in this province. There's uncertainty about how franchises are going to be treated, for example. So workers at Tim Hortons and Canadian Tire could possibly be exempted.

But this schedule really is in contrast to schedule 5, which changes the Occupational Health and Safety Act. What it does is, it allows the Ministry of Labour to reimburse employers for the cost of required protective headwear. Potentially, this could see the government reimbursing major corporate entities, very profitable companies like EllisDon, for example. In 2025, Ellis Don made \$5.6 billion in Canada, much of that from right here in Ontario. So we have some big questions about why the government would introduce legislation that would allow EllisDon to be reimbursed for the cost of the protective headwear that employees need to wear in order to protect them.

But the bigger picture is that there is a lot more support that workers in this province are looking for from this government.

I want to thank the Workers' Action Centre, which recently produced a report called *The Crisis of Wage Theft in Ontario*. It shows that over the last 10 years, \$200 million has been stolen from Ontario workers by employers. That is what has been reported through the Employment Standards Act complaint process, but we know that that's only a fraction of the workers who have had wages stolen by their employers because the process of filing a complaint is onerous and complex, and many workers are too intimidated to go through that process.

Wage theft includes being paid less than minimum wage, not receiving overtime for overtime worked, getting paid fewer hours than worked and, most of all, misclassification—gig workers, contract workers, who are treated as independent contractors when they are actually employees and should be receiving all of the rights and benefits of being an employee. I would argue that protections against wage theft would have been a much more significant support for workers in this province than prohibiting employers from charging their staff for branded uniforms. The Minister of Labour is here. I hope that he is thinking about that for the next group of amendments that he brings forward.

I'm now going to turn to schedule 2, which once more makes significant changes to the Environmental Assessment Act. This is a government—we just had Earth Day yesterday—that has gutted environmental protections in this province. So it's not really a surprise that they would have taken this opportunity to introduce yet more watering down of environmental protections. This schedule prohibits the public from any longer requesting that the minister refer an environmental assessment to the Ontario Land Tribunal. The minister no longer has to conduct and publish a review of a comprehensive environmental assessment. The minister no longer has to provide opportunity for public comments.

But the most worrisome thing, Speaker, is not in the bill itself. It's actually buried in the backgrounder, which says that there will be regulatory changes coming that will exempt certain landfill expansion projects from the Environmental Assessment Act. We saw this in southwestern Ontario with the Dresden landfill. We saw this government bring in special economic zones with Bill 5—the zones where no provincial laws apply. They brought that in so that they could exempt the Dresden landfill project from environmental assessment. Now, with the regulatory changes that are proposed for this bill, we are going to see this happening with landfill expansion projects all across the province.

The other schedule that I wanted to briefly mention is the changes that are proposed dealing with international medical graduates. Schedule 4 of this bill would prioritize residency spots for certain international medical graduates who have a previous connection to Ontario. There has been significant pushback from patients and the medical

community about what this is going to mean for the 2.5 million Ontarians who are still waiting for a family doctor.

The president of the Ontario Medical Association said that “any kinds of restrictions of access to the first round of match”—the matching process to get the residency spots—“risks excluding some of those qualified, internationally trained physicians who are really ready to care for patients.” We know that these international medical graduates fill more than 60% of family medicine residency spots. It's baffling to think that this government is prepared to introduce legislative changes that are going to limit the pool of potential family physicians instead of expanding it.

Speaker, there are a couple of good things in this bill. But there are some very, very concerning schedules. It will be important for this government to hear from the province as to what this is going to mean.

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

1330

Mr. Anthony Leardi: On the topic of internationally educated medical students, the province has increased the number of not only university spots where medical students are trained in Ontario, but we've also increased the total number of residency positions, which, when fully implemented, will be approximately an additional 550. There will be more opportunity for everybody, and I think that's a good thing. Probably everybody in the chamber will agree that's a good thing.

I throw that over to the member and invite her to offer her views of that.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: We know that when the government first tried to make this change, it was taken to the courts. There was a constitutional challenge about the government's ability to move forward with these restrictions on accessing these residency spots. Part of the court challenge included the Black Physicians of Canada, the Canadian Medical Association, the College of Family Physicians of Canada and the Ontario Medical Association. Those organizations understand the need for more family physicians, and they understand how this is going to limit Ontario's ability to bring in those family physicians.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: The member mentioned Earth Day and I wanted to wish everyone else a happy belated Earth Day. It's very important, because there are a lot of environmental protections that have been removed and watered down under this government. Under schedule 2, it's just another example where they are removing protections from the government—from the people, really. They don't publish the results anymore. People can't complain to the Ontario Land Tribunal.

I just wanted to ask the member, why does the government continue to consolidate power in every ministry in this government to avoid transparency and accountability for decisions they're making on the environment?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I appreciate the question from my colleague the member for London–Fanshawe. As I said, these changes to the Environmental Assessment Act are certainly going to reduce transparency, reduce the public's ability to participate in these very important environmental assessment processes. These are going to be brought forward by regulation, and that is a big concern.

The government, if it's going to do this, should include it in legislation. The problem with regulations is that they are developed behind closed doors, and we have seen what this government did this morning, passing its changes to the freedom of information act. This government does not want the people of Ontario to know the kinds of decisions it is making, who is benefiting and who will be hurt by those decisions.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you to the member from London West. Do you have confidence in this government for the way they're handling landfill sites? You mentioned Dresden, but, also, what do you think of the value of environmental assessments in general? Should they remain as is? Should they be strengthened? Would people want to know, if they're getting a landfill site near their idyllic small town, that it's safe to do so? Would they want the tests and proper oversight done?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you to the member for that question. I have no confidence in this government's ability to manage landfill expansion. I have no confidence in their ability to deal with the health care crisis, to deal with the jobs crisis, to deal with the housing crisis, to help people with rising cost of living. But from the early days of this government, we've just seen one attack after another against environmental protections in Ontario.

The really troubling thing is, Speaker, they constantly bring these forward under the guise of red tape. From the very beginning, this government has considered environmental protections to be nothing but red tape that they want to eliminate as soon as they can.

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

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Service standards are very important to this government, and I'm sure they're important for all members of this Legislature. When we introduced business service standards to improve predictability, we saw that the actual experience was that parts of the current legislation were being interpreted inconsistently. So, of course, we need to bring consistency to all interpretations of regulations.

My question to the member is, would you support a system that creates more certainty for both people and businesses in our great province?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I can tell the member that what I would have supported in this bill was an expansion of WSIB coverage to all 1.5 million Ontario workers who are currently excluded from accessing WSIB, including child care workers, who are truly the backbone of our economy.

I appreciate that this bill moves to expand WSIB to residential care and group home workers, but this government has got to face the fact that there are 1.5 million Ontario workers who deserve WSIB coverage and are continuing to be excluded.

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

MPP Wayne Gates: Thanks for the presentation from my colleague. We've had seven Workers for Workers bills. Every time they brought a bill forward, I've stood up in this House, like a lot of my colleagues have, and talked about deeming. We've taken it to committee with amendments, and seven times this government has not included deeming in one of their labour bills.

Deeming may be the worst thing in Ontario for injured workers because it forces them to live in poverty. I've been a firm believer that nobody who gets injured on the job should be forced by an organization like WSIB to live in poverty.

My question to the member, who I know represented as a labour critic for a while: Why do you think this heartless government will not put deeming in any one of these labour bills?

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to commend the member for Niagara Falls for his constant advocacy on the issue of deeming and the number of times he has worked to get this government to eliminate deeming in their changes to the WSIB.

One of the things I think this government enjoys doing is handing out those so-called WSIB surpluses back to employers. They gave \$21.5 billion last year back to employers. Instead, those funds should be used to expand coverage to workers who are excluded and to end practices like deeming that result in so many injured workers living in dire poverty.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): There isn't time for another question or response.

Further debate?

MPP Mohamed Firin: I'm pleased to rise today in strong support of the Protecting Ontario's Workers and Economic Resilience Act, 2026. This package of legislative and regulatory changes reflects how our government is taking strong and decisive action to protect Ontario and support our workers.

1340

This bill does not ignore today's economic pressures. It addresses them head on, Speaker, and it recognizes that worker protection and economic resilience are not competing goals, but they are mutually reinforcing ones. Under the leadership of Premier Ford, we are confronting the real challenges facing Ontario's economy, from global economic pressures and supply chain disruptions to rising costs and trade uncertainty, while keeping workers, employers, and communities at the centre of every decision.

We are not waiting for those pressures to pass. We are acting now to meet them head on. That matters, Speaker, because economic resilience is not built in theory. It is

built in paycheques, in workplaces, and in communities across this province. It is built in confidence a worker has that their job is secure, their pay is fair and their government has their back. And it is built in the confidence businesses have in Ontario as a place where they can invest, grow, and succeed.

Speaker, this package also speaks to a broader expectation Ontarians have of their government: that we respond to economic change with clarity, stability and fairness. People want to know that the rules reflect today's realities and that protections keep pace with how work is changing, and they want to know that the economy we are building is one that works for everyone, not just during times of growth, but during periods of uncertainty as well.

We believe in a simple but powerful idea: That Ontario's economic backbone is the strength of its workers, and at a time when families, businesses and entire sectors are being tested by economic challenges, it is our responsibility to ensure workers are protected, supported, and treated fairly.

The reality is that we're living through a moment of profound economic change: Global markets are unsettled, supply chains are being reshaped, trade relationships that Ontario has relied on for generations are under pressure. And workers, whether they are on construction sites, in retirement homes, in restaurants, retail, machine shops or factories, are feeling the uncertainty directly. They are feeling it in their day-to-day lives in rising costs, in economic uncertainty and in questions about what the future holds.

For some workers that uncertainty means reduced hours or delayed projects. For others, it means wondering whether rising costs can be covered by the next paycheque. For employers, it means tighter margins and difficulty planning ahead. And for our government, it means acting decisively to provide stability, not through short-term fixes but through practical, structural improvements that strengthen Ontario over the long term.

In times of uncertainty, stability is not an option; it's essential. People look to their governments not for words but for action. They look for practical measures that protect their paycheques, their safety and their ability to keep contributing to their communities and our economy. That is exactly what this package is designed to do. It's a comprehensive plan that would ensure Ontario workers are protected, supported and equipped for opportunity, and I'm proud to speak in support of it today.

Speaker, we recognize that when workers are protected, businesses are stronger, and when businesses are stronger, Ontario grows. That is the approach that our government has taken since day one, and it is reflected in the changes we're talking about today. Our approach is grounded in a simple truth: If you want a strong, resilient economy, you need to get the fundamentals right, and that starts with protecting our workers. That is why this package focuses on three pillars: Protecting workers' paycheques, supporting injured workers and strengthening worker protections and economic resilience.

The message has been consistent across the board that the system needs to work better. People are not asking for more complexity; they are asking for fairness, for clarity and for a system that they can rely on. That is what good public policy looks like: identifying gaps, closing them and evolving systems so they work better for everyone, and that is exactly what these measures do.

I want to start with a principle that guides much of what we do: Work should pay and pay should be protected. For too many workers, the ability to take home a full paycheque can mean the difference between stability and stress. It can trigger serious consequences, where even a small deduction can mean falling behind on rent or skipping a bill just to get through the week. It can mean choosing between essentials: between groceries and rent; between transit and child care. Those pressures are felt most acutely by workers who already have the least margins of error, the workers this legislation is designed to protect, Speaker.

Our responsibility as legislators is to ensure that employment standards evolve with today's economy and reflect the realities people face, not the assumptions of decades past. Speaker, no employee should have to pay out of pocket just to show up at work, yet for far too long, that has been the reality, and for many workers, it has quietly become an accepted but deeply unfair cost of employment.

Think about the server at your favourite restaurant, a hotel housekeeper, a retail worker stocking the shelves. Right now, some of these workers are being asked to pay out of pocket for uniforms they're required to wear on the job—clothing they can't use anywhere else, clothing that is not optional, not flexible and not transferable to any other job. No one should have to pay to go to work. That's money coming directly out of their paycheques before they have even settled into their job, before they have had a chance to get ahead or even catch up. And for workers living paycheque to paycheque, those upfront costs are not small, Speaker. They matter. That's why we're taking action by proposing the changes that will prohibit employers from charging employees for mandatory uniforms except in limited circumstances. So what does that mean, Speaker? It means no more deductions for branded or employer-specific uniforms and no more employees effectively paying to start earning a living.

At a time when affordability is top of mind, this is about protecting workers' paycheques and putting money back in their pockets. It's a practical, targeted change but one that will have real impact on the day-to-day lives of workers across this province.

At the same time, we recognize the realities facing small businesses because we understand that many employers are also navigating rising costs and economic uncertainty. That is why we're also proposing targeted consultation on policy parameters, ensuring fairness for employees without creating undue hardships for small businesses. It reflects a measured approach that protects employees while recognizing the realities facing employers.

Speaker, work should not come with an upfront price tag. It should come with opportunity, stability and the ability to earn a fair wage without unnecessary deductions. No one should have to dip into their own pocket simply to meet an employer's branding requirement. With this proposed change, we're making that expectation clear.

We also want to ensure employees receive what they are owed because that money is not theoretical. It's rent; it's groceries. It's the worker who has already done the job and now is waiting just to be paid. And it's the paycheque a worker has already earned and is relying on to support themselves and their family.

That is why we're proposing changes to ensure that employees are prioritized during collection processes when partial funds are recovered, so that more hard-earned money goes back into the worker's pocket, where it belongs—not lost to fees, not reduced by administrative costs and not delayed unnecessarily.

Speaker, wages are not optional; they're earned. They represent hours worked and commitments fulfilled. When those wages are withheld, it's not just a financial issue; it's a matter of basic fairness. When something goes wrong, workers should not have to share what is recovered. They should not be forced to stand at the back of the line for money that's already theirs. Workers should come first. It's a principle that reflects what Ontarians expect: that if you do work, you get paid.

That is also why we're proposing a critical new statute, the Strengthening Talent Agency Regulation Act, 2026, known as the STAR Act. Ontario's arts and culture and creative industries are a major economic driver, generating more than \$26 billion annually and supporting tens of thousands of jobs across Ontario. This industry not only creates jobs but showcases Ontario to the world, attracting investment, talent and global attention. But for far too long, it has operated without clear and consistent protections, and that has left too many performers navigating a system without basic safeguards that workers in other sectors have. Right now, talent agencies in Ontario are unregulated—no requirements for how they handle performers' money, no deadlines for when they have to pay. For an industry of that size and importance, that's simply not good enough, because when an industry grows, protections must grow with it.

Our province is a global destination for film and television production because of our talent, our infrastructure and our reputation. We have the best performers and entertainment workers in the world. Clear, transparent rules don't just protect workers; they protect their paycheques and strengthen that reputation, making Ontario an even more attractive place for productions to invest and grow and create good-paying jobs.

The good actors in this industry want a level playing field, rules to ensure everyone is playing fair. They want certainty, they want transparency and they want confidence that the system works the way it should.

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

MPP Wayne Gates: I listened to your presentation with interest, as you said how much your government cares about workers and how workers should come first; workers should be protected; workers shouldn't pay out of their pocket to go to work. And those are your words: "You should not pay to go to work." I agree 100% with that. I don't believe that workers should go to work and have to pay.

1350

In every single hospital in the province of Ontario, your government is charging parking for people to go to work. Whether you're a nurse, whether you're a doctor, whether you're a PSW, when you go to work, they're taking money off your paycheque to pay for parking. These are people that are going to work every single day to save our lives, our moms, our dads, our aunts and uncles.

How can you stand up and say that workers shouldn't pay to go to work, yet you're taxing workers every single day in the province of Ontario to pay for parking?

MPP Mohamed Firin: Speaker, I'd like to thank the member opposite for the question. Our government, through Working for Workers legislation—seven of them—has shown that we care about the workers, whether it's what I just announced today, whether it's about the branded clothing that now companies cannot charge for, whether it's about protecting workers in various sectors.

The member opposite usually shows up for a lot of our press conferences—and I appreciate that—whenever we have good announcements to make, especially in the Niagara region. But I would urge the member to also vote for some of this legislation. Unfortunately, he talks about caring for workers but never votes for the Working for Workers bills.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: In schedule 2, we're talking about environmental assessments. I'm just wondering if you can tell us how valuable you think environmental assessments are. Should they be required for things like landfill sites? What would your community think of a landfill site going in right next to a neighbourhood without any environmental assessment, or anything else, like a highway, going in without environmental assessments?

MPP Mohamed Firin: I'd like to thank the member opposite for the questions. Speaker, we have some of the best environmental guidelines in this country and on the globe. The Ministry of the Environment has recently tabled a bill putting all the conservation acts and everything together.

We're wasting a lot of energy and time on red tape. This is exactly what this government is doing: We're trying to cut that red tape. We're losing billions of dollars. We're losing global investments that don't want to come to Ontario because of a lot of the red tape regulations. We're reducing those regulations, and we'll continue to do that.

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

Hon. David Piccini: I just want to recognize a visiting delegation from my family's home region of Italy, Friuli-Venezia Giulia. Welcome to Queen's Park. It's an honour to have all of you here.

Speaking of the contributions of Italian Canadians, my question is, what are the measures in this bill that are going to support workers, that are going to get them to work faster, support labour mobility from coast to coast to coast, to build nation-building projects? That member has been a phenomenal champion for these initiatives, and I was just hoping he could elaborate a little more on these successive measures we've introduced to Working for Workers in the latest bill.

MPP Mohamed Firin: I'd like to thank the Minister of Labour for the question, and I'd like to welcome the delegation to Queen's Park.

Speaker, we're at a time right now when there's a lot of global uncertainty. If we're going to compete globally, we have to meet the time and we have to cut the red tape. This is why across this country—it doesn't matter whether you're NDP, whether you're Liberal—whatever party you are, provinces and people are coming together to cut red tape because the number one trade partner that we had has waged an economic war on our country. So it's time we step up.

This is exactly what we're doing with labour mobility, so that a worker that works in Alberta or a worker that works in British Columbia can now come to Ontario and work without any burden, without any additional stress. That's exactly what our regulations will continue to do, Speaker.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Last week, along with my colleagues the member for London-Fanshawe and the member for London North Centre, I met with the executive director of Ark Aid, which is a homeless shelter in London. She told us that seniors are the fastest-growing demographic of people using the services of the homeless shelter.

Now, we know that seniors are being economically evicted from their homes, but many are looking for employment. They are working well past age 65 because they have to in this economy.

This bill makes some changes that will allow injured workers who are injured on the job to get WSIB benefits past 65. My question is, what happens to a young person who is permanently injured at work, who may not know at the time of their injury that they would have worked beyond age 65?

MPP Mohamed Firin: I would like to thank the member opposite for the question. We've heard from seniors, Speaker, which is why, in this legislation, we've included and we've extended the age cap above 65, because some seniors want to work; they want to continue working. What our Working for Workers legislation does is, after every legislation, we meet with every stakeholder across the province and we take those improvements; we make those enhancements. And to the seniors I'd like to say, we

have heard you loud and clear, and we'll continue to make those changes as we go. That's what the Working for Workers legislation does. We're on number 7, and stay tuned; we'll do more in the next legislation.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I'm just noticing in the bill that schedule 6—I had a question about that. If the Franco-Ontarian community is so important to this government, why (1) would you throw the French Language Services Commissioner into the Ombudsman's area and not keep him as an independent, and (2) why would you now mandate that the future Ombudsman needs to be bilingual, when the process to select the Ombudsman started in November?

MPP Mohamed Firin: I'd like to thank the member opposite for the question. Speaker, there's no government that has invested more into our French communities than this government, under the leadership of Premier Ford.

Interjections.

MPP Mohamed Firin: The member laughs, but she's well aware of that, and I would urge her to vote for the budget, where there are many investments for our French communities.

In regards to the Ombudsman, it's something that we've heard loud and clear, and this is why we're implementing it, because what we do, on that side of the aisle and this side of the aisle, is we listen to the public and then we act on that.

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

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: I'm actually going to refer to my paper for this because the Occupational Exposure Registry—it's the online digital portal that gives workers a way to track hazardous substances in the workplace over the course of their career. This is an important change that we're making. I think when we think about occupational health hazards, people can be working for a long time; they want to make sure they have ways to know if there's a diagnosis that needs to be made in the future.

So I think this is really important. Could you speak to why this is going to help so many people who work, and often those front-line workers who are putting their safety ahead of ours and making sure that we are safe and doing the selfless act that so many of them do? I'm thinking about our firefighters or health care providers. So this change to the health and safety act is a good one, and I'm wondering if the member could speak more to that, please.

MPP Mohamed Firin: I'd like to thank the associate minister for that and for the great work that she does, always caring about the workers and pushing workers forward.

What we do at the Ministry of Labour is, we listen to a lot of the stakeholders and we take that feedback, and that's how a lot of this legislation comes forward. When it comes to occupational health and safety—especially when it comes to firefighters; we have our front-line nurses—it's something that we always put first. I've met dozens of

occupational health and safety workers across the province that are actually on the front lines doing a lot of great work. That's why we've increased our spot-checks on companies: to make sure that workers are being treated fairly, that they're not being exposed to any hazardous materials.

I'd like to thank the member again for that question. Continue pushing what you're doing on your side and the wonderful work that you do for the workers. I'd like to thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. There isn't time for another question or response. Further debate?

MPP Lisa Gretzky: It's a pleasure to rise on behalf of my constituents to talk to the bill before us that is entitled Protecting Ontario's Workers and Economic Resilience. I cannot for the life of me figure out why the government is tying in, in some cases, environmental issues. I mean, in this bill about workers, they are talking about expanding landfills. I don't know what that has to do with workers.

1400

But, Speaker, I'm going to focus mainly on the worker piece, because when people have stable jobs with a good income, a good salary, that makes our economy stronger. I don't know how expanding a landfill somehow makes the economy stronger.

I want to point out some alarming numbers, some alarming data when it comes to what people in this province are facing under this Conservative government. And more specifically, I'll have numbers for workers too.

The latest data that comes from the 2025 Hunger Report by Feed Ontario shows that over one million people—that's over one million individuals—used food banks in Ontario in April 2024 to March 2025. That's under this government. Nearly nine million total visits were recorded in that same period of time from April 2024 to March 2025. So over a million people visited a food bank for a total of nearly nine million visits. This is the highest number that has ever been recorded in this province's history.

The government likes to talk about historic things they've done. I hope you're proud of yourself. You set a record for the number of people that are living in poverty in this province and having to access food banks. It's absolutely shameful.

The usage has increased for nine consecutive years, which coincidentally has been this government. It has been this government, so their policies and their decisions are driving poverty and food bank usage in this province.

Roughly one in four food bank users are employed. Let that sink in: One in four food bank users are employed. This government likes to say that they're working for workers or they're protecting Ontario's workers in this bill, but one in four of those workers are going to food banks.

Visits to food banks have dramatically risen, about 165% higher than 2019-20 levels—again, this majority Conservative government. Those numbers: 165% higher since they formed government.

And food bank demand in my region is continuing to rise and is straining resources. If you talk to the food

banks, if you talk to Feed Ontario, talk to Daily Bread here in Toronto, if you talk to UHC back home or any of the others—Downtown Mission, Street Help, any of the food banks. That's not including the churches that set up food banks or other smaller community organizations that have to start food banks. What they're saying is they cannot keep up with demand. They are actually running out of food to be able to support people that need to go to food banks.

Yet this government just voted down our motion to stop price gouging in grocery stores, surveillance pricing where these big retailers like Galen Weston—the Premier said, "God bless them" for gouging people on necessities like food. We brought forward a motion that would stop that from happening and this government voted it down. So it's not surprising that these numbers continue to rise.

Ontario has surpassed one million food bank users annually—nearly nine million visits. And I want to point out again that that is a record number.

We're seeing sharp increases in demand in my area. The food banks are saying they're stretched thin. They're having a hard time supporting people. In my region alone, one in four households have experienced or are experiencing food insecurity.

As of late 2025, 30% of visitors to local food banks were children. So the government side should be explaining to the people in this province, as you're saying that you are protecting Ontario workers, why it is that those parents have to go to food banks with their children in order to be able to feed them. That's a question the government should be answering. Well, they did answer it. Their answer was to go out and spend \$30 million on a luxury jet for the Premier's personal use. That was the government's answer. We've seen a 9% increase in my region over 2024 in the number of people accessing food banks and many of those are workers and seniors.

Speaker, some of the items that the government speaks to in this bill around workers and protecting workers—last night during debate, I heard, when my colleague talked about a woman fleeing violence in the home—who I believe ended up in hospital missing teeth and who almost died. One of the government members—he's here today; I should name him and shame him—got up and talked about how much money the government is pouring into protecting women from violence, and how making sure women have jobs so they can escape the violence—completely out of touch with reality.

You see, Speaker, a lot of the times when women are employed and they are in an abusive relationship, they can no longer go to work because their abuser knows where they work and they will come there and they will find them. So it's not just a matter of saying we're ensuring that women have jobs, which is nonsense. I don't know if the government saw that just, I believe it was last month, men had already made 30%, 35% more than women who are doing the exact same job. If the government was really working for women workers, they would actually do something about that. They sure as heck wouldn't be bringing in bills like Bill 124, which actually suppressed

the wages in sectors like health care and education and child care and developmental services, where the vast majority of those workers are women. They sure as heck wouldn't have done that.

There's nothing in this bill that will actually protect workers from the increase of violence in our schools and our hospitals and in our long-term-care facilities—again, I will point out, sectors that largely employ women. There's nothing in this bill that is actually going to stop the increase in violence in those sectors. We have teachers and education workers and nurses and PSWs—again, mostly women—who are facing more and more violence in their workplace and there is nothing in this bill to protect them.

With the little bit of time I've got left, I want to talk about something that is baked right into this bill. This government will get up and say, "We are so pro union, yay us," but baked right into this bill is union-busting language. Our workplace Minister of Labour is shaking his head at me, which goes to show how out of touch he really is with how it works when it comes to unionizing and trying to get their first collective agreement. There have been many workplaces—my colleague from Niagara Falls had one—where the employer will drag out getting a first contract in order to try and avoid unionization, and this government has put language in to make it easier for decertification under those circumstances.

I want to give a shout-out to the Diageo workers. This government did nothing to protect those 200 workers when that plant closed. They say they negotiated a deal with Diageo; it did nothing to support the 200 workers that lost their jobs. This government right now has an opportunity, again—for about the 17th time now—to pass anti-scab labour legislation to actually protect the workers at Titan Tool and Die, where the company has locked them out, refuses to give them a closure agreement and is using scab labour to do their work in order to drag out actually having to give these workers what they have earned over 30 or 40 years of employment there.

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

1410

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member for her debate. You know, before 1998, workers in Ontario would receive 90% of their take-home pay; then it was cut down to 85% because the WSIB's finances were under pressure. Would the member support the 90% increase back for our injured workers?

MPP Lisa Gretzky: To the member opposite, it was actually a Conservative government under Mike Harris that made that cut in the first place. It's taken you 20 years, of which you've been government for nearly nine, to actually bring it back to the level that it was.

But what I also know is you have had many opportunities to end the practice of deeming, where WSIB takes an injured worker and dreams up some magical job that they say exists and the worker should be able to do, and then they cut their benefits by that amount. So when you're talking about WSIB and you're talking about protecting workers in Ontario, one of the things that you could do

immediately, today—you've had many opportunities—is end the practice of deeming injured workers in this province. You are putting them into legislated poverty and, in many cases, pushing them on to social assistance.

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

MPP Wayne Gates: I'd like to congratulate my colleague from Windsor, because she's absolutely right. There is language in this bill which is union-busting; make no mistake about it.

Interjection.

MPP Wayne Gates: The minister can shake his head all he wants; there is.

But my question is that the Premier, last week in this House, said he doesn't support anti-scab. He doesn't support replacement workers. Yet Titan Tool & Die in Windsor has been out now for nine months. And every day they're watching scabs and replacement workers go cross that picket line—every single day. There's nothing worse as a worker—I know, because I've been on strike many, many times—than watching replacement workers doing your job when you're fighting the company for a fair day and fair pay.

Why do you think this labour minister and this government will not get rid of scabs in the workplace when 98% of all collective agreements are settled without a strike?

MPP Lisa Gretzky: The quick answer to that is because allowing scabs into workplaces actually helps the Conservative government's corporate buddies; that's it.

I want to talk about the Titan workers because the company has said they're closed, but they won't actually give them a closure agreement. They locked the workers out. It's been nearly nine months. They will not give them a closure agreement. There are people who have worked there for 30 or 40 years and the company is trying to screw them, frankly, out of the pensions and benefits that they've earned.

Meanwhile, they are bringing in scab workers to do the work of those Titan workers. So what those Titan workers—again, locked out for nine months—are asking of this government is for them to finally pass anti-scab labour legislation. You have had seven Working for Workers because the first six times, apparently, you couldn't get it right. We have tabled anti-scab labour legislation; you voted against it every single time. I don't know how you justify that. But if you want to do right by the Titan workers and every other worker in this province, then pass anti-scab labour legislation.

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

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I've been listening to the member across talking about unionized workers. I was a unionized worker for 31 years at the Ford Motor plant in Oakville.

Interjections.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Thank you.

During the last election, I noticed that, I think, 22 or 27 private-sector unions endorsed our government and abandoned your party. Can you tell me why they would

abandon the NDP and come over to the Conservatives and support us because we're creating jobs in this province?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member for Windsor West, through the Chair.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Through the Chair; thank you, Speaker.

Actually, the OFL supported us and they have over a million workers in this province. I had unions from education, from private sector, from auto, from health care out supporting me for my campaign, as did many of my colleagues.

I find it rich when the government side lectures us on labour. But what I'll say to that member is, you worked in a union environment. You worked in an auto plant and you reaped the benefits of the hard work that the union does bargaining and negotiating collective agreements, whether that is your wages or your benefits.

I'd like you to tell me how would you have felt if you were pushed out—locked out by your employer—or out on strike, fighting for better, safer, fairer wages and workplaces, and that company was bringing in scab labour? I would like to think that you would sit on that line with your brothers and sisters and push the government of the day to do the right thing by passing anti-scab labour legislation.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: When we were in our constituency before the House came back into session, I had a woman call me and she said that her and her co-worker needed to see me right away because they were trying to get their place unionized in a cheese factory in the London area and they were fired immediately on the spot. They said that they had to either sign a non-disclosure agreement to get their severance pay, and of course, they gave them only seven days to figure this out, so they couldn't even go get legal advice.

I'd like to know, in this bill, under schedule 3, I believe it is—I think it's schedule 3. They say it's a workers bill. Why is this government making it easier to decertify or have a unionized workplace where workers are being penalized for trying to get better working conditions? Is this bill, under schedule 3, benefiting workers or benefiting employers?

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I appreciate the question from my colleague from London. Again, I will say that the reason that the government has put such language into a bill is because the government is on the side of the corporations that actually take advantage and exploit workers. That's what this language is about. This isn't about protecting workers.

We see workplaces all over this province—I mean, heck, the government won't even have their own staff unionized for crying out loud. We are the only party, the NDP, that proudly has unionized staff members. So we see that they're anti-union right off the hop.

But if the government really was pro-union, they would make it easier for people to join unions. We know when they're part of that union, part of that collective, they have

fairer wages, they have benefits, they have a better life. We're not seeing them having to go to food banks like this government is pushing them into, and we don't see a situation like we do in my community and many others in the past where a company drags out that first contract just for the purpose of breaking the union.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: To the member from Windsor West: Do you think that normal governments understand the value of environmental oversight and especially with things like environmental assessments, which is in schedule 2 of this bill—that they would understand the value and benefit and the necessity to have checks and balances and be mindful of what you're building and what you're doing with regard to biodiversity, to contamination, etc.?

MPP Lisa Gretzky: Thank you to my colleague from the other caucus. That's an excellent question.

If this government actually looked at data, actually looked at what goes on in communities around this province, communities like mine where we had, twice—two one-in-100-year storms. We still experienced terrible flooding and it's getting worse. We're getting more and more extreme weather. We've had several cases here in Toronto with severe ice storms. We've seen them in the north. We've seen issues all over this province. If the government was actually interested in protecting the environment and stopping these environmental disasters, they certainly would not be gutting the process of environmental assessments prior to building.

I don't know about anybody else in this place, but I wouldn't want my home built on land that everybody knew, or should know, if there was an environmental assessment, was going to flood. Because two things happen: They either jack up your insurance rates, or you're disqualified from being able to get insurance at all. We've had it done in my region.

So, absolutely, government could be doing more when it comes to the environment and protecting people in this province. This government is just really not interested in the data that's out there.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. We don't have time for another back and forth. Further debate?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: It's a real pleasure to join this debate this afternoon on Bill 105, the Protecting Ontario's Workers and Economic Resilience Act, introduced by the Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Just last week, I was honoured to join the minister and the Minister of Labour at Cinespace Studios in Etobicoke–Lakeshore, which is a major production hub for high-performing TV series like *Law and Order Toronto*. Together, we announced two measures that are now part of this bill: first, ensuring that no workers have to pay out of their pocket for required uniforms just to earn a paycheck—this is now in schedule 1 of Bill 105—and second, improving the transparency and oversight of talent

agents to help protect workers in the entertainment industry. This is in schedule 8.

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Speaker, these are simple but meaningful changes that respect workers and help to build a stronger, more competitive economy. For many workers, especially those just starting out in the retail, hospitality and tourist sectors, the cost of new uniforms can add up quickly. In my riding of Port Credit, many workers cover their own costs themselves—up to \$50 per uniform. Removing this burden is a simple, fair step forward that will help workers keep more of what they earn in their pocket.

At the same time, schedule 8 would build on this by strengthening the oversight and transparency in talent agencies. As the minister said, Ontario's arts and entertainment industry generates over \$26 billion each year and they support almost 178,000 well-paying jobs, but too often they're vulnerable to unfair treatment. They need clear and consistent protection, and that's what schedule 8 would provide.

Victoria Harding, executive director of the Directors Guild of Canada, said, and I agree, protections like these will "reinforce Ontario as a leading jurisdiction in a globally competitive entertainment industry, a position built on both creative excellence and fair treatment for workers."

Next, Speaker, I'd like to take a few minutes on schedule 2. This is a critical moment for Ontario and for Canada. We know that the global demand for critical minerals will increase by as much as 500% by 2050, with countries like China controlling up to 85% of global processing capacity.

Under the previous Liberal government, it took 15 years or more to open a mine in Ontario. Red tape and delays were allowed to hold back investments, job creation and access to critical and strategic minerals. But now, under the leadership of Premier Ford and the Minister of Energy and Mines, we have transformed one of the slowest permitting systems in the world into one of the fastest. Ontario is now a stable, reliable partner in the global economy and one of the top jurisdictions in the world to attract mining investment.

Speaker, that's what I heard at PDAC last month as we launched our new Critical Minerals Strategy. It's what we heard in meetings with delegations from around the world: Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, the Philippines, Sweden and many, many more jurisdictions.

Ontario has a strong foundation with over 371,000 active mine claims, over 400 exploration projects and over 77,000 jobs in the sector, many of them in northern and remote communities. Through the One Project, One Process framework, the Minister of Energy and Mines now acts as a single point of contact to streamline provincial approvals, end bureaucratic delays and attract global investment. Several nation-building projects have already begun, representing over 5,000 new jobs and adding over \$75 billion in our economy.

In February, I joined the Minister of Energy and Mines at NORCAT in Mississauga to announce that we're fast-

tracking Kinross Gold's Great Bear project near Red Lake in northwestern Ontario. This will unlock one of Canada's largest mines, creating over a thousand well-paying jobs and producing over five million ounces of gold.

Another IPIP project, Frontier Lithium's world-class PAK lithium project, which is also near Red Lake, is the largest lithium project in Ontario. It will unlock the highest-grade lithium in North America.

We're also fast-tracking the Canada Nickel Co.'s Crawford nickel project to build the largest nickel mine in the western world, north of Timmins, 100% Canadian-owned and supporting 4,000 jobs. Speaker, schedule 2 will build on this process, allowing us to use the latest technology to build a modern, single-window system that is easier and faster to use.

Speaker, it's important to say that schedule 2 does not remove oversight. It makes it much better and much quicker for us to develop in our mining sector. In energy and in mining, where projects are complex initiatives, schedule 2 will help provide opportunity and investment with the certainty they need to get shovels in the ground sooner on projects that power our province, strengthen our supply chain and create well-paying jobs right across Ontario.

At the same time, when global demand for reliable energy and critical minerals is growing, schedule 2 will help us secure Ontario's position as a global leader in responsible and fast-tracked mining development. Again, I want to thank the Minister of Red Tape Reduction for their work with us on this.

Lastly, Speaker, I want to thank the minister for schedule 9, which delivers the first increase in WSIB benefits for injured workers in 30 years. By increasing income replacement for workers from 85% to 90%, it would ensure that workers who are hurt on the job can keep more of their earnings while they're recovering. For families that rely on this support, that extra 5% would make a real and important difference.

Schedule 9 would also end the cap on benefits at the age of 65. Removing this limit will bring greater fairness and reflects today's reality, when many Ontarians continue working later in life. Together, these changes strengthen the system, providing better income security, treating workers more fairly and ensuring WSIB continues to deliver support that people can rely on when they need it most.

Speaker, taken together, the measures in Bill 105 reflect a clear and balanced approach, one that supports workers, strengthens our economy and ensures that Ontario remains competitive and resilient in a rapidly changing world. From protecting workers from unfair out-of-pocket costs to improving transparency in their talent agencies to modernizing how we improve major projects and strengthening support for injured workers, this bill delivers particularly meaningful benefits for people across Ontario. It recognizes that economic growth and protecting workers go hand in hand. It recognizes that when we reduce unnecessary red tape, we unlock investment, create jobs and build a stronger supply chain. And when we treat

workers fairly and ensure they can keep more of what they earn, we build a more inclusive and resilient economy. At a time of trade wars and global uncertainty, Ontario is stepping up as a stable, responsible and forward-looking jurisdiction.

Speaker, Bill 105 will help us move faster, act smarter and deliver better outcomes for workers, families and communities across the province of Ontario.

I'm proud to support this bill, and I look forward to everyone in the House here today supporting this bill as we move forward and make Ontario the jurisdiction in the world that everybody will look at and be proud to be part of.

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

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: I was listening to you speak, but when you asked a question to my colleague earlier, it was surprising to hear that you were an auto worker for nine years, I think you said.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Thirty-one.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Thirty-one years, so you were a long-lasting union member. So I've got to ask you: Are you for or against anti-scab legislation? Are you for anti-scab legislation?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member for that question. I'm a proud union worker and so was my father. My father was a welder at the Texaco refinery in Port Credit.

What I saw in our government over the last eight years: how unions have all come on board with our government because they know that we support hard-working people in this province. We know that we'll continue working with our unions across the board, and that's what we're going to do in this province. That's why we're going to continue getting more union workers on board with our government.

You know that, and you're upset because you've lost the support of the private sector unions because they've come over to our government because of this great Minister of Labour right here that's done so much great work for our province here.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Come to order.

Questions?

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Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: My question is: This government has destroyed the green development standards which allow municipalities and smart developers—many out there—to build it right the first time, to build sustainably with energy-efficient windows, heat pumps and things like that—with conservation measures. This government has slashed the conservation authorities from 36 to nine. We have states of emergency in the north and over a lot of this province right now with flooding.

This government has destroyed any targets for greenhouse gas emissions while we're in a climate emergency, and now is trying to remove the environmental assess-

ments. Do you think there is proper, significant oversight environmentally in Ontario to keep us safe?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member for that question. I'm not sure if the member is aware that what we put in our energy and mining bill for people that are renovating their homes—we have \$11 billion put aside for them to do renovations, to improve the efficiencies of their home: windows, doors, heat pumps, solar panels. That's what we've done as a government.

But something I want to talk to you about that has really been bothering me for many, many years is that you're a supporter of EV vehicles, but you don't want to build mines in our country. You'd depend on jurisdictions around the world that use child labour and don't care about the environment, like the Congo, when we could have our mines here in Ontario and well-paid jobs for Ontario workers. Why are you so against Ontario jobs and our workers here?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question—and through the Chair.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I want to thank my colleague for his comments and support of the legislation that's before us today.

In my riding of Simcoe–Grey, we have a lot of diverse small and medium enterprises. In fact, there are about 415,000 across the province, which employ over 60% of Ontarians who work in the private sector. When we came into power in 2018, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business gave Ontario a C for red tape. We're now an A, and we've passed many bills reducing red tape.

I'm wondering if the member could speak to the impacts that we've had in promoting small and medium enterprises so that they can drive our economy.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member for that excellent question. Yes, when we took office 15 years ago, there were 386,000 regulations in this province of Ontario. Nobody wanted to invest in Ontario. We've been reducing them all the time, moving forward, to create the environment for more jobs in the province.

When the previous government, the Liberal government, was in power, we lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs in this province. Premier Ford and our Minister of Labour have been able to bring back over a million jobs in this province, and we're going to continue bringing more well-paying jobs to the province—and unionized jobs, too—that will be supporting our government, because they know that we're creating jobs in this province.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm glad to stand and speak on Bill 105, Protecting Ontario's Workers and Economic Resilience Act, 2026.

Once again, we do have an omnibus bill before us. It's pages of unrelated changes bundled together, rushed through the Legislature. Once again, it puts members in impossible positions: support the good or swallow the bad, or oppose the bad and lose the good.

But there are some parts in this bill that are worth supporting, schedule 1 being one of them. For example,

finally addressing the practice of making workers pay for their own uniforms. That's long overdue, for employers to cover that. No one on minimum wage who's just starting out can afford, perhaps, to buy that uniform, and uniforms can get expensive.

There is something in my past employment—when I was in high school, I worked for the London Hospital Linen Service. What they did is they washed and dried and folded linen from the hospitals. Many types of linen came in there: obviously blankets etc., but also uniforms, the greens, the doctor outfits, and oftentimes there were OR blankets coming in from surgeries. If you can imagine: It was a huge processing facility. When you work there, you start off in the sorting area—the sorting area was all the blankets and uniforms that came into the place—and you were on a conveyor belt. So here I am, I'm 16 years old, and there would be things coming on the conveyor belt. You'd empty out the linen bags and oftentimes you'd find things in there that were quite shocking, surprising, because it came from the OR, the surgery rooms. We'd have the doctor greens, uniforms. And sometimes you'd find watches—the doctors forgot to take their watches out of their pockets or the health care workers forgot to take their watches out of their pockets. So I just want to acknowledge that, because as uniforms are being laundered, there are workers behind that service.

I want to give a shout-out to London Hospital Linen Service and all the workers there who keep a nice, clean, sanitized uniform for people who deliver our health care.

Speaker, schedule 8 is regulating talent agencies. It's another welcome step. For far too long, bad-faith agencies have operated a model that looks less like professional representation and more like a cash grab. They sign young, hopeful performers, charge upfront fees and deliver little to nothing in return. So this legislation starts to close that door, and that does matter.

Those are real improvements. But here's the problem: They are packaged alongside changes that undermine workers, weaken oversight and leave people behind. And that's the government's MO: Give a little and take more.

I want to talk about schedule 9. There are positive changes in schedule 9. They expand WSIB coverage to workers in residential care and group homes, and this is absolutely the right thing to do. These workers are mostly women, and they've been excluded for far too long from WSIB.

One of the things that I also want to mention about this sector—group homes and residential care homes—is that there is a campaign coming out called Worth Fighting For. These are workers who work in Community Living homes, and they are looking for fairer wages because of the type of work that they do. I also met with Community Living's Michelle Palmer a few months ago with respect to the issues that are happening in that sector, and one of the things we talked about is housing. The government, in their budget, is building all these housing complexes and housing for everyday people, but they're forgetting that we need targeted housing for Community Living, because the wait-list to access that kind of housing is extremely long.

I've talked in this Legislature, from the time I got elected, about the Rodgers family. They had two sons, and one of them finally got placed in Participation House. But they still have a son who hasn't been able to find residential care. So that is really important.

Speaker, schedule 9 does increase benefits from 85% to 90%, something that advocates have been pushing for. It also requires to remove that six-year lock-in to those benefits, so, again, it's giving something and taking something away.

With respect to schedule 1—again, there are so many items that we can put in workers bills, and one of them is wage theft. Under the Workers' Action Centre, there was a survey, and workers reported that 60% experienced wage theft, 51% were not paid for all the hours they worked, and 47% were paid late. The Ministry of Labour found that \$200 million was still owed to workers in the past 10 years, but \$80 million was not recovered from employers for the workers.

We have to do much better if we're talking about creating legislation for protecting workers. We need to make sure that we actually create enforcement, as well, when we create these pieces of legislation.

Speaker, the other part of that is schedule 2. I'd also like to wish everyone today—and I mentioned it earlier—a belated happy Earth Day. Without a strong environmental climate plan going forward, we can compromise the Earth that we live on. And it's a day when we talk about protecting our environment, about accountability, about leaving something better behind for the next generation. It's a nice sentiment, but it doesn't line up with what's in this bill.

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Schedule 2 removes the requirement for the minister to review and publish environmental assessments, it removes opportunities for public comment, and it takes away the public's ability to request an independent review. That's not streamlining, Speaker. That is shutting the people who pay for these projects out of the conversation—taxpayers.

It's hard not to notice that contradiction, because just weeks ago, on March 13, this government claimed it is “one of the most transparent in Ontario's history” and that they're “very focused on transparency.” But every time there's a choice between transparency and control, this government chooses control. Every time there's a chance to invite the public input, they find a way to limit it.

The budget that just got passed is a very clear example—how they squeezed in that people cannot request FOIs anymore, because the government doesn't want to reveal that information. They're hiding things. Every time, they're asked, “How are your decisions being made? What's going on?” There's no consultation, and they write the rules so they don't have to be accountable for those decisions.

Earlier, the government member was debating and talked about how they pass bills and they talk to stakeholders. Again, it's not a transparent process. If you want to talk to stakeholders, bring them into committee. Let everybody hear what stakeholders are saying, not just your

selective stakeholders—the input that they're giving back. So then you write legislation that helps not have access to public information, not have access to public input. But your ears are only listening to what you want to hear, and not what people are telling you—besides the people that you invite to the table.

When this government is ready to remove harmful pieces, I'll gladly support pieces of the legislation that they provide. I just want to end by saying that there is always time to change course when it comes to government decisions. We had that example earlier this week, about the plane that was in progress of being purchased, and—all the pressure that the Premier had, he changed his mind. I know that I got pressure in my office about the FOIs, and I'm surprised, with all the pressure and all the discussions publicly about how these FOIs hurt everyday people and allow the government to not be accountable and transparent and, really, have consequences for bad actions, that this government didn't take that piece out of the budget.

I'll just end with saying that creating pieces of legislation like in the environmental bill, where people don't have public participation, is disappointing. I look forward to this government, in the future, maybe listening to their conscience a little bit, maybe listening to this side of the Legislature, for really what is expected when you're in a leadership role: how to deliver transparency, be accountable and treat taxpayers fairly—and not just the taxpayers you want to listen to that you invite to the table.

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

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I thank the member opposite for her remarks today.

I want to take note that—and I know the member opposite knows this—more Ontarians are working past the age of 65. Yet, under the old WSIB rules, an injured worker's loss-of-earnings support could still end because of an outdated age threshold, even if that worker intended to remain in the labour force.

Now, this being the case, my question to the member is, would you seriously believe that age should be a barrier to support when the labour market has clearly changed?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I thank the member for that question. I don't know too many people—and it's good if someone does want to work until they're 95; have at it. However, there's a piece about affordability and about WSIB. If you have to work because you need to support yourself because you can't retire and you can't say, "You know what, I've worked 50 years; it's time for me to retire," and you're forced because it's an affordability issue and you have to have a job at 85 years old, that is a sad commentary on how we are going to treat workers under WSIB.

Nobody asks to be injured on the job. We need to ensure that when someone—I could be injured on the job, and I would want to be treated fairly. If I was 65 and I wanted to retire because I had worked 30 years and I got hurt on the job, I would want that option, and I wouldn't have to be forced to work until I'm 85 just to buy food and house myself.

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

MPP Lisa Gretzky: To my colleague from London, because you touched on environmental assessments—I would love to talk more about labour, but we'll go with the environmental assessments.

Under this bill, the minister would no longer have to conduct and publish a review of comprehensive environmental assessments. He or she—he currently—would no longer have to provide an opportunity for public comments. The public could no longer request that the minister refer an environmental assessment to the Ontario Land Tribunal.

So what we're seeing is, again, another instance where the government is trying to centralize power to themselves, and we've seen what this government will do with such power when it comes to, say, the greenbelt, for instance.

I'm wondering if you could maybe elaborate on why you think the government would make a move to actually reduce environmental assessments and the public's access to actually have input on that.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I think what people have been saying is that this government wants to rush development without following the rules. They are rule-breakers. They always want to, at some point, pull out the "notwithstanding" clause because they don't like the ruling of a court, implementing FOIs because they don't like the rules of the court. That's what it is about. They want to bulldoze development anyplace they wish, any time they wish, without having rules to be held accountable to and making those developments actually safe.

I know the member from Windsor mentioned flooding. In my years as an insurance broker for 25 years, you can't buy flood insurance. It's a catastrophic loss.

When you're rushing environmental assessments and you're building things on flood plains—I hope that there's a class-action lawsuit one time to sue this government for their failed legislation to protect them, for building on flood plains.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We do not have time for another question and response.

Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Burch: I'm happy to offer some comments on Bill 105. This bill actually brought back a lot of memories for me and allows me to talk about some of my union background, serving a number of years as a United Steelworkers local president in Hamilton that helped to organize a large group of security guards across Ontario when a former government made it legal for security guards and janitors to join unions. It was progressive labour legislation. After that, from 2000 to 2010, I had the opportunity to work for the service employees' union, SEIU Healthcare, for 10 years.

Ironically, I heard the labour minister, in his speaking, mention Sandee Green from Choices, which is a Community Living organization. She was actually my chief steward when I was a business agent there. We used to call them business agents; they call them staff reps now.

After doing a few years here in Toronto—I had most of the hospitals in Toronto as the business agent for SEIU—I was moved to just Community Living organizations, which I did for two or three years. I represented Community Living organizations in Burlington, which I think was the largest one, Niagara Falls—Niagara Support Services—Welland and a number of others. One of them was Choices, which is in a little place north of Hamilton, Copetown.

The reason that's so relevant—and I'm glad the minister actually met with Sandee—is that those workers in Community Livings are some of the 29,000 that will be covered with this legislation, and they had no WSIB. The reason that's so serious is because, in that particular Community Living, they dealt with very, very serious cases, so there were people getting injured all the time. I'm not kidding you; every week or two the police would be at the facility because there was physical violence and workers were getting injured. So it was always incredible to me that those workers were never covered by WSIB, and it's something that took a lot of the union's time. It was really stressful for the workers. I always admired the way that they came to work. Many of these situations were in residential houses that Community Living would run—at Choices it's actually more of an institutional setting—and just injuries all the time.

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So I'm really happy, actually, to see those workers covered. That's the good news for me in this legislation—very, very much needed and a long time coming. I'm really glad that the minister met with Sandee. When I was first elected, I stood up and spoke about Sandee and about this legislation, so I was really happy to see this. So that's the good news.

The other WSIB changes: I'm not so hot about some of them, especially the age 65 change, but happy to see that clause in there. Actually, I'm going to give Sandee a call this weekend and congratulate her on getting that done on behalf of her members. I know that she's shown a lot of leadership in the SEIU committee that has been advocating for these WSIB changes for a long time.

Later in my career with SEIU, about three years, at the end, I was the first contractor negotiator for SEIU. So I want to talk about the decertification language in here. Actually, I had one employer that I bargained with. It was Chartwell homes. Chartwell homes owns retirement homes, a huge company; blue chip on stock exchange. I travelled around Ontario bargaining first collective agreements, a lot of them in Windsor, Ottawa, Cambridge, which for some reason had a lot of homes, I believe. That's a very different kind of negotiation, which is what troubles me about this legislation, because when you have a first collective agreement, a unit is certified, the onus is all on the union to do all the work because there's no collective agreement. So you're literally negotiating a collective agreement from scratch and putting a template together, then forming the template to match the workplace because there are particular problems that you're dealing with in the workplace.

So you certify the unit, then you have to get to know them, then you have to do proposal meetings, then you have to put this whole collective agreement together and present it to the employer. Almost no one has a collective agreement within six months. You're lucky to start bargaining in most units in six months. So I'm surprised, and I asked the question earlier to a government member, "Did you not do your homework or is this an attempt to make it easier to decertify unions?" Because it's one or the other. It makes absolutely no sense to create this six-month window, because the union just can't do that and get a collective agreement within six months. It gives a whole bunch of power to the employer to work behind the scenes and create a scenario of decertification.

I hope when this bill goes to committee and people come and speak at committee and tell the government what the real situation is, the government will learn about their mistake that they've made. They'll realize that no collective agreements, almost, get bargained within six months. They'll realize that this is very prejudicial against unions and will cause a lot of conflict in the workplace. It won't necessarily result in decertification, but what it will result in is it will split the workers in the workplace. It will cause a whole bunch of unnecessary anxiety and it will be unfair to those workers who just put their neck out on the line to join a union in the first place.

So it's a very troubling piece of legislation that I really think the government needs to rethink. With that, Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to give some comments. I look forward to a few questions.

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member from Niagara Centre for his comments. I appreciate, actually, the very thoughtful comments within.

One part of the bill that I know you didn't have time to touch upon was the health care workforce aspect of it. We have the CaRMS program that matches international graduates to locations here. I'm hoping you might be able to elaborate on your thoughts, your perspective on whether those are an improvement to the system that we have today.

Mr. Jeff Burch: That is one of the changes that I think is supportable. I look forward to learning more about it in committee and hearing people from the sector. Thank you for the question.

After I finished with SEIU, I became executive director of an immigration agency. For about eight years, one of the things that my agency did was match people up in jobs. We had the full range of settlement services, kind of a one-stop shop. Of course, there are provincial programs—they were here, actually, I think yesterday, Employment Solutions—provincial agencies that were here to talk about matching people to jobs. That's one of the things that we did in the immigration agency, and I hope that that part of the legislation makes it easier for those organizations to do their work.

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

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: It's always a pleasure to hear my friend from Niagara Centre because we have a similar background. I represented workers for 25 years, and I organized workplaces also.

When you see this legislation, about the six months—like he said, it's not realistic to think that you can get a first collective agreement in six months. What it does, though, is give the employer a chance to apply for decertification. It's again putting more hurdles for unions and opening the door for employers, especially when you organize a place and you won it with a slow percentage—even worse.

I think that I'd like to hear some more about this because I think a lot of people don't realize if you've done this work, you've done organizing, you've done certification and you've negotiated first collective agreements—which are, by the way, Speaker, the hardest ones to get. Please elaborate on this.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to my friend from Mushkegowuk—James Bay for the question.

Yes, one of the issues that brings to mind is, when you organize a unit in, for example, retirement homes, which is what I dealt with, you're dealing with a lot of part-time workers, and there's a lot of turnover in the workplace. If the employer knows that after six months, they can cause a decertification or work on that behind the scenes, what they can also do is increase that turnover of part-time employees and hire more and more part-time people.

I've seen units where it's taken a year, year and a half. You're still bargaining, and the entire unit has turned over. The employees in the retirement home—70% of them are new. They weren't even there when it was organized.

That's more incentive for the employer to drag things out and also to create turnover in the workplace, which is really unfair to those workers.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Quick question from the member from Beaches—East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Actions speak louder than words. So if this government truly cares about the francophone community, do you think that they should either reinstate the French-language commissioner as an independent, have required the future Ombudsman to be bilingual back in November 2025, when it started, or both?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to the member for the question. I think they should do both, actually, and I think my friend agrees with me.

I come from one of the top French-language-speaking ridings in the province. Welland has a huge French community. All my material from my office is in French and English. A lot of the events I attend are French community in Niagara.

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So they were extremely upset when those changes were made. They felt slighted. We are still trying to figure out what the reason for that was. So I think both those things should happen as quickly as possible and for the government to reconsider.

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

Seeing none, Ms. Khanjin has moved second reading of Bill 105, An Act to enact the Strengthening Talent Agency Regulation Act, 2026 and to amend various Acts. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

All those opposed to the motion will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

Second reading vote deferred.

MILITARY HONOURS

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 26, 2026, on the motion regarding the establishment of an independent military honours review board for the Victoria Cross.

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

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: I'm always honoured to stand and talk about serving and retired members of the Canadian Armed Forces. Too many Canadians don't know how much sacrifice they make every day on our behalf.

As a veteran myself, it would have been nice—if not professional courtesy—to have been included in prior consultation prior to this motion being presented before the Legislature. That's just bad manners.

While I was deployed to Afghanistan myself and worked in the headquarters in Kabul, I heard stories. I won't pretend to fully understand what those soldiers faced in constant contact with the enemy daily. I've heard stories. I've spoken to those who have been directly in combat. I've heard stories from military health professionals about the horrors that they experienced, those combat veterans. And I've heard stories of incredible bravery.

Sixteen Victoria Crosses were awarded during World War I. As has been mentioned by previous speakers, the Canadian Victoria Cross was created in 1993 as the highest award in Canada's honours system.

Since its inception, the Canadian Victoria Cross has never been awarded. I agree it's time that we ask, “Why not?”

Private Jess Larochelle is a hero, period. Let me repeat his story: On October 14, 2006, in Afghanistan, Private Jess Larochelle was manning an observation post on Charles Company's flank. The company was positioned around Pashmul, guarding a road between the two Canadian bases. Private Larochelle was the machine gunner for that observation post.

Around 3 p.m., the company was attacked by a force of over 50 Taliban, who were equipped with rocket-propelled grenades and small arms weapons. The forward observation post took a direct hit and Larochelle was wounded, briefly losing consciousness.

When he came to, he discovered that two of his company, Sergeant Darcy Tedford and Private Blake Williamson, were dead and three more had been wounded. Larochelle himself was seriously injured in the initial attack, with broken vertebrae in his neck and back, a detached retina in one of his eyes and a blown eardrum.

Though he was partially deaf and had limited eyesight, Larochelle mounted a swift and aggressive defence of the observation post. Firing his machine gun, he quickly ran out of ammunition. He then began firing M72 rocket launchers at the enemy, firing 15 66-millimetre rockets at a force of about 20 to 40 Taliban insurgents heavily armed with rifles, light machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades. Larochelle's actions helped protect his wounded comrades and hindered the Taliban attack. He provided covering fire on the company's flank, which was otherwise undefended. His counterattack bought the company enough time to mount a secure defence of the post. The Taliban were forced to withdraw and were unable to significantly attack their main target, which was the rifle company base. He was a brave soldier who saved the lives of members of his company under the most horrendous life-threatening conditions.

On March 14, 2007, Jess Larochelle was awarded the Star of Military Valour for his actions in that brutal battle in October 2006. At the time of his award, Prime Minister Stephen Harper made a recommendation to the Governor General that he be awarded the Star of Military Valour. My understanding is that no submission was made that he receive the Victoria Cross, and I must admit, I'm not sure why not. I understand that General Hillier has since said, "At the end, we decided (on the Star of Military Valour), and I'm still not sure that we got it right.... I think we did get it wrong."

I do agree that we need to look into the circumstances about why Canada has chosen not to award the Victoria Cross for any action since its inception. I fear that the system has perhaps created an unrealistic understanding of heroism and valour. But I must say that I struggle with this motion that an independent military honours review board should be established to review veterans' cases where evidence suggests that the criteria for the Victoria Cross were met. Who would decide that this review board would meet? Who decides whether there's enough evidence to warrant a review? Who will sit on the review board? Who will decide? Speaker, I personally think it should be enough that the Prime Minister of the day, the Minister of National Defence of the day and the Chief of the Defence Staff—if they all agree that they made a mistake, then that should be enough to trigger a review, even if it means creating a new review process.

What I don't struggle with, however, is my belief that as Canadians we need to do everything we can to support our serving military members, their families and veterans. The men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces choose a life that asks more of them than most of us will ever be asked to give—people who step forward knowing that service means separation from family, danger, sacrifice and, in some cases, lifelong consequences or the ultimate price. When we speak about the Canadian Armed Forces, our veterans and their families, we are not speaking about abstract institutions; we are speaking about people who stood up so the rest of us could stand safe.

Speaker, here's the uncomfortable reality: For far too many of our veterans, the hardest battle begins after the

uniform comes off. When a member of the Canadian Armed Forces transitions to civilian life, they're not just simply changing jobs; they are leaving behind a structured system, a tight-knit community, a clear sense of purpose, a shared identity. They are entering a world that often does not understand them—a world where skills are not always easily recognized, support systems are fragmented, mental and physical injuries may be invisible and where even basic needs like finding a family doctor can become an uphill struggle. We ask these individuals to make one of the most complex transitions a person can make, and too often, we don't even meet them halfway.

We must be clear: When someone serves, they do not serve alone. The family serves with them: spouses who put careers on hold; children who move from base to base, school to school; families who live with uncertainty during deployments; families who carry the weight of reintegration when their loved one returns home changed. If we are serious about honouring service, we must also honour the family, because when a veteran struggles, it is never just one person who is affected. Speaker, if you are willing to risk everything for this country, this country should not abandon you when you come home. Right now, we must be honest with ourselves: We can do better.

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One of the most important and often overlooked pieces of this conversation is community integration. When veterans leave the forces, they are not just entering civilian life, they are entering a specific community. And that community matters. A successful transition depends upon feeling welcomed, finding meaningful work, building new social networks, accessing health care and services, re-establishing identity and purpose. But for many veterans, this process is isolating. They go from being surrounded by people who understand them to being surrounded by people who may not. That gap between military culture and civilian life is real, and if we don't actively bridge it, we risk losing people to that gap.

This is not just a federal or provincial issue; it's a community issue. Every town, every city, every province has a role to play. Communities can partner with veteran organizations, create local transition programs, support employment pathways, encourage mentorship networks, ensure services are accessible and coordinated. Because integration is not something that happens automatically; it happens intentionally.

Now let's talk about one of the most urgent and practical issues here in Ontario: access to health care—specifically, access to family doctors. Right across Ontario, we are facing a health care access crisis. Millions of Ontarians do not have a family doctor, but for veterans and their families, this issue is not just inconvenient; it can be life-critical. Veterans may be dealing with physical injuries, chronic pain, PTSD and other mental health challenges—complex service-related conditions. Continuity of care is not optional, it's essential, and yet we have veterans entering civilian life and being told, "Get in line." That's not acceptable.

Providing priority access to family doctors for veterans and their families is not about giving special treatment; it's about recognizing earned responsibility. These individuals have already stepped forward when their country needed them. Ensuring they have timely access to primary care is a basic extension of that contract, and it makes practical sense. Early access to care reduces long-term health care costs, it prevents conditions from worsening, it supports mental health stability and it helps families remain strong and resilient. In other words, it is not just the right thing to do; it's the smart thing to do.

This is an area where Ontario can choose to lead. We have the ability to coordinate between federal and provincial systems. We can create veteran-specific health care pathways. We can prioritize and incentivize family doctor attachment for transitioning members. We can integrate military and civilian medical records more effectively. Other countries have taken steps in this direction. Australia pays doctors who take on military veterans and their families more. We can do it too. We can do this well.

Too often, veterans encounter systems that are complex, bureaucratic, slow, difficult to navigate, and what they need is exactly the opposite. They need clarity, speed, coordination and respect. Can you imagine the hurdles that extend to the family members, moving from community to community and having to start from scratch with obtaining and registering for OHIP, obtaining or transferring a driver's licence, obtaining a new family doctor or a new family dentist, enrolling in new schools?

We should ask ourselves, at the provincial level, what are we doing to make life easier for military members, veterans and their families? Every unnecessary barrier is a failure of a system, not of the individual. Every barrier we remove is a step towards fulfilling our obligation.

So, let's bring this back to the human level. Imagine a veteran leaving the forces after years of service. They move to a new community. They don't know anyone. They're trying to find work. Their child needs a doctor, they themselves are dealing with physical or mental health challenges, and they are told there's a wait-list—months, more likely years. That's not honour. That is abandonment in slow motion.

Honour and practice looks like this: A veteran moves to a new community and then is immediately connected to local supports. Their family is welcomed, not left to figure things out for themselves. They are attached to a family doctor quickly. Their skills are recognized and valued in the workforce. Their mental health is supported without stigma or delay.

So what could the Ontario government actually do? Here are some ideas.

(1) Create a veteran primary care attachment incentive: Provide a targeted payment to family physicians and nurse practitioners who formally attach an eligible veteran for ongoing primary care, with enhanced rates for recent release, medical release, rurality or clinical complexity.

(2) Fund a veteran primary care intake assessment: Create a paid extended first visit plus follow-up care

coordination payments, where needed, to review military history, occupational exposures, medications, mental health, chronic conditions, rehabilitation needs and documentation requirements.

(3) Establish a veteran-friendly practice accreditation stream: Adapt the UK model to Ontario by requiring veteran status identification, basic training, a clinical lead and familiarity with referral pathways relevant to veterans, with a modest participation payment or CME, continuing medical education, support.

(4) Add veterans to Health Care Connect as a priority stream: Create a veteran-specific pathway within Ontario's existing unattached patient system so recently released and medically released veterans are prioritized for attachment.

Speaker, this is a moment for Ontario to lead. I have outlined four ways that Ontario can make the lives of serving members, veterans and their families better. We have the power to do exactly that. Let us all work together to do everything within our power to improve their lives. Then let's do it and let's get it right.

Reviewing and upgrading the award of the Victoria Cross to Private Jess Laroche is the right thing to do. Let's expedite it and let's get it right.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Mr. Matthew Rae: It's always an honour to rise in this place, colleagues, to speak, but today especially to rise to such a worthy motion, the Victoria Cross motion that we're debating this afternoon—obviously, a true honour. We live in a great democracy, colleagues, and that democracy was hard-fought over many and by countless generations in places close to home and far from home. I know the Prime Minister has recently highlighted some of the 1812 leaders—from 1812, World War II, in Korea, in many peacekeeping missions around the world and now more recently for Canada, in Afghanistan. So it is a true honour today to rise to speak to this motion that we are debating for the Legislative Assembly.

Before I begin, Speaker, as I mentioned, I want to acknowledge the courage and sacrifice shown by all of those who have fought to secure our freedoms, whether it's on the slopes of Vimy Ridge, the beaches of Normandy, in Korea, the Middle East or anywhere in between—and many places, colleagues, that we may actually not know about because they obviously are top secret and our great special forces are doing very important work across the world in places that we may not be aware of even today.

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Canada's history is intertwined with the selfless individuals who stepped forward to serve and protect this country, our country, the place each and every one of us calls home. As a nation, I truly believe that we carry a responsibility not only to remember the countless sacrifices that were made by the men and women in combat but also to ensure that the systems we use to honour their service are fair and worthy of the trust placed in them.

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

Speaker, this is not a partisan motion. I know; I’ve been listening to the leadoff debates from all the recognized parties. Now we’re going into the rotation. It was great to hear from all the official parties that we’re all in agreement. It’s not a partisan motion, and it’s not about a backward-looking exercise to place blame.

This motion is an act of institutional reflection rooted in respect. Let me be clear, Speaker: This motion is not about glorifying war and it’s not about questioning service; it’s about justice, integrity and national memory.

We’re calling for the preservation of the Canadians who fought for our rights and freedoms, ensuring they receive the recognition they deserve. It is the least we can do, Speaker. I cannot stress enough how important it is for us to honour our heroes. There’s a widespread call backed by studies signalling that Canada needs to do more to honour and support its veterans and the Canadian Armed Forces members, past and present.

In November, I had the opportunity to present an Ontario Veterans Award for Community Service Excellence to, for example, Ken Thompson in the Mount Forest Legion Branch 134. Ken does great work. He’s a former Legion president at Mount Forest and still a very active member of the board there. It was a great opportunity to meet Ken again—I’ve known Ken for many years now, Speaker—and award this small recognition for his dedication to veterans locally, in the communities of Wellington North and Mount Forest, and, really, across Ontario.

After this experience, and thinking of the veterans I come across in my work as an MPP in Perth–Wellington and how Ontario celebrates those veterans and honours them, it made me wonder how many Canadians have lost their lives in order to save ours today. Recently I became a father—and obviously, even more retrospect in that. The generations before him—hopefully, colleagues, we’ll leave a better country for him and his children if he chooses to have them one day.

I want to take a few minutes to recognize the veterans. I know many in this place speak often, whether it’s on Remembrance Week or even different times of the year. They are usually speechless. I know some members in this place have family members who served. Some members in this place have served, and it’s great to see they continue to serve in a new role.

Speaker, we think often of those veterans we lost in the First World War. We lost over 7,000 brave Canadians who volunteered for service alongside British forces in the South African Boer War, Speaker. In the First World War, 66,000 Canadians perished and 172,000 were wounded.

I know I have the distinct pleasure in this place of representing the village of Arthur. I did not name my son

after the village, even though the Premier has asked me that; it was for other reasons.

The village of Arthur is famous because in 1923, the Toronto Star at the time decided to dub the village of Arthur the most patriotic place in our entire country—that’s the most patriotic village, colleagues, in Canada. Canada did not include Newfoundland at the time. I preface with that because I know our colleagues in Newfoundland contributed a lot to World War I, but the village of Arthur, per capita, contributed more people to the First World War than any other community in Canada at the time.

One of those individuals I think of, Speaker, from Wellington North, the village of Arthur—the small communities in that area—would be Samuel Lewis Honey, who was born in Conn, Ontario, which is now Wellington county, in 1894. He enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force in January 1915, serving in the 78th Battalion during World War I. He was commissioned as an officer, receiving a Military Medal and a Distinguished Conduct Medal for his actions in the attack on Vimy Ridge in 1917.

Lieutenant Honey was awarded the Victoria Cross for his conduct during the offensive operations at Bourlon Wood in France in 1918. After all other officers had, unfortunately, become casualties, he reorganized the advance under heavy German fire in that battle. Continuing to suffer casualties from machine gun fire, Honey located the guns and on his own attacked them, essentially running straight into the line of fire. He took 10 enemy soldiers as prisoners, and Lieutenant Honey and company consolidated the position they had captured, repelling four German counterattacks—Speaker, not one, not two, not three but four German counterattacks. Making solitary reconnaissance missions at night to find enemy posts, he returned with a party from his regiment and captured some of those positions. He again led his company against the German position the next day. Although both his legs were riddled with wounds, Speaker, he continued to direct his men in an unyielding resistance. Unfortunately, he passed away from these injuries.

But as I mentioned, for his brave efforts, Lieutenant Honey was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for his bravery in those operations in the woods of France against the German forces at that time, Speaker. It’s a great example of the importance of this recognition with the Victoria Cross. Lieutenant Honey is one of many, obviously, who have contributed and given their lives, in this case, but as I mentioned, in the First World War, over 170,000 Canadians came home wounded. This was before, I would argue, modern medicine, so many with amputations, missing eyes—not pretty things, Speaker. But they stood for King and country and answered the call to service, and we are forever grateful for those individuals.

I know, Speaker, my late grandmother—my mom’s mom—was born in 1924, lived to the great old age of 98—hopefully I get some of those genes. She was always reminding me that my direct ancestors did not serve in the Second World War and the First World War, because I

come from a proud tradition of farmers and obviously farmers at the time were required for the war effort. I bring up my late grandmother because she always told us about the Great Depression but also the Second World War and her friends and colleagues that answered the call—men and women at that time, Speaker; women in the domestic production and in health care on the front lines and the men that answered the call as well.

Speaker, if you'll indulge me, I'll share a very brief story on her husband at the time, Clifford Winger. An interesting component is that obviously he was a farmer so he wasn't drafted right away, colleagues, but he did receive his papers in August or July of 1944—my parents still have the papers—to report for duty to go to the Pacific Theatre. By that point, we had obviously secured victory in Europe with the Allies, and it is very interesting, Speaker—it's always a big debate, but if the results had been different with the Americans in Japan, I may not be standing in this place. In August of that year, very traumatic events occurred in Japan and I don't advocate for that. As I mentioned, we're not glorifying war—we want to avoid it all costs—but the dropping of the bombs prevented millions of people from dying in that theatre and one of them would have been most likely my ancestor, Speaker. I find it always interesting to do that sort of thought experiment.

Unfortunately, in the Second World War, over one million Canadians and Newfoundlanders—as I mentioned, they weren't part of our country at the time—served in uniform, both here at home and around the world. For the six years of war, both in Europe and the Pacific Theatre, our country lost 45,000 brave individuals in Canadian uniform, while 55,000 were wounded.

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Speaker, this did not end with the Second World War, obviously. We were there with our allies in Korea in 1950. During the Korean War, over 26,000 Canadians served on land and at sea and in the air during this conflict. Unfortunately, at that time, 516 Canadians lost their lives as well.

More recently—bringing it to the 21st century—in Afghanistan, after September 11 and the terrorist attacks in New York City and in Washington and in Pennsylvania, the US formed the international coalition with NATO to use force against the Taliban. Not only was this the largest deployment of Canadian troops since the Second World War, but it was also the longest conflict in Canadian history, lasting more than 12 years. I don't think many Canadians realize this, colleagues: 40,000 Canadians served our country during this time in our operations in the theatre of Afghanistan. I know some in my own riding of Perth-Wellington answered the call to service, and some unfortunately paid the ultimate sacrifice as well.

That's not to mention—as I alluded to earlier—all those who served in peacekeeping efforts around the world. I know the member from Simcoe-Grey has a great—I always see it when I'm driving across rural Ontario—monument to our peacekeepers and the different theatres they have served in. Some of my constituents and veterans

locally have served in those theatres, whether it was the Suez Canal, whether it was in the Middle East or in Africa, to name a few examples.

We live today in our great country and province because of the sacrifices made by all those before us who have given their lives and their bodies and minds, unfortunately, in most cases as well, to our freedoms. It's up to us as Canadians to share in the responsibility of remembering the brave men and women who have served and continue to serve Canada during times of war, conflict and peace. We must continue their stories and experiences to ensure that they remain alive so that we can remember them and ensure the next generation remembers their sacrifices.

As a government, we remain committed to doing just that. Whether it's through education, award programs or investments, on our side of the House we're supporting those who have served courageously so that they too may find success and opportunity upon returning to civilian life.

In November 2024, our government introduced, and this assembly passed, the Honouring Veterans Act, 2024. This legislation reaffirms our government's commitment to supporting veterans and their families while recognizing the extraordinary courage and profound sacrifices that they have made across our province. It's given us a chance to listen and to give back to the 2.3 million Canadians who have served throughout our nation's history and the 118,000 who have made the ultimate sacrifice since our country formed in 1867.

From this piece of legislation, we've been able to streamline certification for veterans and transition them into skilled trades, providing free GO Transit access, for example, for veterans and active Canadian Armed Forces members.

Additionally, one long-standing pillar of Ontario's support for veterans is the Soldiers' Aid Commission, which has assisted veterans and families for more than a century. In recent years, we have strengthened and augmented this program through regulatory changes that have increased the annual financial assistance for eligible veterans and their families to up to \$3,000 per year from the previous \$2,000 cap.

Speaker, these funds can be used to cover essential needs, including health-care-related expenses such as hearing aids, eyeglasses, special mobility equipment—home repairs for that mobility equipment, for example—moving costs and other necessities to support health, independence and stability. I know many of my local Legions are appreciative of the Soldiers' Aid Commission and the important work and support that provides to their local members. I know they highlight it often to their local members so that they can take advantage of those supports we have for our veterans.

But, Speaker, honouring our veterans is not a one-time effort; it's an ongoing commitment. Through many initiatives, we have focused on financial assistance, employment and education pathways, and health and community supports, as well as public recognition of service.

In addition to direct financial support, we have expanded community and health-based services for veterans. The province has strengthened access to specialized care through Health 811, connecting veterans to health professions who understand the unique physical and mental health challenges associated with military service, including for those in rural or remote communities, and those who may require supports in other languages, as well, not just our official languages.

Recognizing that the transition to civilian life is one of the most important significant challenges many veterans face in our society, our government has also invested heavily in education and employment pathways. To support veterans to transition into good civilian careers, our government has invested \$42 million through the Skills Development Fund, supporting 27 veteran-serving projects across Ontario. For example, Speaker, this previous fall, we committed over half a million dollars to enhance the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition process, helping veterans complete their degrees or diplomas, pay less tuition and enter the workforce with confidence. These initiatives make it faster and easier for veterans to access in-demand careers, while ensuring that skills earned through service are formally recognized within civilian education.

Ontario has also recognized the positive impact veterans have in our communities, and their ongoing service to make our province stronger through volunteerism. Last year, our government, in partnership with the Royal Canadian Legion, introduced—as I alluded to earlier—the Ontario Veterans Award for Community Service Excellence, a first-of-its-kind award that recognizes veterans who have served our country, but continue to serve our country through a variety of different ways post their military careers. This includes helping fellow veterans reintegrate into civilian society, supporting those living with ongoing mental health or physical injuries, or leading broader community-building initiatives that strengthen Ontario as a whole.

This past November, over 100 veterans' associations across the province were recognized by their local Legion branches for their selfless dedication. Each recipient was presented with an Ontario Veterans Award for Community Service Excellence, which include a stylized trillium lapel pin—which is very nice—a certificate, and a meaningful acknowledgement from their peers and communities.

We've expanded on our partnerships with four military-veteran-serving organizations to further strengthen this program. We'll continue to engage with the community and stakeholders to deliver a greater impact.

And really, Speaker, to conclude, I want to thank all our past and current veterans and service members who continue to serve in our country and around the world. They continue to serve in military operations, obviously, but I have always remember the great service they provide for our friends and allies around the world—also in natural disasters, and the expertise they bring to that. So really, we

cannot thank them enough, and I hope all my colleagues in this place will support this very important motion.

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

MPP Billy Denault: It's truly a privilege to rise and speak on this motion, which is to establish an independent honours review board to review veterans' cases where evidence suggests that the criteria for the Victoria Cross were met.

Speaker, it's a privilege to rise today to speak about courage: the kind of courage that is demonstrated under the most demanding conditions imaginable; the kind of bravery that is demonstrated in war and that is shown by Canadians who serve our country, often in moments where the consequences of action or inaction are immediate and profound. This courage is emblematic of our nation's long history of military service. It has helped forge Canada's reputation for duty, sacrifice and valour, and it carries with it a responsibility for those of us to ensure it is remembered and recognized.

1540

Recognizing and honouring veterans hits close to home in the Ottawa Valley, Speaker. Some in this House may not be aware of the military history and culture in my community. From the history of many families who had members participate in both world wars to modern engagements, there is a military tradition that is strong in the Ottawa Valley, with institutions like CFB Petawawa.

Since being elected in 2025, and even before that as a municipal councillor, there has been no greater honour than to participate in Remembrance Day ceremonies, to participate in veterans' acknowledgements and truly to get to meet the men and women who answer the call to serve. Those veterans, both in my community and across the province, have long contributed to the well-being of our province, both during and after their service. They served our country with pride and distinction to protect the rights and freedoms we have today, and we should recognize their sacrifices and honour their service. They have given their blood, sweat and tears, standing in places where most of us will never stand, facing challenges most of us will never face. Through their bravery and selflessness, veterans have shaped our nation's history.

Honouring veterans requires more than remembrance; it requires understanding the weight of what was asked of them and the lasting nature of what they gave. When we recognize military courage, we are not only acknowledging a moment in the past, we are affirming that those sacrifices continue to matter and that the country remains prepared to stand behind those who stood for it.

Speaker, Canada's history is inseparable from the stories of those who stepped forward when this country asked them to serve. When they serve, they carry with them the values that define us: duty, resilience, courage and commitment to something larger than themselves.

Canadians have repeatedly demonstrated extraordinary courage in defence of democratic values, human dignity

and international stability. They did not serve for recognition; they served because service was required. Honouring veterans shows that we acknowledge the real human cost behind the security, freedom and collective stability we have enjoyed as a nation. We honour veterans because they have accepted risks and sacrifices that most of us will never have to face, and we can show our gratitude and thanks by recognizing their military courage.

Military courage is not abstract. It is the moment when an ordinary person chooses to face extraordinary danger so that others may live. It is the decision to step forward when every instinct tells you to step back. Military courage demands decision-making under conditions that most civilians will never experience. There is no hesitation, no opportunity to opt out or choose the safe path. Decisions are made in seconds, often with incomplete information, while responsible not only for one's own life but for the lives of others.

It is this burden—the knowledge that hesitation or error may cost someone else their life—that sets military courage apart. That reality is why acts of valour must be examined with care, humility and context, and why recognition systems must be capable of understanding courage not only in the context of outcomes, but with respect to intent, risk and responsibility. It is the ability to act with clarity and purpose in situations filled with fear, chaos and uncertainty. It is the kind of courage that happens in the darkest, most chaotic moments, when danger is real, when the outcome is uncertain and when hesitation could cost lives. It is grounded in experience and shaped through discipline and training, and it is tested under the most demanding of conditions. It does not arise from the expectation of recognition or reward; rather, it is most often rooted in responsibility to one's country, loyalty to one's comrades and a willingness to place others ahead of oneself.

Those qualities are embodied by Canadians whose actions reflected the highest standard of courage. One such Canadian was Private Jess Larochelle.

Jess Larochelle was born in Restoule, Ontario, in 1983, and like many who wore our nation's uniform, he was quiet, humble and deeply committed to his brothers- and sisters-in-arms. He joined the 1st Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment and deployed to Afghanistan in 2006 during one of the most dangerous and violent phases of the conflict in Kandahar province. He was just 23 years old.

On October 14, 2006, in the Pashmul region, Private Larochelle was serving at an observation post when it was destroyed by an enemy rocket. He was severely injured, left in an exposed position and he was under sustained enemy fire.

What happened on October 14 of that year has since become one of the most extraordinary stories of modern Canadian military bravery.

That afternoon, while Larochelle was at the isolated observation post, his comrades were tending to a light armoured vehicle nearby that had been struck by an

improvised explosive device. Without warning, Taliban fighters attacked with rifles, machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades. Private Larochelle's position took a direct hit. The blast killed Sergeant Darcy Tedford and Private Blake Williamson, gravely wounding three others.

Private Larochelle himself suffered a blown eardrum, a detached retina and cracked vertebrae in the neck and his back. He was alone, he was severely wounded and the enemy was closing in. Yet he did not withdraw. He did not seek cover. Instead, he fought.

The circumstances were stark and unforgiving. In the moment, retreat would have been understandable. Many would have considered it the only viable option. Instead, despite his injuries and isolation, Private Larochelle provided aggressive covering fire over the exposed flank.

Private Larochelle got his damaged machine gun working long enough to hold off the assault until he ran out of ammunition. Then, in an act so rare it borders on the unbelievable, he turned to an M72 rocket launcher stored in the post. One after another—15 in total—he launched rockets at the attacking force of 20 to 40 insurgents, buying time for his company to mount a defence and prevent the Taliban from reaching their main objective.

According to those who served alongside him and understand the engagement, his actions saved the lives of many members of his company. His actions enabled his company to reorganize, maintain defensive positions and repel a sustained assault by dozens of heavily armed insurgents.

These claims are not conjecture. They are grounded in testimony, military reporting and sustained advocacy by fellow veterans and supporters. Without Private Larochelle, the attack would have reached the company line and Canada might have lost far more soldiers that day.

For his extraordinary act of self-sacrifice, Private Larochelle was awarded the Star of Military Valour in 2007, Canada's second-highest decoration for bravery in the presence of the enemy.

The very same day he received this honour, he was medically discharged from the Canadian Armed Forces. His wounds—physical, emotional and psychological—never fully healed.

Private Larochelle passed away in 2023, at just 40 years old. He never sought recognition. He spoke modestly about his role, emphasizing teamwork and collective sacrifice—an attitude familiar to anyone who has worked with veterans.

Since 2021, more than 14,000 Canadians—veterans, families, historians, former generals and everyday citizens—have been calling for Private Larochelle's actions to be considered for the Canadian Victoria Cross. The call for review has not come from him alone. It has come from comrades, journalists, historians, petitioners and Canadians who believe that such actions merit full and independent consideration. Their case is compelling.

Speaker, it is time for Ontario and Canada to take a careful and thorough review of how we recognize the most

exceptional acts of bravery—especially Private Larochelle’s—for Victoria Cross eligibility. That is why our province is joining in signing the letter urging the federal government to establish an independent military honours review board. It’s not a symbolic step, but a necessary one.

Canada created its own Victoria Cross in 1993. It was designed to recognize the most conspicuous acts of bravery—acts that rise above even the already extraordinary courage expected in combat. Yet since its creation, the modern Canadian Victoria Cross has never been awarded—not once in over 30 years.

Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom—nations that fought alongside Canada in Afghanistan—have awarded their highest military honours for acts of valour during that mission and Canada has not. We are left with a challenging but important question: Is it possible that acts of extraordinary courage have occurred, yet our system has failed to fully recognize them?

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Speaker, this is not about whether Canadian soldiers have met the standard of bravery. Their courage is not in question, their sacrifice not in doubt. The question before us is whether our process has kept pace with today’s realities.

Private Larochelle’s citation for the Star of Military Valour reflects conduct that would have been recognized under the former Victoria Cross program. Retired General Rick Hillier has stated plainly that Private Larochelle’s actions would have merited the Victoria Cross in previous eras. Veterans who were on the ground that day, who understand the engagement, the danger and the consequences, have said just the same, yet the process remains closed.

At present, Canada has no formal mechanisms to review past military honours. There is no independent arm’s-length body empowered to re-examine cases even as new evidence emerges, even when testimony evolves, even when historians are able to assess events with the benefit of time, perspective and fuller details. This stands in contrast to our allies, who maintain review processes that acknowledge an important reality in today’s world: Combat is dispersed, fast moving and often incompletely documented in the moment.

Today, we must confront an uncomfortable truth: When systems fail us, the brave acts of those who protect our country may not be remembered for what they truly were. Speaker, establishing a review mechanism is not an indictment of past decisions. Those who assess bravery performed during combat do so with limited information and urgent timelines. That reality also deserves respect, but respect for those decisions must coexist with a willingness to reflect when new evidence becomes available.

Nations that create review processes demonstrate maturity and the capacity to look again—not to diminish past judgment, but to ensure completeness and accuracy. In doing so, it strengthens public trust, honours sacrifice more fully and assures future generations that acts of

extraordinary courage will never be lost over time simply because they occurred under complex circumstances.

Private Larochelle’s case is compelling on its own, but it is not isolated. Many Canadians who served in Afghanistan fought under extreme and complex conditions and immense personal risk. They operated in small units. They defended isolated positions. They faced fire, improvised explosives and enemy tactics designed to exploit uncertainty with speed. But they rose to the challenge of unconventional combat. Acts of bravery occurred in seconds, not hours. Evidence of those acts may be fragmented. Witnesses are not always available to speak to incredible, brave actions by others. Afghanistan produced moments of heroism as profound as those of Vimy Ridge, Normandy or Korea, and our honour system must be capable of recognizing courage wherever and however it appears.

That’s why Ontario supports the creation of a federal independent military honours review board, and that is why I want to state clearly that I support the Victoria Cross being awarded to Jess Larochelle. His conduct reflects the highest ideals of service. His courage is beyond dispute. If we fail to act, we risk sending a message that extraordinary courage is admired but not worthy of recognition.

But if we act to establish a fair and independent review process, we can affirm something fundamental about who we are and our values: that in Canada, bravery does not disappear into bureaucracy; that sacrifices are not forgotten; that heroism, wherever it occurs, will always be worthy of recognition. We will be telling future generations that their extraordinary courage matters.

Private Jess Larochelle’s valour has already been proven. What remains is our responsibility to ensure it has been honoured appropriately. His story is not only one of courage, it is a test of our willingness to look carefully, honestly and fairly at how we recognize the highest acts of bravery in our country’s name.

And so, in Private Larochelle’s name and in the name of every Canadian whose courage deserves a second, fair-minded look, I call on the federal government to establish an independent military honours review board and to begin its work by reviewing Afghanistan-era cases.

As a nation, we carry a responsibility, not only to remember our veterans’ sacrifices, but to ensure that the systems we use to honour service are fair, credible and worthy of the trust placed in them. Canada must not hesitate to honour its heroes.

Speaker, recognizing extraordinary courage is not about the past alone; it is also about the message we send to those who serve now and to those who may serve in the future. It tells our service members that their country is prepared to look carefully at their actions, to understand the reality of their service and to honour it with integrity.

I also want to acknowledge, of course, over the last year of being elected, how incredibly honoured it is to get to participate in those services like Remembrance Day—as a young boy, I was always honoured, being able to partici-

pate in the Remembrance Day ceremony in Arnprior. As I said this morning, the passing of Rev. Leo Hughes is certainly a big loss for the community of Arnprior—someone who honoured that ceremony every single year by saying the prayer. It's just etched into my brain—his voice and how true, the heart that rang out from his statements. So not only that experience but also the many experiences—through veterans' appreciation dinners, acknowledging and honouring those with the Ontario veterans service award, which is the new award that our government has brought in, and many other services that we have had over the course of the year in office. So I certainly appreciate it, and I'm certainly supportive of this motion.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I appreciated hearing the comments offered by my colleague the member from Perth–Wellington, who spoke about the proud history of a town in his riding. It reminded me of the very deep, deep traditions that this country has respecting military volunteerism and a commitment to the defence of this country and all that it stands for.

I also appreciated hearing the words offered by the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and what he said about how proud he was, as a child, to participate in Remembrance Day ceremonies.

It's very clear that there are members in this House who share extremely deep traditions in this country.

I remember, as I was serving on municipal council in Amherstburg, which is an old town, as well, in this country—one of the oldest, as a matter of fact, founded in 1796. I remember people coming into the town hall and giving their presentations and me sitting there at the council table and listening to people tell me about the pride that they had that their family had been from that town for 60 years or 80 years or 100 years or 120 years—the deep, deep pride that people had in that.

I also enjoy, often, speaking with my wife, Jacqueline, who is in part, on her mother's side, descended from French Canadians, and how she talks about how her family has been in this country for centuries and that they originally came over from Île de Ré in France, so when I hear members and people talk about the rich history and the deep commitment that they have to this country, it really impresses me, because my family hasn't been here since—approximately 1955, so I can't brag about those roots.

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Sometimes when we talk about issues like this, I tend to see them in kind of an academic point of view. So I took a look at the Victoria Cross—the Canadian version of it, because there's a British version and a Canadian version. We have the Canadian version. It apparently has a lot of symbolism in it. It's got copper, zinc and lead in it, which is coming from across various regions in Canada, and obviously the symbolism of that is to symbolize that it represents everybody in Canada.

It also has, I'm given to understand, metal from Canada's 1867 Confederation medal, which I think represents continuity. The meaning behind that, I think, is to represent the continuity of the founding of this country and as it continues on forward.

Finally, this medal also has bronze from a captured Russian cannon, which was captured during the Siege of Sevastopol in 1855. Now I know a little bit about that, because in those days, to capture an opponent's cannon was a fantastic accomplishment. Then, once you captured that cannon, typically you kept it as a trophy of war, which you then displayed to demonstrate the bravery and professional capacity of your military unit.

Capturing enemy trophies is not new; it is ancient. Other trophies include standards—a standard is kind of like a flag. If you captured an enemy standard, it became a trophy. In the US Civil War, you have several examples of various units displaying captured enemy flags as trophies. There is one famous incident of a Roman legion losing its standard and being humiliated, and that humiliation being remembered for centuries. So this caught my attention, and the fact that this particular medal, the Canadian Victoria Cross, contains metal from a captured Russian cannon, which I will describe as a trophy cannon, caught my eye.

I did a little bit more looking into this, and in a classic and repeating motif from history, this battle of which I was speaking, the Siege of Sevastopol, set the British, French and Ottoman Empires against the Russian Empire, and guess what they were struggling over? They were struggling over control of the Black Sea. At the end of that struggle, there was a peace treaty which essentially neutralized the Black Sea and essentially said nobody's going to build ports or maintain fleets on the Black Sea.

Yesterday I had said something like this: “The past belongs in the past.” I believe that. And the past keeps reaching forward and dragging us back. Today, we have another struggle over exactly the same location, a struggle between Russia and Ukraine, a struggle which goes back into centuries and then reaches forward and drags us back—so much loss, and yet, throughout history, a repeated example of people willing to sacrifice themselves for their people, for their nations and for the values they believe in.

So I thank the members today who spoke to this matter. I thank all of those people who have fought for the values that Canadians hold dear and I support the call from this House to establish the commission of which so many people have spoken—and so many people much braver than myself have surrendered so many of their days in service of their country, in service of their people, in service of democracy and in service of all those values that we hold dear.

Once again, I want to thank the members of this House for having brought this forward. I think it's a wonderful thing to do. I think it's a hard thing for someone to leave their family, to leave their loved ones, to put themselves in

the path of danger and death and almost, under some circumstances, guaranteed loss of life in order to defend the people they hold dear, the families that they love and the nations whom they serve to protect.

Again, I want to thank the member from Perth–Wellington and recognize that his community has sacrificed a lot. He mentioned Newfoundland, and there are communities in Newfoundland who sent so many soldiers to fight in the Great War, which was eventually called the First World War, and they suffered tremendous loss of life on July 1, which is the day we choose to celebrate the founding of our country.

So today, I simply salute all of those people who have sacrificed so much so that we may have so much.

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

Seeing none, Mr. Fedeli has moved government notice of motion number 15, now government order number 43, regarding the establishment of an independent military honours review board for the Victoria Cross. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

Report continues in volume B.

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Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Gualtieri, Silvia (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
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Leardi, Anthony (PC)	Essex	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
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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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Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
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Rosenberg, Bill (PC)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
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	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Chris (IND)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
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Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
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Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
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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	