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Jeudi
27 novembre 2025

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Clerk: Trevor Day

Présidente : L'honorable Donna Skelly
Greffier : Trevor Day

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 27 November 2025

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 27 novembre 2025

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Let us pray.

Prières.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUY ONTARIO ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 VISANT À ENCOURAGER À ACHETER ONTARIEN

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 26, 2025, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 72, An Act to enact the Buy Ontario Act (Public Sector Procurement), 2025, to repeal the Building Ontario Businesses Initiative Act, 2022, to amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to the installation of certain signs and to amend section 10.1 of the Legislation Act, 2006 with respect to certain provisions of the Protecting Condominium Owners Act, 2015 / *Projet de loi 72, Loi visant à édicter la Loi de 2025 visant à encourager à acheter ontarien (approvisionnement du secteur public), à abroger la Loi de 2022 sur l'initiative favorisant l'essor des entreprises ontariennes, à modifier le Code de la route à l'égard de certains panneaux et à modifier l'article 10.1 de la Loi de 2006 sur la législation en ce qui concerne certaines dispositions de la Loi de 2015 sur la protection des propriétaires de condominiums.*

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Good morning. It is my pleasure this morning to rise to speak about Bill 72, the Buy Ontario Act, a piece of legislation that despite its pleasant title represents one of the most sweeping expansions of executive power that we have seen from this government.

Speaker, as the opposition critic for the Attorney General, I am deeply concerned about the legal, constitutional and practical implications of this bill. I am concerned about what it means for transparency. I am concerned about what it means for accountability—and before I continue, I will indicate that I am sharing my time with the member for Ajax and the member for Don Valley West.

Yes, I am concerned, and I am especially concerned about what it means for the communities we serve, including communities like my riding of Ottawa–Vanier where public services are lifelines for so many residents.

The government wants Ontarians to believe that Bill 72 is nothing more than a way to encourage the purchasing of Ontario-made products, but the text of the legislation tells a very different story, when you look into it. Speaker, let's begin with the core of the bill: Bill 72 grants the Management Board of Cabinet—that is, a committee of only six to nine cabinet ministers—the authority to issue directives to any public sector entity and to any entity the government decides to define as public sector in regulation.

Let's pause on that. This Legislature is being asked to give the government the authority to change through regulation the very definition of which organizations are subject to its directives. There is no statutory limit, no boundaries, no democratic safeguards. In effect, Speaker, any organization in Ontario—from universities to municipalities, from school boards to non-profits, from suppliers to private partners—could fall under the scope of this act if the government chooses. That is not normal governance. That is not smart procurement strategy. That is, in fact, unchecked executive authority. This is not a bill about procurement; this is a bill about power—and I would say another one of those.

Speaker, what happens if an organization cannot comply with one of these directives? The bill spells it out clearly: The cabinet may withhold some or all of that organization's provincial funding; funding can be withheld temporarily, indefinitely or permanently; and if funding is withheld until the end of the fiscal year, then it's automatically forfeited.

The organization is explicitly instructed to “minimize harm to the public.” That means that they must cut staff, cut programs or cut services to cope with the withheld funds because the government won't allow them to pass the consequences onto service users.

The government has not offered one additional dollar to offset the new costs of aligning procurement with these directives—not one—so the risk is entirely on the organizations that Ontarians rely on every day. This is not supporting Ontario businesses; this is coercion through funding threats.

Speaker, we cannot debate Bill 72 in isolation. We must look at it in the context of this government's increasing disregard for oversight bodies. Let's talk about the Ministry of the Solicitor General. We've seen repeated cases where the Solicitor General's office has ignored orders from the Information and Privacy Commissioner. One such order required a decision on OPP detachment reports; another demanded the release of the Premier's driver's notes. These are not optional requests—these are legal

orders from a commission. What did the IPC commission tell us? They told us they cannot enforce their own orders unless they go to court because the government refuses to comply voluntarily.

Think about that for a moment. A government that refuses to comply with oversight now wants a bill that lets them impose legally binding directives on anyone they choose with funding clawbacks attached. This is a dangerous pattern—a pattern of eroding transparency, a pattern of resisting accountability and a pattern of centralizing power in the hands of a small group of cabinet ministers. Bill 72 fits squarely into that pattern.

I want to address something that is deeply personal to me and to the community I represent. This government likes to say that Bill 72 is about supporting Ontario-made products and Ontario-based businesses, but the same government recently voted down my bill to help protect and promote Franco-Ontarian bookstores—essential small businesses that sustain our language, our culture and our identity.

My bill was simple. It responded to a genuine need. It would have offered meaningful support to independent Franco-Ontarian bookstores—businesses that are cultural hubs, not just retail outlets—yet this government refused that support.

So I must ask: How can the government claim it wants to buy Ontario when it refuses to support Franco-Ontarian businesses that have been pillars of this province for decades? How can it claim to help local businesses when it rejects legislation specifically designed to protect the stores and publishers that keep our French-language culture alive?

Speaker, this government rejected a targeted, meaningful initiative to support Ontario's French-language businesses, but now wants sweeping, unbounded powers over procurement across this province. It seems that the very arguments for which the government claimed it couldn't support my bill are no longer relevant when it comes to the government's bill. The inconsistency is glaring.

I want to bring this back to the community I represent, Ottawa–Vanier. Ottawa–Vanier is a vibrant, diverse, community-driven riding, but it is also a riding with significant socio-economic pressures: nearly 40% of households are low income or near low income; more than 65% of rental households spend over 30% of their income on housing; we have some of the highest rates of housing precarity in eastern Ontario; our community relies heavily on public sector and non-profit services, with over 150 community agencies operating in this area. Every day, these organizations serve newcomers. They serve seniors, families, francophone communities, survivors of violence, people without housing and people seeking mental health or addiction support. These organizations already operate on razor-thin budgets, struggling to retain staff because wages are simply not competitive.

0910

What Bill 72 does is introduce a new layer of instability for these vital organizations. If they cannot comply with a procurement directive—one that might be ambiguous,

costly or even impossible—they could lose their funding. That is not theoretical. That is a real-life risk that will affect real people in Ottawa–Vanier and the province.

This legislation jeopardizes shelters, food banks, school programs, community health centres, francophone social services, seniors' aid programs, employment support services, youth drop-in centres and addiction treatment providers. These are not luxuries, Speaker. These are essential services that people depend on every single day, and Bill 72 puts their stability at risk.

One of the most concerning aspects of Bill 72 is its vague and open-ended language. The bill says that government directives should support Ontario businesses, but then explicitly states that directives are not limited to that purpose. This is incredibly important. The bill gives the government the power to issue directives for any purpose they deem appropriate. This is not legislation designed to encourage local procurement; this is legislation that allows the government to compel organizations—any organizations—to comply with any directive that they choose. It is policy through coercion, not collaboration.

Speaker, I want to take a moment to explain something that might sound technical, but is actually very simple and very important to note. Bill 72 says that any action taken under one of their government directives is exempt from the Discriminatory Business Practices Act.

Now, people watching at home—if anybody is—might wonder, "What does that mean, and why should I care?" Let me put it in plain language: The Discriminatory Business Practices Act is a law that prevents businesses and organizations from making unfair, harmful decisions. It exists to protect fairness in the marketplace. But Bill 72 creates a loophole, and a big one at that. It says that if the government issues a directive, whatever that directive requires can no longer be challenged under this law. That means the government is giving itself the power to tell an organization, "You must buy from these people, but not from those people. You must choose this supplier, not that one," even if that would normally be considered discriminatory, even if it would normally be illegal.

Instead of crafting a clear, narrow rule that simply supports Ontario businesses, the government is carving out a blanket exemption—a shield—so that if their directives break the usual rules, no one can hold them accountable for it.

Speaker, if a policy is good, if it's well designed, if it's legally sound, it does not need immunity. Good laws stand on their own. Good laws do not require the government to say, "If someone challenges this, we will simply remove the protections that get in our way."

As critic for the Attorney General, I find this deeply concerning because what this exemption tells us is not simply what the government can do, it tells us clearly what the government expects to do. It suggests the government anticipates issuing directives that might otherwise expose organizations to legal consequences. Instead of fixing the policy so that it complies with our laws, they're changing the laws so that they don't have to comply.

Speaker, this is not transparency, this is not accountability and it's certainly not good governance. A responsible buy Ontario strategy could be created without stripping away legal protections. Other provinces do it, the federal government does it and Ontario has done it in the past. None of them required a blanket exemption like this. This is not a targeted tool; this is a blank cheque. And Ontarians—families, seniors, small businesses—have seen what happens when this government gives itself unlimited discretion behind closed doors. We cannot let that happen here.

At its core, this exemption tells us everything we need to know. If the government believed its directives were fair, reasonable and lawful, it would not need to exempt itself from the law. That is why this clause, quietly tucked in the bill, is one of the most troubling aspects of Bill 72.

Speaker, procurement reform is not a bad idea. Supporting Ontario businesses is not a bad idea. And strengthening local supply chains is not a bad idea either, of course. We all want protection. We all want to support our businesses in Ontario. But these goals must be pursued through processes that are transparent, democratic, evidence-based and respectful of our institutions. This bill achieves none of that.

A real procurement strategy would include: some clear definitions—which we don't have; stakeholders' consultations—have they even bothered; analysis of cost impact—which I haven't seen any evidence of; protections for small organizations—none of that in the bill either; supports for non-profits and cultural institutions—important aspects of our society; safeguards for francophone organizations and businesses—which again are not being taken care of; and measurable goals and accountability.

Instead, what Bill 72 offers is vague language, unbounded executive authority, coercive funding penalties and no meaningful protections for the public.

I think Ontario deserves better. If the government is giving itself all that power to put all the details in regulation, I certainly hope that they will take into account those important terms to protect—really protect—Ontario and not just to favour some organizations that they will choose.

Speaker, this bill is not what the government is pretending that it is. It's not a simple buy local initiative. It's not a modest procurement reform. It's not a tool to strengthen Ontario's economy. It is a massive consolidation of power, enabling cabinet to impose binding directives on organizations across the province with severe financial consequences for non-compliance.

It threatens the stability of public services. It burdens non-profits, schools and municipalities. It lacks transparency, accountability and democratic oversight. It undermines the fundamental principles we expect of good governance. And it is entirely inconsistent with the government's refusal, just weeks ago, to support local Franco-Ontarian businesses through my bill to protect independent bookstores.

Speaker, Ontarians deserve legislation that supports communities, not legislation that threatens them.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member for Ajax.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Good morning, everyone. I think it's always a good day in Ontario if we're talking about how we create and support Ontario businesses. I'm rising in support of some of the principles behind this Buy Ontario Act.

I think Ontarians want their tax dollars spent in ways that support Ontario workers, Ontario businesses and Ontario innovation. I think that's really important. We need to consider the broader landscape, absolutely. We need to consider the international landscape, the US. We also need to consider as well that we want to be able to export into the world. But at the end of the day, I truly do believe that people in this province want their tax dollars to support Ontario growth, Ontario innovation, to solve Ontario challenges and problems. And procurement is absolutely one of those areas. I do think that this bill can help us get there.

My colleague from Ottawa-Vanier went over some of the very serious concerns and the greater, I would say, centralization of power and ability for this government to do whatever it wants, wherever it wants. I think those are really important and serious concerns. I think they're in some ways rushed.

0920

But if we do do this properly, Speaker, we can tie this to an approach that builds businesses, that creates jobs and opportunities all throughout Ontario. But it can't just be, "Oh, buy Ontario," and that's it. There's another piece to this that, frankly, I think is missing.

Yesterday's Financial Accountability Office report painted a bit of a stark economic picture for Ontario that is very different than the messaging that we hear from the Premier and the government side. Ontario's economic activity, measured by real GDP, declined by 0.6% in the second quarter of this year. The quarterly decline in economic activity was actually the largest since the 2008-09 recession—excluding the COVID-19 pandemic; we'll be fair to the government there because the pandemic wreaked havoc on everyone. In quarter 3 of 2025, employment in Ontario declined by 1,900 jobs, and that's following a significant 38,000-person drop in the previous quarter. So this is the first back-to-back quarterly job loss since about mid-2009, excluding the pandemic.

So I agree, it's important that we are buying Ontario. It's important that we're supporting Ontario workers, and Ontario workers in the skilled trades as well. One way to buy Ontario is to be able to kick-start home building so our skilled trades workers can continue to work. Well, that's a different way of buying Ontario, with government getting out of the way and taking the HST off of all new home purchases for, not just first-time homebuyers, but anybody buying a principal residence—let's say up to \$1 million, and then you can do a sliding scale to \$1.5 million.

But my focus today is going to talk about more of this bill and the government's approach, so that it can become a real opportunity to grow innovative Ontario firms, especially smaller companies. We know we've got some

really great tech centres in Waterloo, Toronto and Ottawa, with students creating new ideas in—really, in some ways, every college and university. And we see that that support for our colleges and universities, frankly, is not there to the level in which we're able to create even more jobs and opportunities and entrepreneurship through new business and encouraging students to innovate; to think beyond just going to get a job and how they are going to solve problems in the field in which they're studying and where they're working and who they're speaking to.

We look at the incredible potential of growth and innovation in northern Ontario. It really is a place where I think there's a lot of potential. So our province, in my view, Speaker, has a lot of the ingredients that we need to be able to lead in the new economy, but we're not really leading, I think, right now—at least not right now.

Earlier this week, the government had a choice with a vote on a private member's bill to create a made-in-Ontario AI talent innovation strategy that I think would pair in some ways quite nicely with this bill. It was a strategy to build and develop Ontario's AI economy to retain our talent and drive innovation. Frankly, the government chose not to. We know that AI is already transforming how people in our province work, learn and live, and yet the development of that and coordinating all those aspects really is missing. We're seeing other jurisdictions building strategies, expanding supercomputing capacity, investing in research and working aggressively to attract talent, and in many ways Ontario is standing still.

Other people understand that we need to do more. So buy Ontario is not just about purchasing steel for power towers, for example, in the electricity distribution system. Buy Ontario is not just about procuring a vehicle for use by government or a school board or municipality or anywhere in the broader public sector. Buy Ontario is a lot more than just those kind of physical goods that you can touch or feel—or, I guess, in some ways, climb. It's about technology as well. It's about software. And that, I think, here, is where this government is missing the mark.

When we debated the AI bill, I found it very interesting when the government side said that government just needs to get out of the way and AI technology development will just accelerate on its own—and it's true, we are seeing growth in companies, absolutely; frankly, without much support or help from this government, like it has been able to do in the past, where I think we've been able to start up and fuel and create new sectors and industries—as if just creating a strategy means government is getting out of the way. I don't buy that premise. Government getting out of the way doesn't mean you don't need to have a strategy in order to put all the pieces together. It's a bit of a fallacy. I'm still trying to still wrap my head around that. Bringing together experts is not government getting out of the way.

Again, you've got to work. You've got to talk to people. We're seeing a theme where there's not too much consultation. We saw it with Bill 60, for example, with tenant advocacy groups. Well, there wasn't much consultation there. There isn't much consultation, I think we're hearing, in many other areas, and I think it's the result of this

government tripping over itself. That's what I'm seeing—without engaging, without talking to folks. I've spoken to many folks in the education sector, and they say, "We wish the government spoke to us more, because we have constructive ideas—ideas that don't necessarily cost money—in order to solve some of the challenges that students in the classroom, or school boards or government are facing." And I think we're seeing this here as well. The government needs to take in that input.

The government side said this: "We cannot go down this path. We have to let our innovators innovate. We have to let our IT companies be nimble. We have to have the environment for those companies to succeed, and the only way we can have those companies succeed is to stay out of their way and let them succeed."

So let's talk about innovators. Let's talk about access to capital.

When I talk to folks in the start-up space—and when they're trying to grow, and now there's a round of funding that's going out, and different people, different groups, are putting in offers, saying, "Here's our proposal," almost every single time, the Ontario, the Canadian funding offer is the lowest and with the most strings attached. The other offers? Mostly from the United States. So we're seeing Ontario companies, Ontario people, Ontario talent going to the United States, being purchased by the United States. We can talk about buy Ontario—we're losing ideas, we're losing intellectual property to the United States.

Public procurement, I think, is one of the most powerful tools that the government has to support innovation, to help small firms scale, to give companies a first customer in a test environment, and we can use that strategically to build an ecosystem across multiple sectors. The provincial government has funds and supports funds that do support innovation.

What I think the provincial government could be doing and should be doing, if we look at buy Ontario, is: What are the big challenges that we're facing in education? What are the big challenges that we're facing in health care? What are the big challenges that we're facing in government service delivery? What are those big challenges?

We should put out a challenge to Ontario students. We should put out a challenge to Ontario businesses. We should put out a challenge, frankly, to our world-class talent right here in Ontario, to help solve some of those challenges, to support that, to create new businesses, to create new jobs so that then some of those ideas are successful. Well, guess what? We can export those to the world. That's what we could do. We could pair buy Ontario with a real plan and a real strategy to address and support Ontario companies, not just Ontario jobs. We have a lot of firms that are international firms right here in Ontario. Absolutely, they do good work, and absolutely, they're important to Ontario. But small firms, small start-ups—how are they going to compete with a really big US-based tech company, for example? Good luck. That's going to be really, really, really hard, Speaker.

0930

We can actually do a lot more of that right here in Ontario. Right now, there are Ontario firms in schools building tools that reduce administrative work for teachers, that help identify learning gaps so that that educator can be more effective at their job. I'll be very frank, Speaker: In speaking to companies that are doing this work, they're having a really hard time getting into school boards right now. They're having a really hard time because the process which school boards use to look at this technology, it's slow, it's outdated, it's not nimble.

Earlier last week, one of my colleagues was saying government just needs to get out of the way and let innovators innovate. Well, government is the block. Government is literally being the block right now to Ontario companies that are creating incredible tools in order to support students in the classroom.

I don't know if it's just a little bit about conservatism, where there might be some innovation but it's really slow. We can't afford to be slow. Buy Ontario means we've got to innovate a lot faster as well. Otherwise, again, we're going to be sending profits to the United States. We're going to be sending profits to other parts of the world.

We actually can do this. We can do this here. There are people already doing it here. I met with a student in my riding who attends the University of Waterloo. They have created an app to help students learn French. They have created an app using AI and they have done it quite cheaply. It cost them about 30 bucks a month in the testing phase in order to operate. It's quite incredible. They wanted to, literally, just go to schools and say, "Just use this. Here, use it for free, whatever. Our costs are so low right now, we're not paying for business development, we're not paying for all of these other pieces."

I think there were some teachers that were using this app because it was pulling from real-world content written in French—not AI-generated content, not something that there might be a hallucination or something like that. It's using the AI to pull from different reputable publications to help teach kids French, to help teachers say, "Here, student, your interest is in sports." Now, understanding what that student's comprehension level of French is, understanding where they are, understanding how they learn and understanding their interests, they are able to pull content, with definitions, to help tailor that to the student's interest so that learning is fun. That's what people in Ontario are doing and we're seeing government blocking that. So, yes, absolutely, let's buy more Ontario, but let's support Ontario innovators to do that.

There's another company that I spoke with. They have a tool that helps teachers identify learning gaps and they're in use in some school boards in this province. So it's good enough for some school boards, but it not good enough, apparently, for other school boards.

When we talk about government getting out of the way, well, government's already in the way, Speaker. Let's pair buy Ontario with actually then getting government out of the way and government helping to facilitate these kinds of opportunities that I believe are truly innovative.

We've got a problem in public education right now. The problem is that teachers are burned out. The problem is that EAs and ECEs are burned out. Also, EAs and ECEs are not paid nearly enough, quite frankly, and respected nearly enough. We've got a problem in public education where educators who are really great educators—principals are identifying these educators and saying, "You'd make a really good principal" or "You'd make a really good administrator." And you know what those teachers are saying, Speaker? They're saying, "You know what? I'm not interested because there's going to be too much headache, too much stress, too many additional things that I need to worry about, that I need to do."

Well, we can help deal with that if we support the adoption of innovative tools to help support that workload. Instead of that teacher midway through the school year figuring out what those learning gaps are and what the tailored strategies are that they need to do to support that student, we can do that a lot quicker.

It's wild. I was talking to a principal yesterday and you can't even move over the data points from an elementary to a secondary school, and that's in the largest school board in this country—one of the largest in the world, actually. You can't move those data points over because, again, we actually don't innovate nearly enough, as much as we like to think.

So if the government wants to solve some of the challenges, frankly, that we're facing, those are some of the ways to do that—to help bring down that workload, to respect our educators. We can do that. I'd love to see that happen.

There are products that provide deeper insights into student learning in the classroom that could also, again, as I said, really help increase and help drive some of that efficiency and effectiveness of what's happening.

Many Ontario municipalities are exploring AI or digital tools for service delivery. They handle inquiries and direct people to point of contact for services. We need to make sure that we have a good ecosystem of Ontario companies doing this kind of work.

I was talking the other week with the leasing sector in this province. The way in which liens and this stuff is tracked right now is really outdated. There are very few that can compete. Let's use Ontario innovation and talent and skills to solve these problems. We can do these a lot cheaper now than 10, 15, 20 years ago. We're stuck in almost the Stone Age with some of this stuff in this province. The building was built a long time ago, but our processes shouldn't be the same.

In health care, there are Ontario firms developing AI triage and diagnostic support and scheduling tools. We've often heard that those procurement processes are arduous.

So, yes, we need to support more Ontario, 110%. A strong buy Ontario framework with other strategies could change this.

In the Building Ontario Businesses Initiative Act, an Ontario business means a business that's a supplier, manufacturer or distributor—essentially, operates permanently within Ontario; the business either has its head-

quarters or main office in Ontario; or has at least 250 full-time employees in Ontario at the time of the applicable procurement process.

That definition is very, very broad. It includes a wide variety of companies—many international firms. I'm not saying that those firms that are employing people in Ontario, that are developing ideas and supporting Ontario's public sector or businesses in Ontario should be excluded from that, but we need to make sure our home-grown Ontario businesses are supported. That's what we need to do. We can do both so that they're on an even playing field, that they're on a level playing field. Because guess what? To create businesses here—if they operate here and they grow here, they're going to be more resilient and adaptable to changes that are taking place here.

Some of these larger firms—it's great today that they're setting up here; fantastic. I love it—more of it, why not? But they could leave tomorrow. That's something that we could see, just like we see in autos right now. We used to have a lot more folks working in the auto sector than we do now. Yes, some of that is productivity, some of that is innovation—absolutely. Some of that is also business decisions.

So, just as easy, sometimes, as those jobs can come here—well, guess what, Speaker? Especially with AI and tech innovation, those jobs can also leave here as well. So we need to create a stronger ecosystem in this province so that we can truly support buy Ontario. These are start-ups, they're scale-ups, they're small and medium-sized businesses. I'm talking about medical device developers, classroom, education, technology companies. We're losing that world-class talent that is trained right here, that is developed right here in Ontario, to the US.

Innovators and founders are leaving because they're struggling—actually, many of them are telling me—to scale in Ontario, turning Ontario-created ideas into foreign-owned intellectual property where those profits go elsewhere. Some of them have said that they wanted to stay but they left because they lacked access to compute power, to investment or predictable support. That's actually why we need a strategy around this—not just a buy Ontario strategy; it's a create Ontario jobs, made-in-Ontario job strategy.

The Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade—he's travelling the world. He is trying to sell Ontario to try and bring companies here. I respect that. That is important work. But I think what's being forgotten now is we're forgetting how to do this kind of stuff at home. That's what I'm seeing right now. It's pretty hard to be able to do both of those things at the same time. And the more folks I talk to, the more concern I have that we are not going to help enable Ontario firms to be able to compete with larger companies that are setting up shop here. So there's a lot more work to do in this.

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In Kingston, Queen's University—they have a proposal to create a national supercomputer. That's something I'd encourage this government to really get on board with and help advance that project because that is something that

can be defining for our province, in AI and super-computing. I think it actually can be, so that we can support Ontario students, so that we can support people that have gone into the workforce and they've got this idea and they've had this idea for a long time. But if we don't have the back-end support to be able to do it, well, good luck. It's going to be much more difficult, and maybe they'll just stay in their job instead of contributing even more to Ontario—to create more here in Ontario.

We've got to commit to giving opportunities through this to small and medium-sized Ontario firms; businesses located here in Ontario, created here in Ontario; firms that are building their product and service infrastructure right here at home.

The government can add mechanisms such as: evaluation criteria weighted towards domestic development; pilots or phased procurement for small Ontario companies; innovation streams for Ontario-only firms; procurement pathways for early-stage technologies.

Without this, buy Ontario really, in some ways, risks just becoming a missed opportunity. It sounds great and looks great on paper, just like those Protect Ontario signs. They look fantastic. They look great at every single press conference. But we're losing jobs. Ontario isn't being protected.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member from Don Valley West.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Good morning, Speaker, and thank you. It's an honour to rise today with my colleagues to speak about Bill 72, the so-called Buy Ontario Act. And I say that because, honestly, it suggests something straightforward—something that we should feel proud of; it invokes pride, maybe, partnership and prosperity for the people of this province. I'm sure that's what the name was designed to do. But, instead, what we have before us is a piece of legislation that really seems to raise more questions than it answers.

More than that, it really forces us to confront a troubling pattern that has come to define this government's approach. To quote the Queen's Park Observer from this morning, "The Ford government is heavily comms-driven. The PCs pride themselves on messaging and discipline—it's not necessarily the message itself, but how they sell it that really matters." And that certainly is the case when it comes to their performance on the economy, and I fear that this bill is just another part of that narrative.

This bill seems to show a lack of due diligence on the part of the government. In its current form, it seems to be inconsistent with its own bill, too, which was about opening up trade within Canada. It seems to create protective measures that prioritize Ontario companies bidding for public procurement contracts—bids that they could probably win anyway because of their scale and scope without the help of these protective measures. So I'm not really sure that this government's approach is the right one because it seems to lack the vision that is required to implement a buy Canada policy in a smart way.

Ontario's economy will certainly benefit from supporting open trade. We're seeing the opposite of that from

south of the border, and we know the pain that it's causing. This bill seems to invite Ontario's trade partners to consider further protectionist measures, which will, of course, hurt Ontario companies and Ontario workers.

Speaker, we need a government that is focused on supporting a thriving, competitive economy. We need a government that champions local industry, supports workers, encourages innovation and works collaboratively with our partners across Canada and around the world.

Certainly, the report that we saw from the Financial Accountability Office just yesterday shows this government is not doing what we need it to do on the economy. It's not doing what it says it does, when it says, "Oh, you know, everything's great here in Ontario and we spent \$40 million on the ads to tell people that."

Output from manufacturing is down to a 10-year low under this government—they've been in government almost eight years now—almost a 10-year low, Speaker. The government has only created less than 10% of what they promised in manufacturing jobs, and we've had nine consecutive quarters of rising unemployment. We've got an unemployment rate now at a 13-year high at 7.8%. We have over 200,000 young people unemployed, including those in my riding of Don Valley West. Toronto is on the top-four list of the highest unemployment rates in the country—Toronto, Speaker. So, yes, young people are having a hard time finding a job, despite what the Premier told them to do, which was just simply, "Work harder."

And so, yes, I understand the government's need to come up with a new message about what they're doing to help Ontario and protect Ontario. They do need to do something to turn this ship around. They could have actually done that, if they would have approved our motion last week to create a youth career fund, which would help employ between 47,000 and 75,000 young people in this province, and help small and medium-sized enterprises while we're at it. But, of course, Speaker, they voted that down.

I do believe that every member in this Legislature wants to see Ontario businesses succeed. But we also know that in a global, interconnected economy, success doesn't come from isolation or from tearing up agreements that we signed mere weeks ago or from ignoring commitments whenever the political winds shift. Yet here we are again debating a bill that doesn't seem to actually solve a real problem we have, but to create the illusion of action.

The timing of this bill is very bizarre. Just days ago, we saw Minister Fedeli standing before cameras, proudly announcing a new commitment to strengthening Canada's internal trade relationships: new agreements, new promises, new declarations that Ontario is ready to lead the charge in reducing barriers between provinces; a celebration of co-operation. And then, almost immediately after that, we're handed a piece of legislation that pulls the rug out from that very message: a bill that seems to signal loud and clearly that the government is not interested in building a bigger economic tent, but in retreating behind its own walls.

So, Speaker, what is this bill really about? Why did the government put forward a bill that openly contradicts the principles of the agreements they just signed? Why move ahead with legislation that flies in the face of trade commitments that we just made to our fellow provinces?

It really is puzzling, honestly. I stand here a little bit puzzled today. It does seem like it's really just a marketing ploy. This House and the people we represent, we deserve transparency, we deserve answers, and we know we're not getting that from this government. We saw the Auditor General's report that called their Skills Development Fund process not fair, not accountable, not transparent. That was on the training side of the fund, which is over a billion dollars—a billion dollars of taxpayer money not being handled in a way that's fair, transparent or accountable.

So I don't expect, honestly, any transparency from this government. But what I do expect is that, if this bill is passed, we will see a whole bunch of problems. We'll see legal problems, logistical problems, practical problems, financial problems. We see vague powers here, sweeping directives and threats to public services. And we see the same pattern we've seen countless times before: policy that seems more designed to get a headline than for the actual long-term good of this province. And that's really what we should be talking about, Speaker.

Let me get into some of the specifics. Schedule 1 of this bill, again, flies in the face of countless trade agreements that we have with other provinces, with the federal government and with many of our international allies who have long viewed us as a reliable and predictable partner. For decades, administrations from all parties have worked to build a reputation for openness and co-operation—a reputation that did allow Ontario businesses to expand, our exporters to thrive and our economy to be resilient. But with this single piece of legislation, this government seems willing to put that reputation at risk.

Take, for example, the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, CETA. Speaker, this isn't a historical accord; it's a modern, sophisticated agreement that explicitly prohibits excluding EU suppliers from many government procurement projects. Those rules exist for a reason: to prevent exactly the kind of political gamesmanship that we're seeing here.

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I expect, Speaker, if this bill is passed, we'll see legal challenges from our international trading partners. And they have the clout, Speaker. They have an incentive to defend their rights to trade with us. So will the Premier be excited to see those kinds of threats? I can't imagine he will be, and we can't just wish away international law because it's inconvenient in a press release.

This Buy Ontario Act seems to be the polar opposite, as I said, of Bill 2. That is the bill that this government championed with great fanfare when we finally came back to this Legislature. Do you remember, Speaker, back in April, following that cold, dark, early, unnecessary, expensive election that we all suffered through? Bill 2 was supposed to tear down interprovincial trade barriers, to usher in a new era of co-operation between the provinces,

to make it easier for goods, services and workers to move freely across the country. It was a moment when the Premier seemed to be saying, “Hey, yes, we really are open for business here in Ontario.” But with this bill, that picture seems to have disappeared.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has pointed this out too, Speaker. They say that Bill 72 is inconsistent with the work that’s being done between the federal government and the provinces to tear down internal free trade barriers. They say: “Buy Ontario still needs to be compliant with these trade obligations. Domestic agreements, namely the Canadian Free Trade Agreement and the Ontario-Quebec Agreement, limit favouring Ontarian suppliers for contracts valued above strict thresholds....”

Speaker, it’s as though the Premier has entirely forgotten the long list of memos of understanding that he spent the summer signing and, again, bragging about—lots of photo ops, lots of smiling, handshakes, promises of collaboration, the declarations that Ontario would help make it easier, not harder, for goods and services to flow across borders in our country, stripping away unnecessary regulations. So how will this bill play out with all of those provinces who also agreed to remove or reduce their own protections?

This will now be the second time that our Premier has been the reason for stalling barrier-free trade between the provinces. I pointed that out, Speaker, when we debated Bill 2, that it was Premier Jason Kenney in 2019 who took early steps to advance interprovincial trade reform. But our Premier? He actually stood in the way of that. He wasn’t serious about the opportunity then. He’s talking a lot about it now, but it’s mostly just talk. It seems to be all about the headlines and the photo ops. It seems to be more about talk than actual trade.

So, Speaker, showmanship—that really seems to be what this is about. But I fear that this showmanship will lead to some very tough conversations, as I said, with our fellow provinces, the federal government and our international trading partners.

Speaker, I’m wondering what the next conversation between the Prime Minister and the Premier is going to look like, whether it’s on the phone or text—who knows? We hear these different stories. The last time we know the Premier decided to insert himself into international trade matters, he actually halted Canada-US negotiations through his ad campaign. This time, Speaker, he isn’t just interfering with our trading relationships with the US, he’s undermining trade with our fellow Canadians.

Speaker, let’s move to section 4 of schedule 1. It looks to create a stronger, more formalized expectation on subcontractors, who in many cases are the ones who are actually responsible for purchasing on behalf of hospitals, school boards, transit agencies, municipalities and many other public sector organizations. These are the people and companies that handle procurement on a day-to-day basis. They navigate very complex supply chains. They ensure compliance with existing regulations. So it’s already very complex, and they have tight reporting requirements.

And now, with this piece of legislation, this government wants to add yet another layer of red tape, Speaker—one that seems to be broad, ill-defined and incredibly burdensome. Who exactly and how will we evaluate, audit and enforce the mountain of new reporting this bill would demand? Do we have the digital systems? My colleague from Ajax has talked about AI, our need to advance that here with a strategy. Do we have the processes and the staff to do that? This isn’t a matter of just tightening the bolts. It’s an overhaul of an administrative ecosystem, and that doesn’t happen easily or for free.

The government would likely have to hire more employees, analysts, auditors, compliance officers, administrators, IT specialists and managers to oversee them all—an entire new bureaucracy devoted solely to figuring out who bought what from where, and whether it meets these shifting directives that the minister feels like issuing that week.

But Speaker, again, that actually seems like a problem, hiring all those people. Wasn’t it just this summer when the Treasury Board president stood up and said, “We’re going to freeze hiring at agencies”? They said every ministry must tighten its belt, that they would let few hires happen, that you have to come to them for special approval. It’s just one more puzzling aspect of this legislation.

We know that this government governs from sound bite to sound bite, from slogan to slogan, without any real sense of long-term responsibility, or certainly any ability to manage our economy. This bill is just one more example of that.

We’ve got the Toronto Star’s Martin Regg Cohn saying, “Now, Canada’s richest province is back to erecting barriers again, all on its own. Thanks to Ford’s Ontario, it is once again each province for itself....”

“For all his fulsome words, Captain Canada has gone back on his word.”

This bill is yet another populist stunt. It seems like a performative gesture meant to look bold while creating far more problems than it will solve. It’s a headline-chasing exercise that leaves taxpayers, public institutions and workers to deal with the fallout.

There are vague, sweeping powers in this bill. We see that there’s unchecked authority when it comes to those responsible for setting the directives. Sections 3 and 5 of schedule 1 make the scope of this directive alarmingly broad—so broad, in fact, that it’s difficult to imagine the drafters ever intended to build in meaningful guardrails at all. The bill outlines sweeping powers without defining their limits or criteria. It leaves open vast interpretive space for ministers and bureaucrats to impose requirements that could change from year to year, from month to month.

Who will bear the brunt of that? It’s not the government itself; it’s not the Premier’s office, even though he’s doubled the size of it and won’t tell us how much he spends on it. It will be our schools. It will be our hospitals. It will be the children’s aid societies, our public health units, long-term-care homes, transit agencies and every other organization who is focusing on serving the public,

Speaker. They'll be the ones left scrambling. They'll be forced to navigate an unpredictable landscape of procurement directives, reporting rules, compliance expectations, and knowing it all could change at a moment's notice with a new directive. This is not responsible management. It's broad, sweeping powers and it really seems to be chaos by design.

And then, Speaker, I think it gets even worse. Section 6 of schedule 1 allows the government to withhold funding to any public entity that fails to comply with whatever edict the minister has lately chosen to impose. So just think about that. A hospital that does not perfectly, to the letter of the law, follow a procurement directive, maybe just simply because they're too complex to understand—even in that kind of situation, they could see their budgets slashed. They could see having to basically write a cheque back to the government.

This is from a government that its own audit found irregularities in one of the companies it gave taxpayer money to. Now we've got a forensic audit going on. Have they asked for that money back yet? Did they stop writing those cheques?

Just recently we heard—we'll get confirmation in the days to come, I expect—they gave that money for years to that company while they knew about the irregularities in that company. Now, they're going to say, "You skip crossing a t or dotting an i and you might have to give us our money back." It doesn't really seem balanced. Maybe that's what they're hoping for. Maybe they're thinking that when these public sector organizations fail to administer all these rules perfectly, maybe that's how they will end up balancing the budget, Speaker, because it's certainly not a smart plan that they have today.

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Let me be absolutely clear, though, Speaker. We're not opposed on this side of the House to buying more goods and services from Ontario businesses. We know that they are great. We know that they're innovators. We know that companies from around the world buy Ontario goods and services. We want Ontario companies to succeed, to grow and to compete successfully. But this bill, Speaker, is drafted with such sweeping language, such glaring lack of precision, that it leaves far too much room for misinterpretation. And that is just not good. It's dangerous. It creates uncertainty and complexity. That will not help our Ontario companies grow and succeed and compete.

Our allies, our trading partners and our fellow provinces deserve clear signals that Ontario is not looking to tear up the agreements we just signed. Instead, this bill seems to suggest that ministerial power is going to actually change how we deal with provinces in Canada, and we find that very, very troubling.

Why does this government have to push something that seems to be so isolationist when we do think there's middle ground, Speaker? You can develop local procurement strategies that don't get in the way of trade agreements. We could have maybe just simply taken the act this bill would repeal and tweak the wording around subcontractors to make sure that they are buying local when

possible. But instead, we have this big bill trying to make a splashy headline.

What we need to see from the government is not a base instinct to just, again, drive a message home about all they are doing to "protect" Ontario, because we know their plan isn't working. We know. Again, as I said, nine quarters of rising unemployment, 700,000 people unemployed, including 200,000 young people, including those in my riding of Don Valley West.

I get the instinct to try to change the channel and talk about, "Look at what we're doing over here. Look at what we're doing over here, while all of you over here"—including Toronto. Toronto, the capital of Ontario: We are number two on the list of highest unemployment in this country. Could we have a plan to fix that? It is certainly not this bill.

We could have had tax cuts to help small businesses. I'll conclude there, Speaker.

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

Hon. Stephen Crawford: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to another day at the House.

I must say to the member from Don Valley West, I am shocked, actually shocked, with the speeches I heard coming out of the Liberal members. We had an election in February of this year. The overarching theme was Protect Ontario. The people of Ontario want to be protected.

You mentioned some comments about free trade within Canada. Nothing in this bill contradicts the free trade within Canada Act. We are continuing to move ahead with labour mobility, reducing duplication that has nothing to do with supporting Ontario and Canadian businesses.

Is it fair to say—if I could ask a question to the member from Don Valley West—that you will not be supporting this bill, not be supporting Ontario businesses first, not be supporting our government's mandate to extend this to the broader public sector, to municipalities, to school boards, to Metrolinx, to Infrastructure Ontario, to support the mandate to buy Ontario- and Canadian-made products?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I'm kind of shocked by the question because again, as I highlighted, it's under this government that we've had nine quarters of rising unemployment. It's under this government that more businesses are closing their doors than opening their doors. We have proposed lots of things that would help Ontario, and this government has ignored them. We've proposed a small business tax cut; we have proposed a youth career fund that would help both businesses and young people.

So, again, we're trying to understand this bill. It seems to be that it's all about the marketing ploy as opposed to actually creating jobs and helping Ontario businesses. This government is not serious about that. If they were, they would be doing things like taking the \$5 billion that they have in the Protect Ontario account and making good use of it now.

The jury is still out on whether or not we will pass this bill. Maybe we will get a better understanding of how this government will actually implement it in the days to come.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: La députée d'Ottawa-Vanier a mis des bons points par rapport à ce que—acheter en Ontario, est-ce que c'est important? Oui, absolument. Les néo-démocrates, il y a deux semaines, on a mis de l'avant une motion qui disait juste ça : achetez en Ontario. Par contre, lorsqu'on a eu la chance de débattre d'un projet de loi qui était pour protéger des entreprises franco-ontariennes qui ont besoin d'aide en ce moment, le gouvernement de M. Ford a voté contre. Je me demande si, du côté des libéraux, ils sont d'accord que d'acheter en Ontario, ça devrait inclure acheter également d'entreprises franco-ontariennes?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I thank the member from Nickel Belt for the question. Absolutely, we think that supporting Franco-Ontario businesses is important, and it was really disappointing that this government voted against the member from Ottawa-Vanier's bill. Certainly, Franco-Ontarian businesses are an important part of our economy, of our culture, and supporting them is the right thing to do. Speaker, we can't buy from French Ontario businesses if we're buying from other jurisdictions outside of Ontario. We've got them right here; we can buy from them at home. So certainly we want to continue to see that.

This bill certainly does not talk about that, and I would, again, welcome the government's response as to what they are going to do to actually support Franco-Ontario businesses when they defeated the bill from the member from Ottawa-Vanier.

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

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you to my colleagues for all three sets of remarks this morning.

When we look at this bill—I think that probably everybody in this Legislature is here because we're committed to doing the right thing for Ontario and for Canadian businesses. Some have said that this bill is actually more just a branding exercise, a rebranding on this issue, given the legislation that it's planning to repeal.

But on the flip side, we've heard in all three perspectives that it's actually giving undue power and unnecessary power to a small select group of people to be able to advance the issue.

So my question to the member from Don Valley West is, what do you think we'd be able to do very differently with this piece of legislation versus what they already had on the table in 2022 and why the additional extra powers?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I thank the member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore for her question. Yes, that's exactly one of the challenges with this bill, that it's not really clear what it will do differently except give these vast sweeping powers to—actually, we're not really sure who. I think it was one of the law firms who looked at this bill, who said, "Well, gee, will it be Supply Ontario? Will it be another agency?"

And again, these directives could come at any time. The public sector agencies who are going to be scrambling to figure all this out—we could have simply changed, as I

said, the rules for subcontractors under the bill that this bill repeals, and that would have, I think, done what the government says they're trying to do.

So why they're doing this and giving themselves sweeping powers that will, again, put everybody on edge around what's actually going to change this month—I think that is a question this government still needs to answer.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: It's always an honour to rise on behalf of the official opposition, and my constituents at home in St. Catharines. My question is to the third party member. Ontario remembers promises around buy Ontario, supporting local workers, strengthening our supply chains and investing in our communities. We know the Liberals made some of those commitments, but too often Ontario manufacturers and steelworkers in Niagara were left on the sidelines, sitting at picket lines.

With Bill 72 now before us, there's real opportunity for us, as legislators, to get it really right. Will you work with us to ensure that the bill prioritizes Ontario-made goods, Ontario workers, Ontario manufacturers so that communities like Niagara and Hamilton finally see the public investments that benefit the people who live and work there? I'm sure you also agree Ontario deserves a buy Ontario policy that actually delivers.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I'd like to thank the member from St. Catharines for the question. She's absolutely right. I know the member's very passionate about the Garden City Skyway project and the fact that we're not using Ontario steel there.

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This provincial government has invested into Ontario steelmakers. I would note, though, the federal government has invested a heck of a lot more, proportional to what this provincial government has been doing. It's a shame that Ontario steel has not been used by this government in major infrastructure projects in this province. This government needs to do a lot better when it comes to it.

Again, I'm a little concerned, because I look at it; it's a nice title, Buy Ontario Act—100%. I think every member in this House can agree we need to buy more in Ontario. We need to buy more from Niagara winemakers. We need to buy more steel in Hamilton and so many other things in this province, and support Ontario innovations and innovators.

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

Ms. Lee Fairclough: It's good to be able to ask another question. This question is to my member from Ajax, who in his remarks, I think, really highlighted the importance of AI and innovation in our province in the future and the fact that this government just voted down a bill that would make sure that we had a strategy for that.

Again, we've got a bill here that's talking about really prioritizing Ontario-based companies around procurement, but yet we're not prioritizing for some of these other

areas. So I just wondered if the member from Ajax will speak a little more to that.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I thank my colleague from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for the question.

This government can talk the talk. I don't see them walking the walk when it comes to ensuring that we're able to create new Ontario businesses and new innovations, and creating that ecosystem in order to do it.

We heard the government's reasoning for voting against Bill 61, a bill to create an AI talent innovation strategy in this province. The government just needs to get out of the way and it's magically, essentially going to happen. Then we see here the government is getting in the way.

So the messaging doesn't really line up, quite frankly. They had a really great opportunity to be able to hear from stakeholders, from experts, from folks quite frankly more knowledgeable than all of us in that field on what Ontario needs to do to develop a strategy on AI talent and innovation.

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

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Seeing the time on the clock, members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

FOREST INDUSTRY

MPP Billy Denault: For generations, the Ottawa Valley has been the beating heart of the forestry industry, a place where hard work, family tradition and innovation thrive beneath the tall pines. Forestry isn't just a sector in my riding; it's a way of life passed down through generations who take pride in sustainable stewardship and small town entrepreneurship.

Over the past year I've had the privilege of meeting with industry leaders at round table discussions and visiting remarkable family-run operations, from Carson Lake Lumber and Killaloe Wood Products to Ben Hokum and Son, Herb Shaw, McRae mills, Murray brothers and many more. Each represents a story of perseverance, community and innovation.

This summer I welcomed Ontario's Associate Minister of Forestry and Forest Products, Minister Holland, to my riding as our government reaffirmed its commitment to these forestry families. Through the forest biomass program over \$9.1 million was invested in projects across eastern Ontario, with more than \$4.4 million directed to Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke alone.

These investments strengthen the sector's competitive advantage, create jobs, increase productivity and open doors to emerging products. Killaloe Wood Products received \$952,437 to acquire new mobile equipment and that will fuel the availability of forest biomass and bio-energy production in my riding.

These aren't just numbers; they're investments in people, in rural communities and in the next generation of forestry families who care for the land that sustains us.

In the Ottawa Valley we don't just grow trees; we grow opportunity, family and pride.

BIRCHCLIFF BLUFFS UNITED CHURCH

Ms. Doly Begum: Speaker, every year Birchcliff Bluffs United Church hosts their beautiful Christmas Miracles at the Birchcliff Bluffs United Church in support of the United Church as well as the Bluffs Food Bank. It's such a beautiful, beautiful event, where the proceeds go to help the food bank. We know people in our community, right now especially, are struggling. People are trying to make their rent, trying to keep up with their groceries, and it's just not enough.

It's one of the ways during this beautiful time the United Church comes together with the community to support the local food bank, which is just in their basement.

It's a beautiful evening of heartwarming Christmas stories, and I am excited to join some outstanding storytellers to read one of these stories, like every year. The storytellers include Avis Favaro, Ann Ward, John Moore, Steve Paikin, Minister Katie Vardy, who will do the storytelling that evening, along with music director Randy Vancourt, who will have musical sessions, the Birchcliff Bluffs UC Choir as well as singer Loralie Vancourt, Daniel Giverin on violin and special guest musicians the Ault Sisters, accompanied by David Warrack.

There will be some wonderful community members who share some conversation, a gingerbread house, raffle tickets, holiday prizes etc. that are made by Shirley Scott.

I just want to give a big shout-out to the entire team that put this beautiful occasion together. I'm looking forward to another year of Christmas miracles.

RIDING OF NEPEAN

MPP Tyler Watt: Over the last few weeks, I have been reminded again and again of the incredible pride that we share in Nepean.

Earlier this month, I toured Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre south Nepean and main primary care clinics, and I left inspired. The team here is breaking down barriers to care, supporting families and building a healthier, more equitable Nepean. Their work embodies what community looks like when we lift each other up.

I was also honoured to join many of my Ottawa area colleagues at the Ottawa Sikh Society Gurdwara Sahib to celebrate the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. Standing with the Sikh community for such a meaningful occasion reminded me of the strength we draw from our diversity and our shared commitment to service.

In Barrhaven, we celebrated two milestones that speak to our growth and spirit. St. Mary community centre officially opened its doors, a new space for families, seniors and newcomers to connect and feel supported. The Barrhaven BIA marked its 20th anniversary: two decades

of driving local business, fostering neighbourhood pride and helping shape one of the fastest-growing communities in the country.

Speaker, everywhere I go in Nepean, I see hope. I see people who care deeply about one another, who show up, who build, who give. That is the heart of Nepean, and it is the privilege of my life to represent it here in the Legislature.

HOLIDAY MESSAGES

MPP George Darouze: As we approach the end of 2025, I have been reflecting on the year that was: 2025 has been a year defined by collaboration, community and progress. Here at Queen's Park, we have been working to advance legislation to support and invest in our communities, and I'm proud of the work that has taken place here. But the engagement with the community is what I'm most proud of.

This past summer and fall have reminded me once again why Carleton is such a special place to represent. From the historic celebrations of Dickinson Days in Manotick to the tradition and agricultural pride showcased at the Metcalfe Fair, Richmond Fair and Capital Fair, our communities come together to highlight the spirit of our region.

As we move into the Christmas season, I look forward to joining families at parades, tree-lightings and other community events that bring neighbours together. This is the season that inspires kindness, connection and gratitude as we look towards opportunity in the new year.

To residents of Carleton and to my colleagues here at Queen's Park, I wish you all a wonderful Christmas and holiday season to end 2025.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Catherine Fife: November 25 was the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, which is an epidemic.

The Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses collates the names of femicide victims who were murdered in the province of Ontario each year. These women were killed by men, most by men whom they knew. It is an honour to share their names today:

Deborah Anishinabie;
Jolene Arreak;
Susan Berrezueta;
Alisha Brooks;
Serenity Brown;
Sacha Charles;
Sukhdeep Cheema;
Renée Descary;
Rachelle "Francis" Desrochers;
Eleanor Doney;
Tracey Duncan;
Karen Marie Ferguson;
Anita Goodings;
Anita Joan Gray;

Sheila Ann Hercules;
Robin Emiline Kanasawe;
Lori Konrad;
Savannah Kulla;
Yuk Kwan Chu;
Ravina Maghera;
Paula Mallette;
Shelley Anne Marconi;
Barbara Morgan;
Barbara O'Donnell;
Shahnaz Pestonji;
Phy Puth;
Nilakshi Raguthas;
Brenda Rus;
Amanpreet Saini;
Nieshia Sam;
Charlene Shellard;
Shalini Singh;
Marilyn Stevens;
Mikaila Straatsma;
Virginia Theoret; and eight Jane Does.
They mattered, and they deserve justice.

1020

PEEL REGIONAL POLICE

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Earlier this month, I was proud to congratulate Chief Nish Duraipappah and the Peel police for Project Winner, which took over a million dollars in illegal drugs, guns and over a thousand rounds of ammunition off our streets.

This year alone, our government invested almost \$8 million in the Peel police through the Community Safety and Policing Grant Program. Project Winner is a powerful example of how our government's investments in community safety are delivering real results.

I was also proud to join the Premier and the Solicitor General at the Toronto police chief's gala at the Automotive Building at Exhibition Place to support Victim Services Toronto.

The following week, we announced an investment in mental health support for first responders, including \$25,000 each for the Peel Regional Police, Peel paramedics and the Mississauga firefighters. I want to thank them all again for everything they do and for meeting with me yesterday here at Queen's Park, including Chris Varcoe, Adam Neal, Mike Widmeyer, Wesley McEwen and Michael Smith from the Mississauga Fire Fighters Association.

And finally, Speaker, next Tuesday, December 2, I am hosting a community information session on crime prevention with the Peel police, OPP and other local experts at the army, navy and air force veterans club in Lakeview, and everyone is welcome to attend.

HOSPITAL PARKING FEES

MPP Wayne Gates: Over the summer, I met with my constituents who are part of an organization called Ontario

Parents Advocating for Children with Cancer. They're the parent voice for families who have children diagnosed with cancer across the province. We spoke about the many issues that parents and families who have children living with cancer face. It's an almost unimaginable situation, one that creates an incredible number of challenges.

One of these challenges is the cost of hospital parking. We're not talking about a visit to a hospital for a few days or a week at a time. We're talking about months, sometimes even a year or longer, of daily hospital visits for their family. When the costs add up, they're staggering. It's thousands upon thousands of dollars. I've talked to parents in my community who have had to go in debt or take out a second mortgage just because their child got sick with cancer.

The amazing people of OPACC fundraise to reimburse families for some of the costs, but let's be clear: Hospital parking is not something any family with a childhood cancer diagnosis should be worrying about.

I'm calling on this government to do the right thing and take action to eliminate hospital parking fees for families dealing with childhood cancer. Let's get this done. Let's continue to work for elimination of hospital parking fees for every patient, worker, family member and doctor in the province of Ontario.

TD COLISEUM

MPP Monica Ciriello: Last week, Hamilton and the entire Golden Horseshoe witnessed a moment, decades in the making: a grand opening of the new TD Coliseum.

What was once an inspiration was now a reality and a landmark in our downtown core. It didn't open with just a routine ribbon cutting; it opened with an icon: the legendary Sir Paul McCartney stepping onto a stage with over 14,000 people in the crowd on opening night.

It was more than just a concert; it was a statement for our city. This isn't about big names and bright lights; it's about building the way Steeltown has always built: with grit, sweat, pride and an unwavering love for our city.

Across Hamilton, you could feel the impact. Local restaurants and bars were packed, reservations jumped by more than 50% and hotels that had seen quiet nights were suddenly full. From the hard-working trades who rebuilt the arena to the restaurants and shops in every corner of our city, Hamiltonians felt the lift.

And what this tells me is that when people believe in Hamilton, when we invest in Hamilton and when we work for Hamilton, together, we build opportunity. Good jobs, busy kitchens, full dining rooms, tourists, families and fans filling our downtown streets—that's the Hamilton way: hard-working people from Hamilton building something great together.

WHITBY FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Lorne Coe: On August 20, 2024, Whitby Fire and Emergency Services responded to a house fire with reports of a person trapped on the second floor. Captain Christopher

Curry and firefighters Terry Williams and Adonis Perez confronted intense flames, heavy smoke and rapidly deteriorating conditions. Advancing with a firehose, they extinguished the multiple fires while searching for the trapped occupant. After forcing open a blocked door, they located the unresponsive individual. Moments later, the ceiling collapsed on them. Despite the extreme danger, they pressed forward and carried the victim to safety.

Their actions demonstrate remarkable courage, professionalism and unwavering commitment to protecting Whitby residents. Recently, these firefighters received the 2024 Ontario Medal for Firefighter Bravery, our province's highest honour for those who have risked their lives to save and protect the lives of others.

I'd like to extend our congratulations for their extraordinary courage and bravery.

HOUSE SITTINGS

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

Hon. Steve Clark: Point of order: I just want to advise the members of the House that the night sitting scheduled for this evening has been cancelled.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Graydon Smith: I am very thrilled to welcome my former CAO from the town of Bracebridge from my mayoral days, John Sisson, and his partner Robin Hiltz to Queen's Park. Welcome to you both; great to have you here.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Today I'm pleased to welcome the Camp Molly foundation board, who are joining us for question period and a Legislative tour. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: I'm very pleased to welcome page Manélie Lavictoire and her very proud parents who are here today: Azadeh and Guillaume Lavictoire who all are from Etobicoke-Lakeshore. Welcome to your House.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I'd like to welcome Ontario Genomics to the House. They had a reception this morning and I'm really looking forward to our meeting this afternoon.

Hon. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I am pleased to recognize today Andrew Darwin from my riding of Scarborough North who began his term as a Legislative page on November 17. Andrew is an exemplary grade 8 student at Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati Catholic School and we are proud to see him representing our community here at Queen's Park.

I would also like to extend a warm welcome to Andrew's proud family in the members' gallery—his father Darwin Thevathasan; his mother Vathana Arulappu; and his sister Andrea Darwin—who have joined us in support.

My sincere thanks to all of our pages for their excellent service, particularly Andrew. Thank you, Andrew.

Hon. Doug Downey: I'm really pleased to introduce David and Heather Breckles long-time good friends who

watch this show every single day, so I'm glad to have you here in person.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to welcome Dr. Nicholas Leyland from Hamilton Health Sciences. He was here at Queen's Park for making women's health a priority—I couldn't agree more.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Let's not start chirping before we even get to question period.

The member for Beaches–East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Good morning, everyone. I want to welcome powerful Priya Vithani from beautiful Beaches–East York and I want to welcome our biggest fan of question period, watching us every day from Tillsonburg, Ontario, Pat Brady, who I think loves me more than the member from Haldimand–Norfolk.

1030

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: I'd like to introduce an entrepreneur, a friend and an inspiration: Linda Pond. Welcome to your House.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I am pleased to introduce the Canadian Nuclear Association today here at Queen's Park. I can't wait to be there this evening to speak at your event.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to welcome three of my constituency staff; it's their first time at Queen's Park: Anita Bourgeois, Lise Beaulne and Cathy Pfeifer. They make me look good. You can all laugh.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: I'd also like to welcome the members of the Women's Health Coalition and all that have joined today to advocate for women's health issues.

QUESTION PERIOD

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, we're wrapping up another week here in the Legislature. Here's where we are at with this government: a House leader under RCMP criminal investigation, government decisions under OPP anti-racketeering investigation and a Premier who is holding the line for all of the ministers involved.

After weeks and weeks of embarrassing headlines, we are still no closer to getting answers from this government about how they decided which organizations would receive skills development grants.

I'd like to ask the Premier to tell us how it is possible that so many applicants with insider connections got funding from this government.

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

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, as I've said on numerous occasions, when we make these decisions, we assess broad government priorities. I want to reference one in particular. Yesterday, the government announced Pickering nuclear generation's refurbishment. This is a refurbishment that will, alone, create over 37,000 jobs and contribute \$41.6 billion to our economy.

When we make decisions to support training for many of the men and women in Ontario's building trades, it's with nation-building in mind. It's with a \$200-billion commitment to infrastructure in mind, Speaker. When you look to refurbishment projects like the one announced yesterday, the incredible Minister of Energy and our finance minister were there, supported by a number of men and women from Ontario building trades, they recognize that this project will put their men to work. They know that, had it been up to the members opposite, they would have given them pink slips, Speaker.

That's why we're training, nation-building, building—

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, you know what, Speaker? It's really unfortunate that the Premier scheduled a press conference at exactly this time so he didn't have to be here to answer these questions—

Interjections.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Withdraw, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): We're not going to go down that road today. I will warn people today, and people will be removed from the chamber if they don't follow the rules.

Please continue.

Ms. Marit Stiles: The government may be sick of hearing these questions, and let me tell you, I am really sick of asking them. That is why I submitted a complaint to the Integrity Commissioner this week. Ontarians deserve answers, and I am not going to stop fighting to get them.

Will the Premier come clean about his involvement—full transparency, full disclosure—about all of the political interventions and communications related to the SDF grants?

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, I welcome any opportunity to stand up and speak about the work this government is doing to invest in training for our next generation. As I mentioned, this government is committed to nation-building. We're laying down partisan stripes, working with the federal government, working with provinces from around Canada to nation-build.

I just highlighted a specific project that we announced just yesterday, Speaker. Had it been up to the members opposite, they would have handed those workers in Pickering pink slips. They would have sent them home, Speaker.

This government is investing in a refurbishment that will create over 37,000 jobs. This is what is so exciting about our nuclear sector: 90% of project spending will occur right here in Canada, in Ontario. This is incredible.

Supporting our local businesses—and those businesses know that, when it comes to linking with training, they've got a government that's going to support them—

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Laying down partisan stripes? I mean, it's like you can't get a grant from this government unless you donate to that minister's riding, for goodness' sake. Are you kidding me?

Speaker, it is undeniable. Ontarians have had enough of this minister's endless excuses. They want him gone. So back to the Premier: Will you listen to Ontarians and fire this minister?

Hon. David Piccini: As I've said, we have put those stripes down. We've invested in projects whose executives have donated tens of thousands to the members opposite—but that doesn't matter, as I've said—investing in projects led by former candidates of the parties opposite—but that doesn't matter. What matters are the merits of the training they are delivering and the work they are doing to train Ontarians.

Again, I reference that this leader campaigned on giving pink slips to the men and women of Pickering's nuclear sector. She can't name one training centre—not one training centre—that she's actually visited. I know because many of these unions have reached out to me saying they've invited her, and she's refused to come.

It's really, really, really disappointing, but it's not surprising because they have abandoned that party opposite. They used to be the party of labour; now it's Premier Ford and the Ontario PCs because we're putting their members to work.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, let's talk disappointing, shall we? It is really shocking how deep this scandal goes and how close the connections run to this government. In round 5 of the Skills Development Fund, an Alberta company called Technology North received \$900,000 from the Ontario government. Was the Minister of Labour aware that his wife was a lobbyist for Technology North?

Hon. David Piccini: It's shameful that they're bringing family members in—a hard-working woman like my wife who works closely and follows the rules of the Integrity Commissioner.

Again, we're proud to invest in nation-building projects that are going to put the men and women of this province to work because we've got a plan. We've got a plan to build highways, a plan to build roads, a plan to build public transit, after years of neglect, and a plan that's going to make Ontario an energy superpower, from small modular reactors and the 18,000 jobs there to nuclear refurbishment in Pickering to potential new nuclear in communities like mine. People see the immense opportunity this offers.

We've got an energy minister that is enabling Ontario to stand on our own two feet, to be energy sufficient. We're going to make sure we have a talent pipeline to meet the needs of tomorrow and the days to come, and we're not going to apologize for it.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, the minister, I think, said he cleared it somehow—I don't know—but we're going to need proof of that. We're going to need proof of that because the minister's wife, Faith Chipman, is a lobbyist for Technology North. She's also a registered lobbyist here in Ontario.

The minister can say there's nothing to see here, but there is a pattern. I mean, just look at who has benefited from this fund that he controls. We've got the Premier's campaign manager. We've got the minister's close and personal friend, the Paris groom. Now, we've got the minister's wife.

Did the minister give a \$900,000 grant to Technology North because his wife is a lobbyist for that company?

Hon. David Piccini: No. As I've said, this government is committed to supporting meaningful training pathways in every corner of our economy.

This morning, we were out, and I met with a number of our labour unions, and members of the OPFFA yesterday who were disappointed that that member opposite would oppose the very training that's helping their men and women in uniform, delivering better training on the ground.

That's what we're going to continue to do: nation-build, to build projects that are going to define a province, define a nation and put the men and women who are going to get the job done to work, with better training, breaking down barriers for meaningful pathways to apprenticeships. Statistically, it's working.

Again, the Leader of the Opposition can't name one union that she's visited, one training hall—the men and women in our provincial building trades who are getting the job done.

1040

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, this minister is going to do absolutely anything, it's clear, to avoid answering questions about his gift. It's not about the fund. It is about the gift. It is about the direct line between this minister, between the people who are making decisions and the people who are benefiting. It is never, ever about the people of Ontario. It is never about the workers. It is always about this minister and this government and their insiders and their friends.

The laundry list of lobbyists who have made millions of dollars from their connections to this fund and this government continues to grow. Meanwhile, we found out yesterday that manufacturing jobs in this province are down to 1976 levels.

How many unemployed workers are not being trained right now because of this minister using that fund as a slush fund for his friends and family?

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, it's completely inaccurate. We're going to continue to stay focused on supporting training pathways with our fund that's improved after every round, that's linking to our employment management system that requires a financial audit, that requires monthly reporting that every dollar goes to training. Why are we doing that? Because one need look no further than the recent pandemic to the tariff policies that we see from President Trump.

We're investing in projects that are helping men and women of any age get better trained to deal with the disruptions that we're seeing in our economy, and we're proud to have a program that's making those investments.

We've seen an increase in registration in apprenticeships, support for AI-driven training, support for training that's delivering a better generation of PSWs and health care workers, and we're going to continue to stay focused on that.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. John Fraser: My question is to the Premier. Ontario's manufacturing jobs as a share of the economy is the lowest it has been since 1976. It's not because the economy is growing—we've had nine straight quarters of decline—no, it's because the Premier continues to shovel millions and millions of dollars out the door, no strings attached, to friends and insiders in the rot that is the Skills Development Fund.

There is no real plan for jobs in Ontario, and everybody can see it. Our unemployment is at a record high. The Premier thinks the solution is to shovel \$10 million out the door to the owners of a strip club.

Speaker, when is the Premier going to get serious about manufacturing jobs here in Ontario?

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you, Madam Speaker, through you, to the member opposite for that very important question.

Let's go back in time a little bit, when the government that he was part of said to manufacturers, "We don't want you in this province anymore. We want a service economy," and abandoned our manufacturing sector. Then 300,000 manufacturing jobs later, Premier Doug Ford and this government come in, and today, from the low point of Kathleen Wynne and the previous government of 750,000 jobs, we've grown it to 830,000 manufacturing jobs. Because we have the backs of the manufacturing workers in this province, be it in steel, be it in auto, be it in lumber. Right across this province, we're supporting manufacturing. We're supporting workers.

In fact, we've gone further. We've done a manufacturing tax cut to incent more capital to support the businesses that hire the workers.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Mr. John Fraser: It's interesting for the minister to say that because they've gained about 20,000 jobs in seven years, which is way slower than the population grows, but I'll let him explain that in his response.

It's actually not about jobs with the Premier. It's all about the big show. They're in such a hurry to do things—and I think they're in double digits for housing bills now, each one undoing the one that was there before. Our housing starts are the lowest in the country by a country mile, and that gap is growing.

They're in such a hurry, they gave tens of millions of dollars to a company that they put under a forensic audit, and they continue to give it to them.

They were in such a hurry to start Ontario Health at Home that dying people couldn't get the supplies they needed to die in dignity at home.

We need a serious government and a serious Premier who's serious about jobs. When is the Premier going to do that?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Madam Speaker, you know what an unserious government does? They said they would shut down the Pickering nuclear station. That's what an unserious government, the previous Liberal government, said.

Yesterday, I was very proud to be in my riding of Pickering-Uxbridge, along with the great Minister of Energy and Mines, to announce the refurbishment of the Pickering nuclear station, which will power 2.2 million homes—clean energy, good jobs. You know how many jobs that will be? Some 30,000 new construction jobs supporting our manufacturing sector.

With their government, there wouldn't be one job—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Don Valley North will come to order.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:—their policies.

Madam Speaker, we're stepping up for building the vision and the future of this province, but we're doing it today.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, with this government, mistakes are going up and jobs are going down. And if you want a visual representation, a real visual representation, just take a look at the signs that the Premier sent to replace the speed cameras. They are huge. They are huge to the point of absurdity. You can't miss them. You could fit three of me inside them, and that's a big sign.

Speaker, having a big sign just doesn't compensate for having no plan. If this Premier was serious and we had a serious government, we wouldn't have to talk about strip clubs, forensic audits, oversized signs, licence plates that don't work—do you want me to go on?

I guess the real question here is, when is the Premier going to get serious about his job and about the jobs of Ontarians?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The member opposite is searching for a jobs plan, and there's one right before them: the authorization of a nuclear refurbishment that will create 37,000 net new jobs starting in 2026 for the people of Ontario, a nuclear asset which the Liberal Party campaigned on closing, turning their backs on 2,000 workers.

Madam Speaker, if the members opposite seek a plan to get people working, they will commit today to Ontario's nuclear advantage, a program that will use 90% of our program spend that stays in this province, supporting the supply chain, supporting workers, supporting families. We want members opposite to support our plan to expand energy, to build net new nuclear, to fire up the supply chain and to get 30,000 Ontarians working.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: The FAO's report yesterday highlights yet again that this government's rosy picture of the Ontario economy is just plain wrong. These are the facts: Ontario's unemployment rate was 5.9% when this government took office; now it's 7.8%. And Ontario cities hold the indistinct honour of taking the top four spots in Canada's list of cities with the highest unemployment rates.

Speaker, what do they do in response to this jobs crisis? They brag about their Skills Development Fund, which got a failing grade from the Auditor General because it was not fair, transparent, nor accountable because the labour minister gave money to his friends instead of high-scoring applicants.

Speaker, my question to the finance minister: Will he stand up today and admit that that was wrong?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: What was wrong were the failed policies of the previous Liberal government. I know it hurts. I know it's painful. Madam Speaker, often the truth hurts. I know it's painful.

I know it's painful to hear that our economy grew under our administration from \$850 billion to \$1.2 trillion. That really hurt.

It really hurts to hear that under their government manufacturing got as low as 750,000 jobs in this province. There are 70,000 more manufacturing jobs today under our government at 830,000. I know that hurts a lot to hear that.

And our Minister of Energy: I know it really hurts when we give you the opportunity to support 30,000 new construction jobs for Pickering and another 18,000 jobs in Durham. That's almost 50,000 new construction jobs. You have a chance to vote for the people of Ontario—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The leader of the third party will come to order.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Step up and vote for Ontario.
1050

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: It's clear: The finance minister does not want to speak about the Skills Development Fund because he knows he cannot defend the indefensible. He won't stand up and defend it. He knows that Ontario's unemployment is not being addressed by the Skills Development Fund; it was really a way to make the government's friends and insiders—just make them richer. And in the process, they secured money for the PCs through donations.

Speaker, this program has been in place since 2021, unemployment started rising in 2023, and Ontario has more unemployed people than we ever have before. The Skills Development Fund is a fiasco.

Through you to the finance minister: When will he step in and stop the flow of taxpayer money to the Skills Development Fund?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Oh, it's tough to be on the other side of the aisle—I understand that—very painful, because under their government, we saw a credit rating downgrade. I know it hurts when we you see credit rating upgrades, lowering the borrowing costs for Ontario to put more money into the people of Ontario: businesses, workers and families. In fact, the fall economic statement, which they did not support—they did not vote for—highlighted almost \$12 billion in cuts in taxes and fees for consumers in Ontario; money back in their pockets.

But wait, there's more: \$11.5 billion back in the pockets of businesses around this province, including \$5.6 billion back in the pockets of small or medium-sized businesses that the members opposite have the option to vote for Ontario, vote for our energy plan, refurbishing Pickering, building the SMRs. Come join us.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Speaker, do you know what's tough? It's tough for this finance minister to stand up and even utter the words "Skills Development Fund." Do you know why? Because he knows that giving money to it, until it's cleaned up, is an irresponsible use of taxpayer money. He won't admit that that program has not boosted the jobs and talking about job creation is not the same as creating jobs.

Youth unemployment is near an all-time high under this government. We know that gangs are recruiting those youth to violent crime. And, Speaker, they're vulnerable in part because they can't find a job. In my riding of Don Valley West, parents of these youths are worried that their kids will be the next ones recruited to gangs and violent crime. Our youth career fund that this government voted down would have provided work for up to 75,000 young people.

My question to the finance minister: When will he start focusing on helping young people find a job instead of helping PC friends and insiders through the Skills Development Fund?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Let's be clear what the member opposite and the Liberals are saying: They're saying no to the men and women who are building this province. That's what they're saying. They're saying no to the great workers who are building Ontario.

Let's just take a look at the announcement yesterday that was made and some of the supportive quotes from the ironworkers who helped build this province. They were at the announcement; they're supporting this government because they know these are good-paying jobs and they will continue to do that.

Carpenters were there. The Canadian Union of Skilled Workers, LIUNA and the boilermakers were there. The construction workers and Teamsters Canada were there. The Society of Union Professionals, the engineers—you know, I think it's time that the members opposite wake up that something is happening here. We're building Ontario, we're creating the conditions for great jobs, the energy future for this province, supporting the men and women who are building this province.

I say it again—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: To the Premier: Northerners saw more closures on Highway 11 and 17 yesterday, and more today. Now, for more than 24 hours, the emergency room in Kapuskasing is closed because the on-call doctor is stuck on the road. Yet, this government refused to act, and we are still seeing accidents and closures all the time, and winter has not even started.

Can the Premier explain what their plan is to ensure these highways are safe, to remain open for families, hospitals, workers, goods and economic activities? Because your plan, what you're doing, is not working.

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

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We have deployed over 1,400 pieces of equipment across our highways, with a specific focus on the north and making sure that we clear those highways. We have the best standard of highway clearance in all of Canada, and we continue to beat that standard 97% of the time.

Over \$100 million was invested last year in improving winter maintenance on northern roads. And guess what? Every time we have invested or made investments within budgets—the fall economic statement that is here today—that member has voted against every single one of those investments into highway maintenance and improvements into highway maintenance, Madam Speaker.

We're going to continue to ensure that we have those highways clear. We're going to continue to ensure that our winter maintenance program is enhanced, like we have every single year, year over year, and ensure that we continue to have the safest roads in North America.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Timiskaming—Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: I listened intently to the minister, and your investments don't seem to be working. Highway 11—the Trans-Canada Highway, the one that actually gets to the engine of northern Ontario—between North Bay and Cochrane, from January to September, was closed for a total of 32 days—32 days. We got that from the Ministry of Transportation. So whatever you're doing isn't working.

This is the highway that actually gets to Crawford—minerals of national significance—that gets to Agnico Eagle, that gets to Detour Lake, that actually drives this province. And it's two lanes. You promise things but you don't deliver. When are you going to take northerners and the Trans-Canada Highway seriously?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: There is no government that has invested more in northern highways and northern winter maintenance than this government. Let the record show for itself, Madam Speaker: just last year, over \$500 million of investments into the north, which the members opposite have voted against.

In fact, they fundamentally disagree with building roads, whether it's Highway 413, the Bradford Bypass or

our investments in Highways 11 and 17. The Premier announced his intent and our plan to build, in that member's own riding, the expansion of the 2+1 pilot program, which the member has consistently voted against every single time.

We have a \$30-billion plan over the next 10 years to invest in our highways and in infrastructure and building those northern highways, and we will do that. We'll get shovels in the ground despite the opposition of the NDP and Liberals of not investing in those areas, Madam Speaker. With over 1,400 pieces of equipment deployed across our highways to ensure we keep people safe, we're going to continue to do whatever we can to do—

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

RESPONSABILITÉ GOUVERNEMENTALE

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

M. Ted Hsu: Le site Web personnel de la présidente du Conseil du Trésor de l'Ontario dit en anglais qu'elle est « ensuring the provincial government delivers value to taxpayers ».

Son ministère a sûrement dû l'avertir, car le ministre du Travail avait personnellement choisi de financer les demandes de développement de compétences qui avaient de faibles cotes, qu'il mettait sérieusement en danger cette « value to taxpayers ». L'argent allait aller à des projets qui avaient moins de chance d'aider les gens à trouver un emploi. D'ailleurs, c'est exactement ce que conclut la vérificatrice générale.

À la présidente du Conseil du Trésor : est-ce que le ministre du Travail lui a carrément caché les cotes?

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

L'hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Merci pour cette question très importante. Écoute : What we are doing in this province, and what I'm not hearing from the member opposite, is supporting the training of the great men and women of this province who are building this province.

What the minister is doing is helping to retrain and reskill and bring into the workforce all the workers that we need, whether it's science, technology, engineering and math. From the Minister of Colleges and Universities to the Minister of Labour focusing on skilled trades, making sure the ironworkers and the boilermakers and the carpenters and the men and women who are in those organizations not only build our nuclear capacity in this province that supports our manufacturing capacity in this province but that we, as a government, are providing them the tools, in partnership with those workers' unions and those workers' organizations, to make sure that we can continue to build this great province.

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

M. Ted Hsu: L'année dernière, après que le ministère de la Santé a donné son feu vert à la nouvelle clinique de médecine familiale Midtown à Kingston, la clinique n'a pas pu signer de bail ni embaucher de personnel parce qu'elle attendait l'approbation du Conseil du Trésor. C'était frustrant parce que les gens attendent depuis longtemps un médecin de famille. Mais on devait patienter parce que le Conseil de Trésor devait faire son travail de s'assurer que le gouvernement en ait pour notre argent.

La présidente du Conseil du Trésor a-t-elle bel et bien validé le financement du Fonds pour le développement des compétences pour des demandeurs mal cotés, ou est-ce que le ministre du Travail l'a dupée?

L'hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Encore merci pour cette question très importante.

Let's bring it back to my riding—and I'm sure for all of us who represent our constituents there. We put a shovel in the ground. The Minister of Education supported the building of a new Catholic school in Pickering for 622 students, 88 child care spaces—haven't been built in over a decade, for the Catholic system. Do you know what the workers there said? "We need more machinists. We need more HVAC specialists. We need more skilled workers in this province to help build this province"—\$200 billion of infrastructure to build this province. So the retraining, the reskilling, the support for these workers is what this province needs more than ever right now.

Let me tell you this: Be it an apprenticeship program or a better jobs program or a fairs program or a dual credit system in grade 11 or 12, this minister, this government won't relent, supporting the workers of Ontario.

ROAD SAFETY

MPP Mohamed Firin: Madam Speaker, my question is for the Honourable Minister of Transportation. Every Ontarian deserves to feel safe on our roads. But dangerous and careless driving continues to put lives at risk and devastate families.

We have all heard heartbreaking stories, like that of Andrew Cristillo, a father of three tragically killed by a driver charged with dangerous driving and stunt driving.

Our communities deserve real protection.

Earlier this week, our government introduced legislation that would crack down on dangerous driving and keep our communities safe. Can the minister explain how this new legislation will make our roads safer for everyone?

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

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you to the member from York South–Weston for your commitment on raising this important issue: road safety.

Speaker, no family should ever face the heartbreak of losing a loved one because of a reckless driver.

That's why our government will introduce a tough new law and measures to crack down on dangerous driving, inspired by the Andrew's Law petition. These changes include a lifetime licence suspension for anyone convicted of dangerous driving causing death, immediate roadside

licence suspensions and vehicle impoundments for dangerous driving behaviour and increased fines and penalties for driving with a suspended licence and distracted driving.

Under this Premier's leadership, we're taking decisive action to deter reckless behaviour, hold offenders accountable and make sure Ontario's roads are the safest roads in North America.

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

MPP Mohamed Firin: Thank you to the honourable member for the response. It's encouraging to hear that our government is continuing to prioritize public safety and hold reckless drivers accountable.

Families in my riding of York South–Weston want to know that these measures will make a difference. They also want to have the confidence that this bill will help prevent tragedies like Andrew Cristillo's from ever happening again.

Our government must continue to demonstrate leadership and take immediate action on our roads and highways.

Speaker, can the minister share more details on how these changes will protect drivers and pedestrians and strengthen road safety across Ontario?

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Thank you again to the member from York South–Weston.

Our government is committed to making our roads safer than ever. In addition to lifetime licence suspensions for dangerous driving causing death, we're introducing new roadside suspensions for careless driving—seven days for careless driving and 30 days for careless driving causing bodily harm; increasing fines for distracted driving and commercial vehicle offences; and enhancing driver education for young and novice drivers to prevent dangerous behaviour before it starts.

We're also consulting on new policies to support families impacted by impaired driving, including requiring offenders to provide financial support for victims' children.

These measures send a clear message: Dangerous driving will not be tolerated in Ontario. We will continue to put road safety first and protect lives here on our roads.

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: ᓄᓄᓄᓄᓄᓄ

This fall, Anishinabek Nation and the Nishnawbe Aski Nation declared states of emergency because of a public safety crisis. In NAN territory, the push for resource development has made communities more vulnerable to human trafficking, gang-related crime and drug activity.

To the Premier: What actions has this government taken to address the public safety crisis in First Nations across Ontario?

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

Hon. Doug Downey: We have taken several actions and engaged in conversations that are still ongoing. We're very aware that we do have some challenges, and we're partnering with First Nations to make sure that we are

doing things properly, to make sure that we're doing things in concert.

We do have a table that meets regularly to deal with First Nations bylaws and the enforcement of those bylaws to try and find a way that we can work together to achieve a common goal of having everyone feel safe in their communities, make sure that the resources are there to follow through and make sure that that happens.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Conversations and tables are not good enough right now. First Nations have declared states of emergency, and this government has not responded.

I know that the Premier talks big about extracting from the north but ignores the crisis—the crises, actually, in mental health and addictions, public safety and health care.

When will the Premier start to value the lives of First Nations people and children over the dollar signs he sees on our lands?

Hon. Doug Downey: Our government does understand the unique social challenges facing First Nations communities, and we understand the need for tailored, community-based responses. There's almost \$4 million through the Roadmap to Wellness to continue supporting emergency prevention and recovery efforts through the regional Social Emergency Managers Program. We're aware of the recent states of emergency declared by NAN and other First Nations following incidents of violence, and we're working closely with our federal partners as well.

There's \$94 million over three years to improve the health and well-being of Indigenous and northern communities, including \$60 million for mental health, addictions and opioid services. Our government has allocated \$110 million to improve emergency preparedness for funding supporting community organizations, expanded emergency programs and others.

We are not just meeting at tables and having discussions; we are acting, and we are putting resources in place.

FRENCH-LANGUAGE HEALTH SERVICES

M^{me} Lucille Collard: It's truly unfortunate that this government's mishandling of public funds has forced us to spend so much time discussing their skills development fiasco instead of the real issues affecting Ontarians, like access to health care.

The situation is even more troubling for the francophone community. It has now been a full year since the government received the major provincial plan developed by l'Hôpital Montfort, a plan the government itself commissioned to improve health services in French. It's been a whole year, yet despite all this work, despite the urgency, the government has still not responded.

I'll offer an occasion to the minister to offer a response as to when the government is going to finally respond to the Montfort-led provincial plan and invest in francophone

health care so that our communities can receive the services that they have been waiting for.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you to the member opposite for raising a very important issue. As she knows very well, we have embarked on the largest primary care expansion in decades, really, in the province of Ontario—multidisciplinary teams—with an investment of over \$2 billion. In February 2024, you will remember that we announced our first round of 78 new and expanded multidisciplinary teams across Ontario. Of course, all of those teams are now up and running, taking on new patients. Our most recent expansion was in June of this year, again, where we intend to expand access to primary care.

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There's no doubt that Ontario leads Canada, but we can do more, and we are doing more with these investments. We are currently assessing the applications that came in in September, and I look forward to good news shortly.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Obviously this government continues to ignore the very real challenges Franco-Ontarians face when trying to access health care in their own language. I didn't hear the minister mention the word "francophone" in her answer. Did I miss it? Did somebody hear "francophone?" So there's definitely some misunderstanding.

The urgency could not be clearer in Vanier, where we have a large francophone population and 10,000 residents remain unattached to a primary care provider. Many are newcomers who rely on French to navigate our system, and many are seniors, like my mother, who simply cannot contemplate having to explain complex medical issues in English.

Access to francophone primary care is profoundly inadequate, so I will ask the minister: What is your actual plan to increase the number of seats for French-speaking doctors, nurses and other health professionals in Ontario's universities and colleges?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: It would probably be helpful for the member opposite to actually pull out the applications and what we're looking for across Ontario. As we embark on these expansions, we have very much focused first, of course, on communities that have the highest unattachment rate—and I say that knowing that Ontario leads Canada in attachment rates of 90%.

She might also be interested in knowing that in the application process, applications that have a focus on areas of high need, communities that have a higher population of First Nations and francophone populations, have actually been prioritized. To suggest that we are not actively working with Montfort, in particular—they have been a leader in ensuring that we are encouraging individuals who want to come to Ontario and practise their health care profession in Ontario. We are doing that. We have done that with Practice Ready Ontario, we have done that with the CPSO and we will continue to do that.

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

Mr. Billy Pang: My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism. Ontario is one of the most diverse provinces in Canada, and that diversity is one of our greatest strengths. However, we have seen a rise in hate-motivated incidents that have targeted places of worship, cultural centres and community organizations. These acts of hate not only threaten the safety and well-being of communities in our province, but they go against everything we stand for as Ontarians.

People in my riding of Markham–Unionville and across the province want to know that our government is taking action to protect our communities and prevent these acts from happening.

Speaker, can the minister please tell this House what our government is doing to combat hate and ensure that Ontarians feel safe in their communities?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Scarborough–Agincourt.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you to the member from Markham–Unionville for that question. Racism, hate and discrimination have no place in Ontario and will never be tolerated. That's why our government continues to work with community partners and organizations from faith-based and cultural communities to create community-centred solutions that combat hate and build safer communities right here at home.

Earlier this month, our government launched another round of the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant. Since May 2023, we have invested \$58 million to help faith-based and cultural organizations strengthen safety and security at places of worship and other culturally significant spaces.

Speaker, hate has no place in Ontario and we are taking decisive action to ensure that every person in Ontario can practise their faith, earn a living and raise a family—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member from Markham–Unionville.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you to the parliamentary assistant for that response.

Security upgrades are critical to addressing hate incidents in our province. That's why the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant program is so important in establishing safe and inclusive environments for all Ontarians. But we know that these investments alone are only part of the solution.

Education and prevention are equally important to address the root causes of hate and build understanding among communities. Our government is working beyond physical security measures to promote inclusion and prevent hate from in our communities.

Speaker, can the parliamentary assistant please explain what additional steps we are taking to foster education and awareness, so that Ontario remains a province where everyone feels safe and respected?

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you to the member for highlighting this important point. The member is absolutely right. Combatting hate requires more than security

upgrades. That's why in addition to the Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant, our government is investing in education and outreach initiatives that promote acceptance, unity and inclusion.

Between 2021 and 2025, the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism has supported 82 community-led public education and awareness projects to combat racism and hate while fostering safer, more united communities. That's why we released Building a Stronger and More Inclusive Ontario: Ontario's Anti-Racism Strategic Plan which outlines 49 initiatives from 14 ministries and hundreds of millions in investment from across the government to dismantle barriers and empower communities.

Speaker, our message is clear—

La Présidente (L'hon. Donna Skelly): La députée de Nickel Belt.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé.

Speaker, 72% of northern Ontario hospitals are facing a deficit. They tried every efficiency possible, but they are left with no choice but to cut programs and lay off staff.

Two weeks ago, the MPP from Sudbury and I went to the hospital in North Bay. They have issued layoff notices to 40 front-line health care worker: 13 RNs, three RPNs, one occupational therapist—the list goes on. Those people work in important hospital services, like the emergency department that has a 12-hour wait time right now.

What is the minister doing to protect access to hospital services for the good people of North Bay?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Not only is it appropriate but it is necessary for us to work with our hospital partners to make sure that they have a path to balance, which is why earlier this year, we asked them for their three-year plan on how they intended to do that.

We are now seeing hospitals submitting plans that show they can make improvements in access to care. There is no—and I repeat—no change in the actual services provided.

What our hospital partners are doing is completely appropriate and something they do on a regular basis, and that is to assess and review their operations to make sure that they are providing the appropriate care in their communities and that those front-line providers are there when the communities need it.

La Présidente (L'hon. Donna Skelly): Le député de Sudbury.

MPP Jamie West: I'll be sure to carry on to the minister—that the three women with babies that the work they do has no effect on health care.

The member from Nickel Belt and I went to North Bay because the Premier is a jobs disaster. Under his watch, in his minister's riding, 40 health care workers are going to lose their jobs and nobody from the Conservative bench will even speak with them.

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New Democrats care about workers. New Democrats care about health care. If 40 health care workers from

Sudbury were losing their jobs, I'd fight for them every single day.

When will the Premier finally start fighting for the 40 health care workers in North Bay?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I hope when the members opposite visited the North Bay Regional Health Centre, they also highlighted the fact, for the last three years, we have increased hospital base budgets by an average of 4%. I'm guessing the answer is you forgot that very salient point.

When we invest in our health care workers, when we license over 100,000 nurses since 2018, when we offer more opportunities for training in our communities, that's when we start to see impacts that positively ensure that our hospital partners are there and able to provide the necessary services. We'll continue to do that.

As I said: 4% on their base budgets in the last four years. We've been there for hospitals, and we will continue to be there for hospitals.

BEVERAGE ALCOHOL SALES

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Ontario's craft brewing industry is an incredible economic driver, creating great local jobs, generating local investment and driving local tourism, especially in rural and northern communities: 11,500 full-time jobs, \$685 million annually to our GDP, often the largest employers in the regions.

But the current beer tax system is outdated and unfair: 90% of craft brewers in Ontario pay the same tax as microbrewers that are bigger and more established. They pay \$78 tax on the first hectolitre of beer they produce, versus \$10 in Alberta.

My question to the Premier: Will he adopt Alberta's progressive tax structure so that craft breweries can not only survive but thrive in Ontario?

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Wow. That was a great endorsement of our plan for Ontario and the alcohol system. I couldn't have written it any better.

No government in history has supported the craft beer industry more than this government. In fact, the volumes are up 33% for all the local producers since we modernized.

We've cut craft beer taxes. In fact, when we did that by 50% in the last budget, they lauded the move to cut taxes and fees, putting more money back into the craft brewers' pockets so they could employ more people and they could sell more product.

It goes beyond that. Do you know the VQA, the wine producers in Ontario, as well as the craft producers—their volumes are up 79%. Madam Speaker, we've seen a renaissance for producers in this province. We've never seen more support and action from this government to support our great Ontario-made products.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Speaker, we know how obsessed this Premier is with alcohol: buck-a-beer, Crown Royal, booze in corner stores—a complete love

affair. Yet his Minister of Finance instructed the LCBO to jack up prices as part of a new wholesale program. When the restaurant, bar and retail sector blew their stacks, this government tried to blame the LCBO and the usual backtracking began, with the price gouging delayed until April 2026. But it needs to be cancelled outright, because a 40% to 70% markup for beer will not fly with Ontarians, and it undermines our competitiveness.

My question to the Minister of Finance: Why would he order the LCBO to increase the price of alcohol so drastically when Ontarians need it to cope with this government?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I would advise the member opposite to check her source for that. This government has cut fees and taxes like no other government in the history of Ontario. Just ask the craft producers. Just ask the wine producers. Just ask the cider producers. Just ask the spirits producers. We cut taxes by 50% for spirits and for craft producers—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The leader of the third party will come to order.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: So, Madam Speaker, 9,000 points of sale now—way up.

By the way, they increased the wine tax. They increased the beer tax. They increased more taxes while they were in government than we've seen in a long time.

We're cutting taxes. We're putting more money back in the pockets of consumers and for alcohol producers.

And by the way, small businesses—convenience stores say their revenues are up 30% off a long weekend. So we're helping small businesses at the same time. This is a great win for the people and the businesses of Ontario.

BAIL REFORM

Mr. Andrew Dowie: My question is to the Associate Solicitor General for Auto Theft and Bail Reform. Speaker, families in Ontario deserve to feel safe in their homes and in their communities. But for far too long, we've heard case after case of career criminals and repeat, violent offenders being released on bail, only to reoffend the same day or the same hour.

The consequences are serious. Families are concerned for their well-being and are looking to their governments for support.

Our government will always stand up for the safety of our residents. That's why, under this Premier's leadership, we've been calling for tougher bail and a stronger Criminal Code.

Speaker, can the associate minister share some details with the House on what he's doing to push the federal government for stronger bail reform in Canada?

Hon. Zee Hamid: I thank my colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh for the question.

Speaker, since day one, our government has been unequivocal on the need for meaningful bail reform in Ontario. Too often, dangerous criminals are released immediately on the street with little thought given to the impact it has on communities.

Under the leadership of Premier Ford, we have pushed the federal government to prioritize bail and sentencing reform, resulting in positive changes to the Canadian Criminal Code. While not as fulsome as we would like, these changes are a good first step in restoring safety in our communities and confidence in our justice system.

Of course, there remains a lot to do, and our government will not waver in our commitment to ensure that everybody in Ontario feels safe, and that criminals, particularly repeat, violent offenders, are kept where they belong: behind bars.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the Associate Solicitor General for that response.

The federal government's recently introduced Bill C-14 appears to be a step in the right direction—we thank them for that—when it comes to bail reform, but there's more that needs to be done. Too many violent, repeat offenders continue to walk free and put our communities at risk. This cannot continue, Speaker.

Under the leadership of this Premier, our government is making victims' voices heard and standing behind our brave men and women in uniform to help put these criminals behind bars.

Speaker, can the Associate Solicitor General share some more details with the House on what steps our government is taking to keep our streets and communities safe?

Hon. Zee Hamid: This week, our government introduced the Keeping Criminals Behind Bars Act. This bill contains provisions that, if passed, will prove transformative for justice in our province.

These proposed changes include:

- requiring that an accused person or their surety provide a cash deposit in the full amount ordered by court upon release;

- enhanced collection tools for garnishing wages, seizure and sale of property and property liens for bail debt;

- the creation of a surety database to help streamline and enhance surety checks and provide a centralized depository of information supplied to police; and

- enhanced enforcement and monitoring tools, including expansion of the provincial bail prosecution teams.

While these changes mark yet another step towards restoring confidence in our justice system, our government will not stop pushing for more changes, including at the federal level, to ensure fairness, justice and security for all who call Ontario home

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. Tenants at a high-rise in my riding are facing a third above-guideline rent increase. They have just gone through two years of increases that have raised their rents about 10%. They fear another 5% increase. Quite a few tell me that with their wages stagnant, they don't know if they can afford to stay in their homes.

When will the Premier act to protect tenants like this who are pushed to the brink?

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

Hon. Rob Flack: I think, as I've said in the House several times this week, rent is at a 40-month low in the city of Toronto. We continue to see more supply. With more supply, better competition is coming, and rents are actually falling.

We're seeing increased investment in this sector. We're up 17,000 new starts year over year, 51,000 new starts over three years. We lowered the HST on purpose-built rentals.

The program is working. Rental starts in this province are a bright light in our housing continuum, and they will continue to be, as we continue to grow. We will prevail in the housing market.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I have to say, my constituents who are worried about losing their homes will get no comfort from that response—none.

The recent changes to landlord and tenant law in Bill 60 will make it easier for corporate landlords to squeeze the tenants who are already finding it difficult to cover rent and food at the same time.

Tenants need protection from predatory corporate landlords. Will this government give them that protection?

Hon. Rob Flack: Speaker, spreading fear is not going to work.

Not one protection has been altered in Bill 60. In fact, we've increased the time it's going to take to get to landlord-tenant hearings adjudications—we've doubled the adjudicators in the province. That's a fact. We've invested \$26 million into the system to speed up adjudication. That is a fact. We've seen an 80% decrease in hearings—we've sped up the backlog. It's continuing to work. We're tightening the system. We're creating the conditions to get more hearings heard faster—better conditions for more renters, better conditions for landlords.

And let's talk about protecting all Ontarians when it comes to our rental markets—why? Because we're creating supply.

The program is working. We will continue on this path.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

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

Hon. Steve Clark: Under standing order 59, I just want to give some clarity on next week's schedule.

As in the orders of the day, this afternoon we'll have second reading debate on Bill 72, followed by second reading debate on Bill 76.

On Monday, December 1, in the afternoon, we'll have two third reading debates: third reading debate on Bill 27, followed by third reading debate on Bill 25.

On Tuesday, December 2, both in the morning and in the afternoon, we'll have second reading debate on Bill 45.

On Wednesday, December 3, in the morning, we'll have second reading debate on Bill 45. The House will come back at 1 o'clock. In the afternoon, just prior to the Speaker's party, we'll have tributes to deceased members, with five minutes for the government, five minutes for the official opposition, five minutes for the third party and two minutes each for the independent members as a group.

Thursday, at this time, is to be determined.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Ottawa South has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to the question given by the Minister of Finance regarding manufacturing jobs. This matter will be debated on Tuesday, December 2, following private members' public business.

DEFERRED VOTES

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): We have a deferred vote on private member's notice of motion number 40.

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

The division bells rang from 1133 to 1138.

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

MPP Gilmour has moved private member's notice of motion number 40.

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

Ayes

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gélinas, France	Shamji, Adil
Begum, Doly	Gilmour, Alexa	Shaw, Sandy
Bell, Jessica	Glover, Chris	Smyth, Stephanie
Bourgouin, Guy	Gretzky, Lisa	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Bowman, Stephanie	Hazell, Andrea	Stiles, Marit
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Hsu, Ted	Tabuns, Peter
Burch, Jeff	Kernaghan, Terence	Tsao, Jonathan
Clancy, Aislinn	Mamakwa, Sol	Vanthof, John
Collard, Lucille	McCrimmon, Karen	Vaugeois, Lise
Fairclough, Lee	McKenney, Catherine	Watt, Tyler
Fife, Catherine	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	West, Jamie
Fraser, John	Pasma, Chandra	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
French, Jennifer K.	Sattler, Peggy	
Gates, Wayne	Schreiner, Mike	

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

Nays

Allsopp, Tyler	Dunlop, Jill	Piccini, David
Anand, Deepak	Firin, Mohamed	Pinsonneault, Steve
Babikian, Aris	Flack, Rob	Quinn, Nolan
Bailey, Robert	Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Racinsky, Joseph
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Rae, Matthew

Breese, Ric	Gualtieri, Silvia	Riddell, Brian
Calandra, Paul	Hamid, Zee	Rosenberg, Bill
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Hardeman, Ernie	Sabawy, Sheref
Cho, Stan	Jones, Sylvia	Sandhu, Amarjot
Ciriello, Monica	Jones, Trevor	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Clark, Steve	Jordan, John	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Coe, Lorne	Kanapathi, Logan	Saunderson, Brian
Cooper, Michelle	Kerzner, Michael S.	Smith, David
Crawford, Stephen	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, Graydon
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, Laura
Darouze, George	Lumsden, Neil	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Denault, Billy	McCarthy, Todd J.	Thompson, Lisa M.
Dixon, Jess	McGregor, Graham	Vickers, Paul
Dowie, Andrew	Pang, Billy	Wai, Daisy
Downey, Doug	Parsa, Michael	Williams, Charmaine A.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 40; the nays are 60.

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

Motion negatived.

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

The House recessed from 1141 to 1300.

ROYAL ASSENT

SANCTION ROYALE

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I beg to inform the House that in the name of His Majesty the King, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to certain bills in her office.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Julia Douglas): The following are the titles of the bills to which Her Honour did assent:

An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters / Loi modifiant diverses lois relatives à l'emploi et au travail ainsi qu'à d'autres questions.

An Act to amend various Acts and to enact the Water and Wastewater Public Corporations Act, 2025 / Loi modifiant diverses lois et édictant la Loi de 2025 sur les sociétés publiques de gestion de l'eau et des eaux usées.

An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I would like to introduce all of the great students from colleges around the province who are here—yesterday and today—with Ontario Student Voices.

MPP Monica Ciriello: I'd like to welcome the students from Ontario Student Voices, specifically Hish, Peter, Colton, Samiya and Christian. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I'm so delighted to welcome to the Ontario Legislative Assembly Balachandran Yuganeetharuban, proud resident of Markham–Stouffville and the owner of Vijaya Jewellery, a well-known family

business—also a big philanthropist—joined by his son Yuganeetharuban Abishek. Welcome to Queen’s Park.

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 November 27, 2025, 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.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

VAUGHAN BASKETBALL INC. ACT, 2025, BILL PR31, MS. FAIRCLOUGH

Ms. Fairclough moved first reading of the following bill: Bill Pr31, An Act to revive Vaughan Basketball Inc.

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

First reading agreed to.

ONTARIO CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 POUR L’ADAPTATION ET LA RÉSILIENCE AUX CHANGEMENTS CLIMATIQUES DE L’ONTARIO

Mr. Tabuns moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 81, An Act providing a climate change adaptation program for Ontario / Projet de loi 81, Loi prévoyant un programme d’adaptation aux changements climatiques pour l’Ontario.

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?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Yes. The bill sets in place a framework for developing a strategic plan, sets up funding mechanisms, sets up structures within government to deliver our implementation of a program to protect Ontarians and their property against rising levels of extreme weather that we expect will increase over the next decades.

PROTECTING RENTERS FROM UNFAIR ABOVE GUIDELINE RENT INCREASES ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 VISANT À PROTÉGER LES LOCATAIRES CONTRE LES AUGMENTATIONS INJUSTES DE LOYER SUPÉRIEURES AU TAUX LÉGAL

MPP Smyth moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 82, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 with respect to above guideline rent increases / Projet de loi 82, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d’habitation à l’égard des augmentations de loyer supérieures au taux légal.

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 Stephanie Smyth: The Protecting Renters from Unfair Above Guideline Rent Increases Act, 2025, is a fair, reasonable and genuinely workable update to the Residential Tenancies Act. In my riding of Toronto–St. Paul’s, 61% of residents are tenants, and that number is going up. They deserve a system that protects them from being priced out of their homes while still allowing landlords to make the extraordinary repairs AGIs were originally intended for.

This bill does exactly that. It tightens the rules so AGIs can only be used for real, necessary capital work in extraordinary cases—not cosmetic upgrades, not routine maintenance and not repairs caused by a landlord’s own neglect. It requires proper evidence and proper documentation, and it gives the Landlord and Tenant Board the authority to reject increases that would cause genuine hardship for tenants. It also closes loopholes.

Please know this bill was written to be reasonable, workable and possible to pass. It—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I want to remind the member that this is not a time to actually debate the bill; it’s just a brief explanation. Thank you.

PETITIONS

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I’m introducing a petition, “Fund Ontario Public Schools.”

“Whereas the government has taken control of several school boards, including the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board...; and

“Whereas the provincial government has cut the share of provincial revenues going to education leaving a \$1,500 shortfall for student and provincial funding...; and” because, in fact, that cut in funding is harming children and communities and, in fact, the provincial government

is in a position to adequately fund our schools, it is resolved that we should restore education funding lost since 2018, fund the repairs and staffing that our schools need and keep local school board decision-making with local elected trustees.

I agree with this petition. I affix my signature and I give it to page David to take to the table.

HOMELESSNESS

Ms. Lee Fairclough: I'm pleased to present this petition that was presented to me on behalf of citizens in the Niagara region while I was there, who are deeply concerned about homelessness, citing the cost of supportive housing at \$613 per month while the cost of one month in jail is \$4,300 per month.

The petition asks the Legislature to reconsider and pass Bill 28, the Homelessness Ends with Housing Act, which asks the government to come up with a strategy to end homeless in 10 years. That bill was voted down and now we have Bill 60, which is making it even harder for people who are living on the edge to keep their housing.

I will add my name to this petition and I will give it to the page from my riding, Manélie.

TENANT PROTECTION

MPP Lise Vaugeois: People in Ontario are very, very worried about the cost of housing and the cost of rent, and very concerned about the effects of Bill 60. So the petitioners have asked that Bill 60 be repealed and to end the attack on renters; that the government bring back rent control, with fair rules, so rents stay affordable; that the LTB backlog be fixed, so that renters get fast and fair hearings; and that the loopholes are closed, so corporate landlords can't raise rents unfairly or push renovations.

I thoroughly support this petition and will give it to Emery to submit.

ONTARIO SCIENCE CENTRE

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Residents in my riding of Don Valley West continue to be concerned about the undermining of the iconic Ontario Science Centre in the Don Valley and this government's plan to construct a smaller facility at Ontario Place, which will involve at least half a million dollars of public funds. They're concerned about the relocation and the downsizing threatening the international reputation of the Ontario Science Centre, which was designed for its current location by the esteemed late Ontario architect Raymond Moriyama, and that the strategic location of the science centre in Flemingdon Park, Don Mills, which is accessible and vital to diverse communities and school children, will be lost.

1310

They're asking the Legislative Assembly to reconsider this decision to move the Ontario Science Centre and relocate it to Ontario Place; to prioritize renewing it in its

current location; and to conduct comprehensive public consultation and environmental impact assessments for any proposed changes.

I support this petition, will sign it and give it to page Emelin to take to the Clerk.

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Ms. Catherine Fife: Once again, I am presenting the petition on social media use among young Ontarians. Government members will know that I have tabled this motion. I want us to work together on this issue at social policy committee.

The research around the damages to our youth and their mental health by overuse of screens and social media apps is profound. I want to quote: The research by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection has recently reported a new study on child sexual victimization online in Canada. It reports that, "Over 9 in 10 (93%) of teen victims think Canada" and Ontario "should legally force apps and platforms to prevent harm online. Most also thought safety measures would help."

The fact of the matter is that the social media companies and platforms are not going to protect our youth. They just are not. The algorithms are designed to be addictive. If youth are spending four to eight hours a day on social media, they are not learning in school, they are not socializing and they are at risk. Why will the government not call this important motion to the committee so we can actually get something done to protect students?

It's my pleasure to affix the signatures—I think at this point, I've presented about 5,000 signatures. Let's get to work. Let's do something good for the people of Ontario.

DOCTOR SHORTAGE

MPP Jamie West: This petition is entitled, "Putting Patients First: Fix the Doctor Shortage." The petition is a little bit old: The stat back then was 2.2 million Ontarians not having a family physician or primary care. That puts your health at risk and also costs us all a little bit more because, when people are going to walk-in clinics and ER rooms instead of having a family doctor, you don't have that long-term care outlook for yourself. As well, when your care system, your primary care system, is randomized—I know there are charting systems, but a family doctor will recognize if you've gained weight or lost weight or other health effects that are visibly apparent because they have that long-term relationship.

The goal of this petition, really, is to help with the administrative burden that family doctors have. I know that OMA has come several times to speak to all of us in our offices about how family physicians are burning out because of the amount of paperwork that they're doing, as well as how, in medical schools, practising family physicians are dissuading new physicians from getting into family medicine because of the burden of paperwork. What we're talking about is hiring additional staff support that could help with charting, help with this paperwork

burden side of it, so that our health care professionals could spend more time with the patients that they represent.

I support this petition. I think it's a great idea. I think that implementing this—there's an estimate that you'd have an additional 2 million patients having doctors and front-line primary health care professionals.

I support this petition. I'll affix my signature, and provide it to page Olivia for the table.

TUITION

MPP Jamie West: This is titled, "Fight the fees." This has to do with the high cost of tuition for not just students, but the families who often are supporting those students in order to graduate. The undergrad tuition has increased by 215%, and domestic graduate tuition—master's and programs like that—is 247% higher than it used to be.

Ontario provides the lowest funding of all the provinces in Canada, and that means that our kids who are trying to get those jobs of tomorrow, the jobs of the future, the high-skilled jobs, are paying more and more out-of-pocket. They're graduating with massive debts that make it even more difficult because, as we all know, housing and rent are through the roof as well. Affordability is key for a lot of people: parents like myself, who would like my kids, once they graduate, to be able to move out. The more debt they have the more unlikely it is they'll be able to afford first and last towards a house or they'll be able to save for a house or be able to purchase a house, and so we have to do the right thing as all members of the assembly to support the students as they graduate into those better jobs.

What they're asking for here is reversing that \$1-billion cut in assistance that the Conservative government made in 2018. As well, the students want their right to organize and represent themselves. We've seen the Conservative government try to remove this right a couple of times. They lost the court challenge. It was recently brought back in another bill. Students need to have that ability to have a voice for themselves and have their perspective.

The students have been meeting with us just in the last two days, and the reality for most of us around the room—I'm not trying to insult anybody, but we're a long way from what it's like to be a student, and they need to have their voices. They would like free and accessible education for all. They want the loan system to be transitioned back into a grant system, and they want to legislate the students' right to organize so they don't have to constantly fight this in a court challenge by various governments that come along.

I obviously support this petition, and I'll affix my signature and provide it to page Ojas for the table.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition that is calling on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to bring back real rent control in this province.

The petition notes that the government cancelled rent control as one of the first things they did when they assumed office in 2018. So all units built after November 2018 do not have any rent control, at a time when cost-of-living pressures are just getting greater and the cost to rent a home has never been higher, especially in relation to lower-income people who are on fixed incomes or relying on minimum-wage jobs.

The petition also notes that unscrupulous, unethical landlords have used the lack of rent control to evict tenants so that they can jack up rents for the next renter. People are leaving their home communities because they are in search of affordable housing.

This petition calls on the Legislative Assembly to protect tenants and ensure that renters can live in safe and affordable homes.

I couldn't agree more with this petition, affix my signature and will send it to the table with page Manélie.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

MPP Jamie West: This petition is entitled "Declare Intimate Partner Violence an Epidemic in Ontario." I will not share their name, but I notice in the petition that a friend of mine has signed this petition. The reason I'm not saying their name is because I know their mother was a victim of intimate partner violence and continually has to move around the city because her ex stalks them. So I don't want to share that, but I want to put a real face to that and what it means.

This is basically calling for intimate partner violence to be declared an epidemic. I know we've had lots of debate about "epidemic" versus "endemic" and what the right term is. But if you have feared for your life and for the life of your children and have to travel around the city in order to try to stay employed while somebody is stalking you, and you want to hear the word "epidemic," I don't think people in that situation want to hear someone clarify or use a thesaurus about what the right word is.

The reality is that there are many, many municipalities—over 100, including the city of Greater Sudbury—that have declared intimate partner violence an epidemic. We should be doing that in this House as well. I support all the people who took the time to fill out this petition and stand for themselves, for their mothers and for the people in our community.

I'll affix my signature, and I'll provide the petition to the table with page Luke.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition signed by many residents of London West that calls on the Legislative Assembly to keep classrooms safe for students and staff.

I think we all agree that students and education workers deserve safe places to learn and work, but we are seeing a marked increase in reports of violence in our schools because of the lack of mental health supports and the lack of community mental health supports for families. We

know that too many kids are going to school and forced to learn in crowded classrooms, often without the proper facilities. This contributes to the crisis that we are seeing in our schools.

1320

This petition calls on the Legislative Assembly to take immediate action to address this crisis of violence in our schools, to invest in mental health resources, to end violence against education workers, to improve reporting of incidents of workplace violence and to properly fund our schools: to make sure that we have smaller class sizes and more caring adults in our school facilities.

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

WORKPLACE SAFETY

MPP Jamie West: When the member for Nickel Belt is not here, I've got to pull our weight.

This petition is entitled "Legislation for Heat Limits in the Workplace Now."

This may sound like a weird petition to bring up in November or heading into December, so close to the Christmas season, but the reality is there are a lot of hot workplaces that exist all year around.

I come from the mining industry. I worked in a smelter, where we basically melt rocks into lava. It's a hot job. There's a lot of heat involved with that. There are jobs where you work below the furnace, where it's an unbearable temperature, where you do some adjustments on the furnace so that it doesn't have any issues. As well, people in the mining industry—the deeper you go, the hotter it gets. Even in our own workplace here at Queen's Park, all of us had that issue where the heater has not been able to turn down and your office becomes sweltering. People do perform work in workplaces like that for dry cleaning and other industries, where it's just warm where they work.

The petition is calling for heat stress limits—to work on this. I feel like sometimes we're very partisan in debate. I want to say I've had good conversations with the Minister of Labour about how we start moving towards this and what that looks like, because heat stress is a reality for people, and nobody wants people to get sick. Having worked in an industry where we deal with heat stress all the time, it is difficult to monitor for yourself, and the outcomes of being overheated can have major effects on somebody.

So I do support this petition. I think it's a very important idea. I urge the minister to continue the work he has talked about.

I will affix my signature and provide it to page Olivia for the table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUY ONTARIO ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 VISANT À ENCOURAGER À ACHETER ONTARIEN

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 27, 2025, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 72, An Act to enact the Buy Ontario Act (Public Sector Procurement), 2025, to repeal the Building Ontario Businesses Initiative Act, 2022, to amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to the installation of certain signs and to amend section 10.1 of the Legislation Act, 2006 with respect to certain provisions of the Protecting Condominium Owners Act, 2015 / *Projet de loi 72, Loi visant à édicter la Loi de 2025 visant à encourager à acheter ontarien (approvisionnement du secteur public), à abroger la Loi de 2022 sur l'initiative favorisant l'essor des entreprises ontariennes, à modifier le Code de la route à l'égard de certains panneaux et à modifier l'article 10.1 de la Loi de 2006 sur la législation en ce qui concerne certaines dispositions de la Loi de 2015 sur la protection des propriétaires de condominiums.*

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

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I have long waited for this day to come: the day I can rise in the House and support buy Ontario. Bill 72, this legislation, speaks directly to the values of the people of Newmarket–Aurora, to the request from my local manufacturing and service providers and to what Ontarians expect from their provincial government: protecting good jobs, supporting our local businesses and strengthening a resilient, self-reliant economy.

Notre gouvernement prend des mesures pour protéger les travailleurs et les entreprises en rendant obligatoire la politique « achetez Ontario » pour les marchés publics, afin que l'argent des contribuables serve à financer les emplois et les produits ontariens, et non ceux des concurrents étrangers.

Speaker, this bill is saying very clearly that when Ontario spends public dollars, those dollars should work for Ontarians first. Over the past few years, our province has faced tremendous pressures: global supply chain disruptions, rising costs and unfair US tariffs that have put our businesses at a disadvantage. Our workers, entrepreneurs and small business owners want to know that their government has their back not only in words, but in real, tangible actions, and this is exactly what Bill 72 delivers.

The public sector entities impacted by this proposed Buy Ontario Act include Ontario ministries, provincial agencies, Ontario Power Generation, the Independent Electricity System Operator and designated broader public sector organizations such as hospitals, school boards, universities and colleges. The Buy Ontario Act, if passed, would also enable other public sector organizations to be covered by the legislation in the future.

Alors, les entités du secteur public visées par le projet de loi « acheter en Ontario », comprennent les ministères

de l'Ontario, les organismes provinciaux, Ontario Power Generation, la Société indépendante d'exploitation du réseau d'électricité et certains organismes du secteur public désignés, tels que les hôpitaux, les conseils scolaires, les universités et les collèges. Si elle est adoptée, la loi « acheter en Ontario » permettra également à d'autres organismes du secteur public d'être visés par cette loi à l'avenir.

We are introducing enabling legislation. Why? If passed, the Buy Ontario Act will enable the Ontario government to work with public sector entities collaboratively with the goal of developing stronger procurement rules to prioritize Ontario-made goods and services, then Canadian ones.

Alors, comme première étape, le gouvernement exigera que tous les achats de travaux de construction des ministères et des organismes provinciaux, y compris ceux qui appuient le plan d'immobilisation de 200 milliards de dollars de l'Ontario, privilégient les biens et services ontariens. Cela comprendra les matériaux et l'expertise utilisés par les entrepreneurs et les sous-traitants tout au long de la chaîne d'approvisionnement d'un projet.

The resilience of Ontario's supply chain is vital for our economy. Bill 72 will help public sector organizations strengthen supply chain resilience while maintaining competitive procurement practices.

First, the bill gives the Management Board of Cabinet the authority to set clear procurement policies and standards that encourage sourcing from Ontario businesses. This means that when the government needs to buy things—whether it's medical supplies, construction materials, or technology—we're encouraged to look locally, which helps keep our supply chain strong and less dependent on outside sources. For example, during emergencies like a winter storm or a health crisis, having reliable Ontario suppliers for road salt or personal protective equipment means we can respond quickly and avoid shortages.

The bill also allows for the creation of vendor performance standards so public sector organizations can track which suppliers consistently deliver on time and meet quality expectations. I think that's what we, as a government, should expect. This helps build a network of dependable local partners.

At the same time, the act maintains competitive procurement practices by requiring open competition and transparency. All decisions must be documented, and there are regular reviews to ensure fairness. In short, the bill helps Ontario organizations build strong, reliable supply chains while making sure taxpayers still get the best value and fair competition.

1330

Madam Speaker, safeguards have been built into the proposed legislation to maintain open competition, documentation of decisions and auditability of the preference process.

Premièrement, la loi exige que toutes les décisions d'approvisionnement, y compris celles qui accordent la préférence aux entreprises ontariennes, soient entièrement documentées. Cela signifie que chaque étape, de l'évaluation

des soumissions à l'attribution des contrats, doit être consignée afin de retracer clairement le processus décisionnel. Par exemple, si un fournisseur local est choisi, les raisons—comme le prix, la qualité ou les délais de livraison—doivent être écrites et accessibles pour consultation.

Deuxièmement, la loi garantit une concurrence ouverte. Les organismes du secteur public doivent toujours lancer des appels d'offres et permettre à tous les fournisseurs qualifiés d'y participer, afin que la préférence locale n'exclue pas injustement d'autres entreprises. Cela assure la compétitivité du processus et contribue à garantir aux contribuables le meilleur rapport qualité-prix.

Troisièmement, la loi prévoit des examens et des vérifications de conformité réguliers. Des contrôles indépendants seront effectués pour s'assurer du respect des règles et de l'absence de favoritisme envers les fournisseurs. Ces examens permettent de déceler les erreurs ou les préjugés et de prendre les mesures correctives nécessaires.

Speaker, I am incredibly proud of the businesses, innovators and skilled workers in Newmarket–Aurora. But many of these businesses ask me the same thing: Why does the province not place a higher importance on Ontario-made products and services?

When government organizations issue contracts, when they look for suppliers, when they invest public funds, they want Ontario businesses to be able to compete. And yes, it should be a procurement that is open, that is fair and that is transparent so everyone can trust the process.

Located in Aurora, Thermogenics is a manufacturer of boilers, from steam boilers to critical hot water boilers to hydronic condensing boilers to thermal heating systems, electric boilers and more. They are experts in industrial and commercial boiler repair and maintenance of all makes, models and types of boilers. Their customers are hospitals and schools, and many other large facilities and buildings.

I have had many conversations with their CEO, Ross Garland, who shared with me on many occasions how difficult it can be when hospitals and other government entities purchase products from outside the province, especially from our friends south of the border, even when Ontario companies can offer comparable quality, products, and the ability to fully service, in a timely manner, all of these products.

Last winter, Madam Speaker, there was a hospital in Toronto whose boiler system failed and the hospital was without heat. I am sure most of you know exactly which hospital that was. The boiler was not an Ontario-made boiler, no. However, my local business, Thermogenics, was quick to be on-site and they provided the service that was needed to get that boiler up and running to ensure the patients, staff and everyone in that hospital had heat, which we all know is vital during the winter months.

This past year, just after the order was made for hospitals to prioritize Ontario-made where possible, Thermogenics just missed out on having one of their RFP responses be considered for a hospital in Milton. That was frustrating for the business, as it was for me. However, I know

Thermogenics will be there for that hospital in the future if they ever need servicing to ensure that hospital's heating systems are functioning at all times. Bill 72 will give businesses like Thermogenics the opportunity they deserve, the local jobs my community deserves and the support to our hospitals that all Ontarians expect.

In Newmarket, there's Onefinity CNC, a manufacturer designing and building advanced CNC machines. Their products are used by creators and educators worldwide, including in schools, to provide training for the next generation in robotics and automation. Madam Speaker, in conversation with this manufacturer, they have more of their machines shipping internationally than here at home. There are opportunities with our schools and our colleges. Entrance into our education system can be transformative not only for their business, but for the people they employ and our local economy in Newmarket.

When public institutions prioritize Ontario-made solutions, it opens the door for companies like these to innovate and grow. These are the types of businesses that form the backbone of our local economy: family-owned, community-based, hard-working and proud to call Newmarket–Aurora home.

Speaker, Ontario spends over \$30 billion every single year on goods and services. Imagine the impact when more of these dollars stay right here at home, supporting Ontario manufacturers, innovators, farmers, tradespeople and suppliers. For communities like Newmarket–Aurora, this could mean more opportunities for our local manufacturers, as I noted with just two examples, more contracts for our small and medium-sized businesses, more jobs for our residents and stronger supply chain certainty for our institutions.

The pandemic taught us very clearly that when we cannot depend on global supply chains for essential goods, we just can't. Ontario's economic future depends on building self-reliance and resilience, and Bill 72 does precisely that.

This legislation has been endorsed strongly by industry leaders, including the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, CME. They know that prioritizing Ontario-made goods in public procurement protects jobs, strengthens supply chains and supports Ontario's economy.

Madam Speaker—or, Mr. Speaker, sorry. This morning—oh, now Madam Speaker—I listened to members opposite speak against this bill. The member from Ajax spoke specifically regarding opportunities with AI.

An AI software company specific to innovations in pharmaceutical checks, called HumanisRx—their president, Sayeh Radpay, connected with me to say how happy she was to hear about Bill 72. Do you know why? Because this legislation would allow AI technology developed here in Ontario, by Ontario experts, Ontario workers—it will give them an opportunity to showcase Ontario technology. They are not asking for a handout, but just the chance to compete to have their technology used here in provincial institutions, where it should be.

We talk about how Ontario is a hub for AI technology. Well, let's make sure we are prioritizing Ontario AI

software, as—you know what?—the tech experts will definitely be staying here. The investors will definitely be investing here. Tell me, how is that a bad thing?

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Speaker, the Buy Ontario Act, 2025, is more than legislation; it is a commitment, a promise to Ontario's workers, families and businesses.

Madam Speaker, I could go on with another example on the AI, and I've got a little bit of time, so I'm going to do just that.

Another AI developer, very unique and located in my riding—it's a start-up company called Skinopathy. Well, they've been around for maybe five years now. They are making such headway when it comes to looking at the skin and having programs that can assess wounds, wound care. It's amazing technology and, again, another example of a Canadian-made AI software program, Canadian tech experts, Canadian workers, a Canadian program—that's all Ontario, quite frankly—and can be used here to help patients, to help our residents.

Yes, AI—this is a great opportunity for technology here in this province of ours.

So a promise that when Ontario spends public dollars, we will do everything possible to ensure those dollars support Ontario jobs, Ontario businesses and Ontario prosperity—including in my riding of Newmarket–Aurora, but, quite frankly, I want to see it all across this great province.

This is a bill that reflects our values. It strengthens confidence in our economy. And it positions Ontario to thrive in the face of global challenges.

Alors, j'exhorte tous les membres de cette chambre à appuyer le projet de loi 72 et à contribuer à bâtir un Ontario plus résilient, plus autonome et plus prospère.

Madam Speaker, I request, I ask, I sincerely ask that all members of this chamber support Bill 72. Support us when we want to support our local businesses, to support our local technology providers, to support our local manufacturers, to support our local workers, to support our local residents. We want a strong economy here in Ontario. And Bill 72 will do just that. Once again, I urge all my colleagues to sincerely consider 100% support of this bill for all of our collective communities.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: I feel like I'm in a very dysfunctional online commercial—"You too can get a procurement strategy for only \$9.99, but if you order now, you'll get two"—because the member fully knows that we brought forward this strategy back on November 3, which is only 11 sitting days ago. The procurement strategy called that, "the government of Ontario must implement Ontario-first procurement criteria that prioritizes contracts for Ontario and Canadian businesses that can offer local jobs for all public spending contracts issued by the Ontario government, ministries, agencies, municipalities, and other provincially funded institutions, as well as ban US companies from receiving public contracts until the trade war is over."

Yes, we too brought forward a procurement strategy, and the government voted against it. So what makes today so different? It's the same language. It's the same intent. But you voted against it 11 sitting days ago.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the member from Waterloo for that question. At its core, we have to talk about the definition of what an Ontario business is. At the core, it is what we are actually talking about. It spells out that there's no confusion or loopholes when it comes to Ontario businesses.

This is important, because to qualify as an Ontario business a company must have a real, ongoing presence in this province. That means they must operate here permanently in Ontario. We are outlining exactly what it means to be a business in Ontario and to be considered.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member from Newmarket–Aurora for her comments.

But I have to say, I still find Bill 72 quite perplexing. It repeals the Building Ontario Businesses Initiative Act, 2022, which this government brought in. Surely they could have, as I said this morning in my debate on this bill, just tweaked some regulations to get done what they wanted to get done. But instead, we're debating a bill that maybe makes some good slogans and gives them vast power.

It was this government that all of a sudden got religion about buying Ontario. This is the government that gave Staples a sole-source contract and shut down local businesses in my community of Don Valley West when they put ServiceOntario there. This is the government who gave a billion-dollar contract and a 95-year lease to Therme. My question to the member is, were those deals bad deals?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I thank the member for her question. With that, I will say that transparency and fairness is critical to this process. It truly is. At the end of the day, we must ensure that this buy Ontario builds in several safeguards, safeguards that will protect open competition and ensure that there's clear documentation, and it will guarantee auditability throughout the preference process.

It is important that we have compliance reviews in the audits, independent checks that would be performed so as to ensure that we're following and no supplier is unfavourably, unfairly treated. This is the importance, and this is what's in buy Ontario.

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

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I've been listening to our member here speaking and the opposition asking questions.

I come out of the automotive industry, and 65% of the cars that are built in Ontario have Canadian-made parts. I'm listening to the opposition and they're against American companies that are here in Canada building automotive cars in Canada. They're against SMR technology where 85% of SMR technology will be Canadian, and even OPG is using 95% Canadian.

How will this bill improve our ability to build and produce more Canadian products here in Ontario?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I appreciate the member's question because, as I noted in my speech, we're talking about \$30 billion here. We're talking about getting value for our money. We're talking about ensuring our local communities and local businesses have the opportunities to be part of this great \$30-billion economic engine.

At the end of the day, this legislation requires every procurement decision to be documented. In short, the bill strikes a balance at the end of the day. It supports local businesses, but it will always keep an eye on getting the best value for Ontarians. I think "best value" means "Ontario-made," so bring on those Ontario-made SMRs.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: This government had an opportunity to support a buy-Ontario-first procurement. We put this forward in legislation, and every one of this government's members voted against that motion. That was just 10 or 11 days ago. It's hard to know what's changed because it's essentially the same bill. We put this forward to address the jobs disaster crisis that this government has created. There are 800,000 people out of work.

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This government is now promising to spend dollars to support Ontario jobs. My question to this government is, you promised to spend those dollars. Does this promise extend to the Garden City Skyway? I'm a proud Hamiltonian, Local 1005, proud steelworkers. Why is this government not making a commitment, a guarantee, that you will use Canadian-made steel and Canadian union workers when you are building the Garden City Skyway?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. I think what's important here as well is the public trust in government procurement, which absolutely depends on transparency. The Buy Ontario Act addresses all of this through several provisions.

Let's take a look at section 3(2)(d) of the act, which empowers the Management Board of Cabinet to issue directives that can establish reporting requirements and procedures. This is important because we want to see how decisions are made for making these acquisitions. The member talks about the acquisition of steel. This section will allow for that. How is that decision being made?

Additionally, another section, section 9(4) of the act, will require that any directive issued under section 3(1) must be made available to anyone who requires a copy and must be publicly posted.

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

Ms. Lee Fairclough: My question is quite simple. I think you have the ability to do everything you've said today in the existing legislation that you passed in 2022. The only difference here is the tightening of control among the cabinet ministers around how that's done. Can you explain to me why this is so critical? Of course, I will speak in depth to some of the other aspects, but I just don't

understand why you wouldn't have used the piece of legislation you tabled yourself two years ago to achieve what we all want to achieve, which is making sure that our Ontario businesses thrive.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I thank the member for her question. I believe what's important here with this act, when I read this act, is that we need to avoid any type of discriminatory business practice and make sure we maintain compliance with trade agreements. This is what comes through with this Buy Ontario Act.

Now, let me tell you a little bit about how it works. The act will let the government set rules that give Ontario companies a better chance when bidding for contracts. For example, if a school board needs new computers, or maybe they might need one of those CNC machines that I talked about from my manufacturer in Newmarket—if they need something like that, for example, then Ontario suppliers might get a preference. Wow, I love that, and I want that. But the bill doesn't say we can ignore everyone else and break promises we've made to other provinces and countries.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Even before I start, I know that all of us had Christmas cards from the member from Haldimand-Norfolk on our tables. She's set a new high—or a new low; we're not quite sure yet. However, let the competition begin. My money is on Sol Mamakwa.

I do also want to say, and I sort of referenced it in my one-minute question to the previous speaker, that it's just so incredibly frustrating that here we are, on November 27, when we brought forward a similar piece of legislation to bolster and to strengthen Ontario's economy through a procurement strategy that was truly focused and very directed at supporting Ontario companies, and if not Ontario then Canadian companies.

The debate that day really focused on the gaps and the loopholes that exist in Ontario's current economy—meant to address and sort of plug up those weaknesses, quite honestly, in our procurement strategy. We all now know there's \$30 billion worth of procurement that this government engages in in goods and services and contracts, be they infrastructure, be they through the municipalities.

What an opportunity, right, to really do something that we can actually control in the face of a very aggressive trade war with a very irrational and unhinged leader in the United States. You can't control what's happening down there. I know there are many governors who really have a very warm relationship with us. I'm thinking especially of the member from Windsor. Those cross-border communities, those relationships have for years been built—built on trust, built on economic evaluations of how we can support each other. But Ontario has really found itself in a very unprecedented state where we are now in an aggressive trade war with our former friend, the United States. These are dark days for the economy.

If anyone had the opportunity to look through the Financial Accountability Officer's report that was released yesterday—I know the finance minister and the economic

development minister will say, "Well, this is just a snapshot in time." It actually isn't, right? The FAO report is an economic analysis of where we are as a province, what trends have been part of our reality through Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4. This is actually tracking how we're doing; it's not a snapshot in time. It's a legitimate, non-partisan review of where we are as a province.

Our manufacturing sector is in free fall, and in order to address a problem, Madam Speaker, you have to be honest about what's happening. The fact that we have not been this low from a manufacturing state of affairs since 1976—our leader yesterday did remind me that, in 1976, there was a Shaun Cassidy poster on some of our walls. That does give you some context perhaps for how long ago that was and really how much we have to catch up, if you will, from a manufacturing perspective.

It's very true that we are back on our heels, so a progressive, forward-thinking procurement strategy is exactly what we do need right now in Ontario.

However, my work that I've done as the chair of the leader's advisory council on procurement and the trade tariff war has really led me to listen very carefully to those sector-vulnerable leaders in forestry, aluminum, steel and auto, who have said, "Listen, this is not sustainable." Forestry's looking at a 37% tariff right now. The commercials the Premier thought to engage in, at a cost of \$10 million—\$25 million? You kind of lose track around here because a lot of money goes out the door and doesn't really come back on the return on investment for people in Ontario—now with an additional potential 10% tariff on those sectors, because of an ego and because of a commercial that really just poked the bear. Even the Prime Minister of Canada said, "Please, we don't need this commercial. It may be a good commercial, but we don't need it. It's not helpful to negotiations that are happening." Captain Canada is not here in the room doing the negotiation. So can we just protect what we have right now and build on our strengths?

Those sectors have said to me and to the council—there are five of us who sit on this council and report back to the leader—"Listen, we need contracts. We don't want handouts. We don't want loans. We want contracts."

I'm thinking specifically of forestry. The forestry sector is our strength. For many years now, though, it has been ignored or neglected as a sector. This is what we have heard. The potential there, though, is room to grow, especially if they have procurement contracts with the Ontario government to, say, build housing, for instance—housing, because we're in a housing disaster, we're in a jobs disaster. The common denominator around the disasters is this Premier and is this government.

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We are looking for pathways to keep sectors viable through the storm. We need to weather the storm. And when I'm listening to those folks, what they say to me makes a lot of sense. I mean, this is how we keep northern towns and cities alive. Those sectors attract families to those communities who want to buy houses, who want to settle down, who want a strong health care system, who

want a strong education system. So it's economics 101—everything is connected. But we are in a very vulnerable state right now.

While the government turned down our buy-Ontario strategy that was informed by these consultations, which were informed by sector leaders in steel, in forestry, in auto—and even though we came forward in earnest, reaching across the aisle, non-partisan, just trying to do the right thing, the government said no.

Well, you know what? We're going to look at this legislation, Madam Speaker, because the loopholes that were referenced still exist in this legislation and we're going to have to navigate through some very complex international requirements and regulations. But at the end of the day, clearly these sectors need to be supported.

It makes me kind of think of—sometimes we hear what we want to hear. It reminds me of the story when—young kids, like four and two, and I wanted to go to this local church, but I didn't want to go alone. So I talked one of my unfortunate neighbours into coming with me, and she brought her six- and four-year-old. This is the first time that they were all in a church, okay?

We all go to the church and we're at the back. We're late, we're almost divorced, but we get there. So we're in the back; the minister calls the kids down to the front of the church and says, "All the children come to the front." And so, our kids, who had never been in a church before, except for the babies, run down to the front. The minister says, "Who here loves Jesus?" And our kids have got their hands up. They are so into this idea, and the parents in the back row—we're thinking, "What's going on?"

So, once again, the minister says, "Who here loves Jesus?" And once again, these kids—never been in a church before—are looking at the sky and I'm wondering, quite honestly, what the hell is going on. Anyway, one more time, she says, "Who here loves Jesus?" And little Spencer, the neighbour kid, puts up his hand and he goes, "I love Cheezies"—Cheezies, yes. There's a big difference between Jesus and Cheezies. Anyway, after, we moved churches. But sometimes you hear what you want to hear, right? So I think that this government was hearing certain things and so designed a piece of legislation which sounds really good on paper.

Listen, who doesn't want to buy Ontario? Who doesn't want to support our sector? Well, in 2021, I brought forward a piece of legislation to respond to the pandemic because, Madam Speaker, we learned a lot of lessons during the pandemic when we didn't have PPE, when we didn't have the medical innovations, when we didn't have access to vaccines. And they said, at that time, "This will never happen to us again"—never again.

And yet, the life sciences sector who continue to come to this place year after year after year—and I was on the life science all-party caucus back in 2012—have been asking for a procurement pipeline for research and innovation, and commercialization of that innovation. So that not only can we hold the intellectual property here in Ontario—in Toronto, in Kitchener-Waterloo, in Ottawa—and hold the IP, we hold the research and we hold the jobs,

but almost more importantly, we have the medical health benefits of supporting the sector. And when the sector—research and innovation, medical innovation—feel supported, then they are emboldened to actually reinvest and double down because they know they have a partner in the government. When they know that they have a partner in the government, they know that the investors will also come to the table, right?

I think of Intellijoint in Waterloo, one of the first companies that I ever sat down with as a newly elected MPP after that historic by-election back in 2012. They were at the Accelerator Centre, which is an ecosystem that supports the business plan, the mentorship and the financing of these young companies whose dream is to be part of the economic ecosystem and, also, obviously, to help people.

Intellijoint deals with knee and hip replacements, and I was shocked to learn that in the past, for many, many decades now, surgeons get in there on your knee and hip, and they're sort of just estimating where the replacement joint happens. Intellijoint designed a system that was specific, that was measured and that reduced the risk to the patient by almost 82%. But could they get down on University Avenue here? Could they get into our hospitals? No. The Liberals were part of that all-party caucus, the Conservatives were part of that all-party caucus—we all agreed, but nobody was going to move forward and create that pathway. That's a lost opportunity, I would have to say, because now they have a pilot project, and I think they're in three Ontario hospitals 12 years later.

We have something in this province called "pilot-itis," where we only value pilot projects, even though the evidence and research proves that this is beneficial to the economy, to our academic ecosystem and also to the health benefit of the people who we're elected to serve. There's so much groundwork that has been done to finally get to this point, where it took a temper tantrum by the United States President for us to actually consider moving forward in a contractual way, in a structural way. I do want to point out, though, that the loopholes still exist.

But just to complete the life sciences—because this is actually a passion of mine. This is one of the areas where we have lost huge jobs. These small startup companies get bought up by Silicon Valley, and we lose the intellectual property, we lost the potential for health benefits, we lose the jobs. It's time for Ontario to start winning again. That's the province that we are fighting for and that is why we brought forward a buy-Ontario strategy on November 3.

Just to remind folks, we said, "The government of Ontario must implement Ontario-first procurement criteria that prioritizes contracts for Ontario and Canadian businesses that can offer local jobs for all public spending contracts issued by the Ontario government, ministries, agencies, municipalities, and other provincially funded institutions, as well as ban US companies from receiving public contracts until the trade war is over."

Well, the trade war, I believe, unfortunately, is not going to be over. We are in a completely new economy right now. It doesn't matter if a Democratic President gets

in. It doesn't matter if it's a very progressive politician who understands that diversifying the procurement chain will strengthen the economy. We like to say in this province that diversity is our strength, but it's clear that some people in this House do not fully believe that.

As I said, Ontario spends approximately \$30 billion each year on goods, services and infrastructure through public procurement. This would include ministries, agencies, Infrastructure Ontario, the LCBO, hospitals, municipalities, school boards—poor LCBO, poor school boards, poor hospitals, poor colleges and universities—that use public spending for procurement.

I do want to say that Supply Ontario was created, I now want to say, five or six years ago. Supply Ontario, you'll recall, was a new agency created by the government to create another level of government—which is also ironic. Supply Ontario is supposed to be one-stop shopping to have real focus on mobilizing and amplifying the power of our procurement dollars to benefit Ontario. It went through four presidents in four years. Their turnover, obviously, was incredibly destabilizing. No one at that time had a clear view and mandate for how Supply Ontario was going to work; how it was going to amplify and support the economy; who was going to benefit the most from this.

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I had an early meeting with them, I know, in 2020 or 2021, and I said, "What are your goals? What is your mandate?" They were still working on it at the time. But this one-stop shopping thing was a very catchy sort of phrase, you know. My bill was actually endorsed by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce because they saw the value of businesses being able to access government contracts, support local economies, but also produce really good, quality services.

Ontario's service economy is our strength. The government tries to punch down on it, but we have good talent in this province and good services that are the envy of the world.

Anyway, Supply Ontario moved over, four presidents went through Supply Ontario over four years, and my understanding is that one of the government's friends is now running that Supply Ontario. I'm sure everything is going to be fine now; I'm sure everything is going to be fine.

I do want to say, you can also look at a government by past behaviour and past actions. We heard this morning, the energy sector does create a lot of jobs—no doubt about it, Madam Speaker. However, the SMRs that this energy minister is talking about—this is US design, this is US steel, this is US enriched fuel going forward. This is a US business contract, whereas you have Candu—Candu's reputation, as our energy critic talks about often: Candu is Canadian. Candu is on time. Candu is under budget. Choices have been made which demonstrate that the government is not entirely committed to buy Ontario or buy Canada. If you need to bring in a piece of legislation that holds you to the words that you are saying or to the press releases that you are releasing—this is a pattern of behaviour that we've become too accustomed to, I would say, Madam Speaker.

I just want to end with the loopholes and the problems, because I do want to acknowledge that this is not an easy navigation for this government.

I was just meeting this morning with the mayor of Waterloo. This is where I learned that all fire trucks are constructed and built in the United States—all fire trucks. We just had the firefighters here yesterday. It was really great meeting with them. Also of interest, I'm sure, to the minister: All voting tabulation mechanisms in Ontario—in fact, in Canada—are also made in the United States. We will have to have some difficult conversations about how you sometimes carve out some of these sectors. Ontario is not going to automatically get in the business of developing voting tabulation machines between now and October 2026.

If there was ever a piece of legislation that should go to committee, it would be this one. I hope that it does, and I look forward to further debate.

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

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: I listened very carefully to the member from Waterloo and her comments.

I was very disappointed to hear at the beginning of her speech that she did not support our wildly successful ad campaign in the United States that really drove the message home to Americans of the troubles of tariffs. Unlike the opposition, we won't apologize for standing up for Ontario.

Speaker, the government's procurement reform is part of a broader economic strategy to deepen Ontario's manufacturing and service sectors, create jobs and retain investments. I want to ask the member, will they stand with Ontario's future or are they going to continue opposing our Building Ontario Businesses Initiative?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think the member should put "#sarcasm" at the end of that statement.

Listen, the ad campaign that the Premier developed on the backs of the taxpayers of Ontario was solely about this Premier. It was not about our economy. It was not about the people of this province.

The only person who had to apologize, unfortunately in the middle of negotiations, was the Prime Minister of Canada. He had to apologize for the behaviour, the conduct and the interference in the negotiations on behalf of the Premier.

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, you've got something else to say? I look forward to you saying something of value.

Let's just end this by saying, Madam Speaker, that I would say that the Premier of Ontario should apologize to all the businesses that now have an additional 10% tariff on their sectors, because that is hurting the economy of Ontario.

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

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you to the member from Waterloo. I was very interested to hear you talk about Supply Ontario as something that has already existed here for possibly five or six years. Yet I look at when the \$9-

billion contract went to Hitachi to build the Ontario Line. That was 2022, so I'm thinking about 2020 is when Supply Ontario was probably developed. Then Staples, of course, was given away in 2024. WSIB has been giving away jobs to an American-owned corporation this year.

I'm wondering if you have any concerns about this government actually following through on a commitment when it seemed like they were sort of pointing in that direction with Supply Ontario but, in fact, took a very different direction in reality.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much to the member for Thunder Bay–Superior North. She quite rightly has been on the WSIB file and was one of the first MPPs to bring this to our attention: that, as an agency, they were contracting out their leadership development money and contracts to Americans.

WSIB is uniquely and somewhat unfortunately made in Ontario. There are a number of issues at play with this agency, including how they treat their workers and the mental health of the workers that exist in that agency, who we've met with and we've talked with.

Yes, look, the sole-sourced deals that have happened thus far—Staples, I think, is one of the most egregious. This is the privatization of public services, where the public as a whole are not getting good value for money. I think that, at the end of the day, the government usually goes down to the lowest bidder, even regardless of if they're from Ontario or Canada. In fact, they're often not. But then those contracts actually get a top-up, because nobody could deliver those services at the time. So a whole new lens needs to be applied to these contracts.

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

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you to the member for your remarks on this bill. I actually really enjoyed listening to it. I enjoyed being reminded of the important work by a company like Intellijoint in your area as well.

I have to say I'm kind of as blown away as you by the question about the video and how this is supposed to be helping us here in Ontario, and then introducing a bill like this, that ultimately the government could already be doing. But now they've once again introduced these exorbitant powers, among a few, to make decisions.

I just wondered if you wanted to comment a little bit more about why we think that we could trust the government with this kind of set of powers that are articulated in this legislation.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore. I think that what we're talking about, perhaps, under the surface a little bit is the lack of credibility that this government has and the lack of trust that it has. This is why when you're crafting a law, this law needs to be very clear, and it needs to be very specific in who is going to have access to these procurement dollars and who is not.

When you look at the way that this government has issued funding from the Skills Development Fund, this raises a red—or a blue flag, whatever you want to call it. It calls into question how the government is making

decisions. This weakens the economy as a whole. Investors don't want to come to Ontario because we're playing Russian roulette here with how funding is distributed, and that compromises the strength of our potential.

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

Mr. Steve Pinsonneault: Speaker, this question will go through you to the member for Waterloo. Why does the opposition claim concerns about transparency when this legislation mandates public sector entities to document local preference decisions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I mean, I think it speaks to the credibility and trust that I've already mentioned. But also, when people show you who they really are, maybe you should believe them, right? That's why legislation like this, given the track record of the US SMRs, US design, US fuel over Candu Canadian design, Candu on-budget projects—the choices that you're making really expose you for who you are fighting for. We know who you're fighting for. We're fighting for the people of Ontario; we're fighting for those sectors that are tariff-exposed and vulnerable to get us through the storm. All the while, you have been focused on who is donating to you, who is connected to you, who your friends and family are. This is your reputation right now.

So this is why the legislation has to be ironclad. People need to have confidence in this law. That's why it needs to go to committee so we can actually make it stronger.

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

MPP Jamie West: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to my colleague as well for an excellent debate.

We held an election in the middle of February last year to “protect Ontario,” and then on April 30, the Ontario NDP brought forward a motion that was called “buy Ontario.” The idea of this basically was because moms, dads, grandparents, when they're grocery shopping, wanted to know what was Canadian at the grocery store, and we wanted labelling to clearly say that. The Conservative government voted unanimously against that. They didn't want to do that. They were very proud that Galen Weston was filling his pockets with money, so they voted that down.

Then, November 3, we brought another one forward, and that was on Ontario procurement, so that in the public sector, when they're making purchases for paper and things like that, we would ensure that it would be Ontario-first. It's a common sense thing. When you talk to people—moms and dads, grandparents—they go, “That makes sense. That's what I'm doing in my household; you should do it too.” But the Conservative government voted that down too.

So you fast forward from our first motion about buy Ontario to about seven months later, and they bring this thing forward, and after the Skills Development Fund, after \$2.5 billion that probably is going to end up with another criminal investigation—and they're saying, “Trust us with billions of your dollars, because we're going to

protect Ontario; we believe in buy Ontario.” Why do you think, maybe, the public won’t buy it this time?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from Sudbury for that question. I do think it’s a values question that you’re asking here. I think that people are genuinely concerned about the values and the legislation that are actually coming out of this Legislature.

I mentioned that there is a pattern of behaviour here which compromises trust in our economy. Not to get overly personal, but when a government is picking losers and winners, this undermines the entire transparency of the procurement process. There has to be clear guidelines, there has to be transparency, and there also has to be accountability. This is something that these folks are definitely not that interested in, and they feel like the rules don’t apply to them, which is why Bill 72 has to be as strong as possible.

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

Ms. Lee Fairclough: I rise today to be able to address Bill 72, the Buy Ontario Act.

I would like to start by saying that buying from our small, local businesses, from Ontario, from Canadian companies and employers, in the face of tariffs at the moment, is particularly crucial. Our longest-standing trade partner, the US, imposing tariffs on Canadian- and Ontario-made exports has shown us that we need to strengthen our economic resilience right here in our province.

I think it’s important to also note that though this act is called the Buy Ontario Act, it is actually “buy Ontario and Canada,” really, because that is also reflected in the bill. We’ve passed Bill 2 so that we can ensure that we can continue to enable and improve our ability to trade within Canada and provincially.

These last many months, it’s also shown us that this province and this country need to diversify their trade relationships with countries outside the US. The federal government has shown leadership in this regard. We even hear from this government that they’ve been taking actions to ensure that we can diversify.

I am wholeheartedly supportive of Ontario and Canadian businesses, but I also think it’s a little misleading to frame any procurement or trade activity outside Ontario as completely harmful to the province. The idea that buying outside our border is automatically bad for Ontario is not true, especially when diversified trading is what keeps our supply chains stable, our businesses competitive and our economy resilient.

We have been working primarily to ensure that we have less reliance on the US. That has to be a priority. We can’t trust this President. There’s no question about that. We need to increase our reliance in other areas, and we definitely need to be able to bolster what we’re able to do within Ontario and within our own country.

It’s also important to just recognize that Ontario participates in multiple domestic and international trade agreements that forbid discriminatory procurement practices. If the Management Board of Cabinet issues directives that

violate such agreements, Ontario could face penalties, retaliatory measures or the loss of access to other international markets. I need to trust that the government knows that, but I think it’s important to point it out when we’re having this conversation.

Speaker, procurement matters precisely because it governs how billions of public dollars are spent and whether institutions get the highest-quality goods at the best value. Bill 72 does prioritize Ontario but also has some unusual repercussions if you don’t, which I will get into. By giving cabinet sweeping authority to dictate procurement rules, limit who can bid for procurement and even withhold funding from institutions that can’t comply, this bill potentially opens the door to higher costs; to some degree, reduced competition; and what I’m most worried about is potentially politically driven decision-making. Instead of strengthening transparency and value for procurement, Bill 72 concentrates power and undermines the very processes that allow our public sector organizations to buy responsibly.

Now, I thought I would just comment for a few minutes about procurement in the health sector. Speaker, as you know, I worked in the health sector for 27 years. As the former president of a hospital, as a leader for many years, I’m well aware of the procurement expectations. So I’d like to just talk about the reality of how that procurement would work in our Ontario public sector.

First of all, hospitals in the broader public sector already operate under a system where we get directives from government. Even the bill that’s being repealed here and replaced—it would include that. The government really has any ability they need to set regulations where they would like us to be prioritizing. For years we’ve received directives from the government and had to adjust. Even when this came out in 2022, organizations like hospitals and community health organizations, etc., all took steps to make sure that they could be compliant with that directive.

I think it’s also important to remind you that anybody working in those sectors is very accustomed to what a standard procurement would look like. There’s a set of criteria. There’s a group of people that review every proposal, and they score it independently. Then they make decisions based on the highest score. Now, in our current procurement system, you know the cost carries a fair bit of weight. It’s often financially driven, but those are the criteria, and we are expected to make decisions according to those criteria.

Much of the work that Bill 72 claims to introduce, I would just say, has been under way for years. And in fact, I was reading the recent commentary from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives this morning that, again, just question, is this bill simply the government rebranding the same policy for political effect?

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I mean, I can tell you, and I’ve heard it out of every member in this Legislature, actually: We love supporting our local businesses. We do. I love supporting Ontario. I love supporting our country. We all do. But we also know

that we have critical supply chains that are going to, by necessity, for the time being, rely on other trade partners. We definitely can't rely on the US, so we'll need to build some of those within Ontario and within Canada—I look forward to doing that—and then these other important trade relationships. We see the minister all over the world right now trying to do that, so their own government must support that approach as well. Let's be realistic about what we're trying to do here.

I would say that procurement today is driven heavily by cost. Under current directives, the scoring places enormous weight on choosing the lowest bidder, and that often puts our companies in Ontario and Canada at a disadvantage. You can imagine that you're procuring health care supplies, let's say, for a hospital, or medical devices. One is Canadian. One is from overseas. In our current practices today, if they scored equally on everything else and one costs less, we would have to choose the one that costs less. That may or may not be the one from Ontario or Canada. That may be from somewhere else.

The one thing I like about this bill is I think it would allow us to suggest that that should hold some more weight in those standard set of criteria that I'm describing when we're making our decisions. Right now, we would be required to choose only the lowest option. Well, let's be eyes wide open. That could require us to use taxpayer money in a different way. It might cost us a little more to buy those same supplies, but the premise is, we're actually prioritizing jobs, prioritizing employment here in our country. All of that I'm actually quite supportive of, especially if we're abiding by the laws that we need to.

The Intellijoint was a good example of this, actually, in the last debate—I just want to come back to that—where new innovations, I would say, at times, are disadvantaged because of the costs, and this would allow us to support some of those, to do more.

Now, we must be honest, though, about the practical limitations of buying in the province in highly specialized areas. Sometimes diagnostic equipment, surgical robots, certain pharmaceutical technologies, we may just simply not have suppliers for things we need every day today. And that is why any policy must be implemented realistically, with some level of flexibility built in. Again, we've got to think about this notion of penalties for public sector organizations or businesses for some of the circumstances that could be beyond their control.

Setting goals that favour local sourcing is appropriate, but it must be recognized that some procurement and health care could never be local given some of the complexity or specialization required of equipment and technology. I was recently looking at this from the perspective of medical isotopes, and there is one part in that whole supply chain that we actually need to rely on Germany to do. They're our partner in the process right now. Sure, one day, maybe we could do the whole thing here, and I think it's great to think about how we could do it. But we wouldn't be able to do that today. The intent of strengthening Ontario's industrial capacity is critically important.

Now, in terms of the increases in government oversight and power, I just want to speak to this because I do have several concerns as it relates to schedule 1. In this schedule, the bill allows the Management Board of Cabinet to issue directives to any public sector entity and requires that they comply with policy procedures or standards. We do that already. But what's different is that the bill hands cabinet the ability to rewrite those procurement rules without legislative oversight.

Future directives could be created behind closed doors, with no requirement for consultation, transparency or evidence. And this means the government can use procurement to reward political insiders or punish sectors it dislikes, with no accountability and complete impunity because the bill actually shields the government from many legal challenges.

Withholding funds: There is also a section in this schedule on what happens to the institutions that are unable to comply. If a directed public sector organization cannot meet the directives issued by the cabinet, the bill empowers the cabinet to withhold some or all of its provincial funding. The money stays frozen until the institution fully complies.

But the most serious part is this: If the issue isn't resolved by the end of the fiscal year, on March 31, the institution permanently loses that funding and the withheld amount is absorbed back into the government's general revenues. I'd like to think this wouldn't happen, but you could see using this as a tool to set up organizations to fail. I sure hope that's not what we would see, but in effect, hospitals, universities, colleges or other public sector organizations could face major financial penalties for failing to meet directives that may be difficult or even impossible to carry out. Again, this does come back to trust. We've talked about trust today, and I wish I had more trust that that would not be the case here.

Speaker, there is also a provision in this bill that suggests that the entity or organization in question is responsible for minimizing the impact of these funds being withheld. We've talked about a lot in here. When you consider this applying to our hospitals that are already facing close to a billion-dollar deficit, despite being the most efficient in the—

Interjection.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: I know you laugh, but I don't know why you laugh, because, actually, our hospitals are the most efficient in the country by far. We have some of the best-quality outcomes, despite it all. What we're saying is that this—and it's not just hospitals; it's other parts of the health system too. They have been stretched and stretched and stretched and set up for failure. With these funds being held and public sector organizations failing to meet the directives when they're so near to the brink, I worry about the implications, and I worry about the control that that provides the government, actually.

The bill also removes the legal protections for businesses. Schedule 1 stipulates that actions taken under a directive are exempt from the Discriminatory Business Practices Act, which protects the government from liabil-

ity and lawsuits regarding procurement. In other words, the government can issue procurement directives that violate this act, yet all businesses will be severely constricted in holding them accountable in court.

One of the biggest problems with this schedule, and with the bill more generally, is the vague language on an issue that demands clarity, to ensure the government does not overstep its authority.

Speaker, in schedule 1 it says cabinet can impose measures on how Ontario public institutions buy goods and services and then adds the phrase “without limiting the generality of the foregoing.” That means examples listed right after, like supporting Ontario businesses or promoting Ontario-made goods, are not limits at all. They’re simply illustrations of the much broader powers the bill can give. In practice, cabinet can order virtually any procurement measure it wants, far beyond what’s written on the page.

We also know that this schedule, the Building Ontario Businesses Initiative Act, is being repealed. That act already gave the government the authority to set regulations requiring public sectors organizations to consider Ontario businesses in their procurement decisions. In other words, the framework to do this already existed and it allowed the government to issue directives, establish criteria and shape procurement practices across hospitals, school boards and other broader public sector entities.

This act, I believe, also adds that same level to municipalities. So by repealing the act and replacing it with schedule 1 of Bill 72, the government is effectively tearing down legislation it introduced itself just two years ago, without explaining why a complete legislative reset is suddenly required. It raises again the question which we’ve already talked about: Is this simply rebranding existing powers under a new political banner? It leaves the public sector unsure of what rules they’re supposed to be following.

Lastly, I have to just say: I do just need to speak to some of the hypocrisy being introduced in the bill to “buy Ontario.” This government claims to champion Ontario businesses, yet it has failed to support 679 Ontario businesses and organizations through the Skills Development Fund. These were the high-ranked proposals submitted to you that were actually turned down. We know that over 56% of the \$2.5 billion in taxpayer money was directed to organizations that ranked low in meeting the objectives of this government.

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I talked about that whole process that we work so hard to follow in the public sector. We set criteria. We review. We score. And do you know what? We make decisions based on that. We’re held to account for that. But that is not what happened in the skills development program. In my world that I used to work in, poor-, low-, even medium-ranked proposals—we would actually say, “Do we have sufficient quality here to even move forward?” That’s how it would have worked.

Many Ontario businesses and organizations were better positioned to achieve these goals, and they were passed

over. These objectives set by this same government—they set the criteria that was actually assessed by a third party—included the development of a resilient workforce, fostering partnerships, driving innovation through collaborative training initiatives that build local capacity, supporting skilled trades and construction labour, and responding to US tariffs to support in-demand—so those were the criteria. There were 669 applicants that addressed one or more of those key objectives, and they received not a cent from the Skills Development Fund.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Not one cent.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Not one cent.

Meanwhile, we learned that more than half of those projects Minister Piccini’s office gave funding to were poor-, low- or medium-ranked against those goals.

You may wonder why we’ve asked so many questions. I take it to heart because we have held ourselves accountable for this in the public sector, and I don’t understand why this government doesn’t see they missed the mark on that.

The Auditor General also found 64 low- and medium-ranked projects that were funded, with a note saying “minister recommended”—that Piccini’s office chose them, and they were all organizations that had hired registered lobbyists.

Nothing about how the minister handled this \$742 million reflected any regard for the value of Ontario taxpayers’ money or for the businesses that were left off out of this meaningful funding.

This is a bill that is about procurement. This is a bill that lays out a whole bunch of requirements to hold people accountable, withhold funding if they don’t do the right thing.

This government claims it wants to “buy Ontario,” yet at the same time it’s funnelling millions through the Skills Development Fund to low-ranked proposals instead of supporting Ontario businesses and workers who actually did the work, met the criteria and should have been funded. So it is hard to take this government’s commitment to “buying Ontario” seriously, to be able to trust that we’re going to have a process around procurement that’s going to be transparent and fair in light of all of that.

And do you know what? This is just one example, Speaker. Again, we’ve seen it with the Staples agreement. We’ve seen it with Therme. We’ve seen so many examples of unfair procurement practices, and we’ve also seen lots of examples where Ontario and Canada were not being put first.

Overall, I share the banner that all of you want with this bill, which is—I want to support Ontario businesses. I want to support Canadian businesses. I would love to see them score in all those criteria we talked about—I would love to see that we put a bit more weight on that and it would allow us to do that. Even if it might cost us a tiny bit more to do it, we’d be supporting jobs in this province. I love the notion of all of that. But I’ve laid out some thoughts that I hope the government will consider as they move to implement this—

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

A reminder to all members that they must refer to others by their title or their riding.

Questions?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): No—*Interjection.*

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

Questions?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to the member for her comments.

I just wanted to start by informing the opposition that the 10% tariff that was threatened by President Trump at the end of October has yet to be implemented. I know we've all been busy here talking about the Skills Development Fund, so maybe you didn't have a chance to talk to exporters to find out that fact, but I just wanted to let you know that we can't always take President Trump at his word.

My question to the member is about our preference regime that we've designed based on the Canada Free Trade Agreement and other trade commitments, which limits the risk to legal action. I just wanted to ask the member if they trust that safeguard-based design for our preference regime.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Wow, you do definitely have more trust in Trump than I do. I certainly don't trust him. I'm not sure—I will disagree with you; I don't think the video was helpful to Canada's overall negotiating debate. And like was said, it was unusual that we have to see the Prime Minister in the position of needing to apologize for one of the leaders in our country at the same time.

In terms of your question around some of the legal protections that you've included in this, I think I characterized where my concerns were in how this would be implemented. Again, there are impunities and protections that are being granted to the government that actually put the vast majority of risk on some of the public sector organizations. I do have some concerns around that; that's a lot of power in the hands of a few.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the member for her remarks. She mentioned quite a few things, including some of the vague language in the bill, as well as how can we really take the government's word when it comes to procurement. I know the member has some experience with procurement, leading a hospital, and what we have seen over the years with this government when it comes to procurement and when it comes to some of the big decisions. She's mentioned the Staples agreement, and she's mentioned, I think, a few other examples.

Just recently, we're looking at these big signs, these giant signs that may need new poles because they can't put up those signs without those poles and the government is now going to figure out what to do, and they're blaming municipalities.

It really boggles my mind, in terms of whether the government has figured it out when it comes to these local things. Speaker, you know very well what happened with the licence plates—the invisible licence plate—that they want us to forget about.

Would the member speak a little bit about what she feels when it comes to this bill and whether they have gotten it right when it comes to procurement and whether we can trust them?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: I appreciate your comment and the other examples that you're pointing out around the government's experience with procurement and licence plates and the new signs.

As I mentioned in my debate, I do want to see us have a system where we could actually assign more scores in a procurement process to local, to Ontario, to Canada—I do. I think it would be great, and I think that there is a mechanism that they could do that today.

Where I'm more concerned is that we've moved to making this legislation, and also the fact that it is putting so much power in the power of a few at the cabinet table. I think that there's a lot of responsibility when you put that kind of power into a few, and I just want to be able to trust it will be done appropriately.

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

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you to my colleague from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for a wonderful debate that brings up so many questions, like why is this government giving a small group of cabinet ministers sweeping authority to issue procurement directives to any public sector entity without clear limits or legislative oversight? Why is the government empowering itself to add a proscribed public sector entity by regulation, allowing the act to apply to virtually anyone at any time?

But moreover, to my colleague, why do you think the government is creating a system where hospitals, school boards and municipalities can permanently lose provincial funding for failing to follow procurement directives? As someone who's worked in the industry and knows procurement, how could this possibly help in this type of legislation that's supposed to help buy in Ontario?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you for the question. Again, I believe that most organizations in the public sector are doing everything they can to be compliant with the directives that come to us. You're always going to see some bad actors here and there, but again, the vast majority are working to be compliant.

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Again, I worry a little bit about the impossible task where, if these organizations have worked to be compliant, worked to try to see if they could meet the expectations but we actually just don't have any of those suppliers in Canada, how that might be used against them. Again, this is the risk you take when you put the authority in the hands of a few to design these systems.

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

I've had car companies come to me—I won't name them—and say that it's great that Ontario has an electric vehicle strategy, it's great that we're putting money into supplying them, but—my gosh—why doesn't the Ontario government have a fleet strategy to buy electric vehicles, so we could actually stimulate demand for the electric vehicle plants that we're actually investing in?

So you're going to have to put some resources into making this work if public institutions are going to be the active players we want them to be in a buy-local campaign.

Speaker, in the few minutes I have remaining, I'm going to ask the government to apply “buy local” to themselves when it comes to this bill, and I'm going to ask them to do it when it comes to small modular reactors. This government is buying SMRs for the province of Ontario using US technology and locking us in to having to buy enriched US uranium instead of Ontario technology. No wonder our electricity bills have been jacked up 29% on November 1, because if you look at the cost escalation on these US-technology SMRs, they've gone from a cost estimate of \$4.1 billion for four SMRs in 2015 to—my gosh. Here we are in 2025, and they're going to cost \$21 billion now.

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No wonder our electricity bills are going up 29% and the IESO is projecting significant increases in the future. The current government is going with gas plants, utilizing US gas instead of Canadian. So why don't we apply “buy local” to our energy sector as well?

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

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to the member, my neighbour from Guelph, for his comments. I've been asking him some hard-hitting questions, but I appreciate his support for this bill and support for local businesses and Ontario procurement.

In this act, it sets out monetary thresholds below which Ontario businesses would receive purchasing preference so local firms can compete better. I just want to ask the member how that kind of change would support local businesses in Guelph and the surrounding areas.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I always enjoy getting a question from my neighbour in Wellington–Halton Hills here, since you surround Guelph.

I think it's good that we have preferences for small and medium-sized businesses. But Speaker, I've heard over and over again from small and medium-sized businesses that the government has to fix the procurement process. It's too complicated. It's too onerous.

So even if you're going to give them preferences, in the same way that you're talking about a one-window process for mining, we need a one-window, simple process for small and medium-sized businesses to be able to access government procurement. Because part of the challenge—I can tell you this as a small-business owner—is the time it takes to navigate the bureaucracy. We have to fix that in Ontario.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I appreciated the comments from the member for Guelph. He certainly shared some very useful examples of when the government has gone ahead and ignored its own stated commitment to buying local, even buying Canadian.

There have been numerous examples, in fact, of the government awarding public contracts to US or other foreign companies. The Garden City Skyway contracts were awarded to a consortium of foreign-owned companies just in June this year. In July, the Mississauga hospital contract was awarded to a US firm. Also in July, the WSIB contract was handed to a private company from Massachusetts.

My question is, do you think Ontarians might be a little bit skeptical about this government's commitment to ensuring that we procure locally?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member from London's question. If I'd had more time, I'd have given you more examples, so I appreciate the member asking the question.

This is exactly why I'm asking the members opposite, when we debate this bill, to look in the mirror and think about the decisions this government has made where they have put forward procurements that haven't bought local, haven't been Ontario, including in the past year, and what that means at a time when we're trying to benefit Ontario's economy.

So if you're going to put in penalties for the broader public service to “buy Ontario,” the same commitment to “buying Ontario” needs to apply to the government procurement at the provincial level as well.

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

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Thank you to the member for Guelph's remarks. I'm happy to hear that you agree.

It's going to be important, as we prioritize buying local, “buying Ontario,” that we realize there might be a slight increase in some of those costs. Given the sectors we're talking about that rely on government funding, there needs to be a recognition that that money will need to follow to make this effective.

I did want to ask you: Have you got any concerns around that whole penalty component of this bill?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member from Etobicoke's question. I do have concerns about penalties, especially when we're talking about public sector institutions that are on very tight budgets. That's exactly why, in my comments, I talked about the importance of providing opportunities to have incentives as well as penalties.

I can tell you about my own experience in working with, let's say, a hospital. We helped Scarborough hospital in Scarborough have a local food program back when I was at Local Food Plus. They did it for a while, but they actually had to pull back on it because of the cost pressure they were under.

So the government is going to have to make sure that our public sector institutions are properly funded so they can afford to buy Ontario.

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

MPP Billy Denault: It's an honour to rise today in strong support of Bill 72, the Buy Ontario Act, 2025. This landmark legislation delivers on one of the most important commitments our government has made to the people of this province, and that is to protect Ontario workers, Ontario businesses, Ontario families and the communities that they call home.

This bill could not come at a more critical moment for our province. Across Ontario, from small towns to urban centres, we have seen the impacts of global instability, harmful US tariffs and unfair trade practices that threaten the livelihoods of the men and women who power our economy. These challenges are not abstract. They affect real people: workers on the shop floor; small business owners trying to make payroll; and communities that have built their identity around manufacturing, agriculture, forestry and the skilled trades.

Our manufacturers, our skilled tradespeople, our small and medium-sized enterprises—they are looking for leadership. They are looking for stability, and they are looking for a government that understands that when public dollars are spent, those dollars should create Ontario jobs, fuel Ontario innovation and strengthen Ontario communities.

That is the foundation of Bill 72. With this legislation, Ontario is building on existing procurement and economic development measures to reinforce our supply chains, strengthen our economy and ensure that our province emerges stronger and more resilient in an uncertain global environment.

Every year, the public sector in Ontario spends more than \$30 billion on goods and services. For far too long, too much of that money left our province, even though Ontario is home to world-class manufacturers, innovators, engineers and supply chain specialists. Every dollar that leaves the province represents a missed opportunity for local businesses and Ontario workers. The fact remains, Ontario has everything we need to meet these challenges head-on and come out stronger.

We have diverse industries, abundant natural resources, innovative entrepreneurs and hard-working, highly skilled people. Bill 72 ensures that tax dollars stay right here in Ontario, supporting Ontario workers, strengthening Ontario businesses and securing Ontario's economic future.

Here is why Bill 72 matters. The Buy Ontario Act authorizes the government to issue directives requiring public sector organizations, including school boards, hospitals and broader public sector entities, to give preference to Ontario-made goods and services—not as a suggestion, not as a vague principle, not as a hope, but as a clear, enforceable requirement.

This legislation does the following: It sets transparent procurement rules, so every business knows what is expected when bidding on public contracts. It prioritizes Ontario first, then Canadian goods and services and then international sources only when necessary. It strengthens supply chains by keeping production and innovation close

to home. And it builds resilience, reducing our exposure to global shocks and unstable international markets.

Public dollars should support public good, and that means supporting Ontario workers. The importance of buy Ontario is reflected in every region of this province, and nowhere more than in my own riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, where manufacturing continues to be the heartbeat of our communities.

Let me share just a few local examples that illustrate why this legislation matters so deeply. And I know, having spoken on the member from Brampton East's motion earlier, that some of these may be reiterating them, but they're important.

When someone buys a Reactine allergy product at Shoppers Drug Mart, part of that product may have been made in Arnprior. When your kids lace up for hockey and wrap their sticks with tape, there's a good chance that tape was made at Scapa in Renfrew. When you renovate your home using MDF boards, the quality materials may have come from Roseburg Forest Products in Pembroke. In Arnprior, NuTech supplies Ontario's nuclear industry and has produced pressure tubes used in the Darlington nuclear reactors. Companies like Magellan Aerospace, SRB Technologies and Bubble Technology continue to innovate and push the boundaries of what Ontario manufacturing can achieve. I'm proud to say that they do all that in my own backyard.

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These businesses are not just economic anchors; they are community builders. They employ our neighbours. They sponsor our kids' sports teams. They support local charities. They keep small-town Ontario thriving.

Speaker, I recently spoke with a constituent—a prospective vendor for public-sector procurement—who told me about the barriers he faced under the old system. He said he was thrilled to see Bill 72 introduced. To him, this bill represents fairness, hope and a real opportunity to grow. Bill 72 gives businesses, like his, the opportunity he worked so hard for and deserves.

Thanks to the leadership of the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement, this bill arrives at a pivotal moment for our province. From rural communities to major cities, Ontarians are feeling the strain of global uncertainty, punitive US tariffs and unfair trade actions that put at risk the livelihoods of the people who drive our economy forward. These pressures are not theoretical; they touch the everyday lives of workers on factory floors, entrepreneurs working to keep their doors open and communities whose very character is rooted in manufacturing, agriculture, forestry and the skilled trades.

Our manufacturers, tradespeople and small and medium-sized businesses are calling for clear direction. They want stability. They want a government that recognizes that when public dollars are invested, those dollars must support Ontario jobs, spark Ontario innovation and strengthen Ontario's communities.

Speaker, I'd like to touch on a little bit of a local example that is just happening in the local municipal government in my riding: Think Renfrew County, a model

of local resilience. I want to highlight this example from my community because it shows just how powerful local action can be. In response to the rising threat of US tariffs, Renfrew county quickly embraced the Think Renfrew County campaign, a simple but powerful reminder that the strength of our economy begins at home.

This campaign reflects exactly what Bill 72 aims to achieve at a provincial scale. When residents choose to think local, think Renfrew county, think Ontario and think Canadian, they are doing more than making a purchase. They are reinforcing a resilient and self-sustaining economic ecosystem. From our farmers and food producers to our foresters and forestry sector, to our advanced manufacturers and small retailers, to the artisans and tradespeople who shape the character of our region, Think Renfrew County demonstrates how local choices translate into local prosperity. When we prioritize homegrown talent and locally made goods, we keep jobs here, we expand opportunities here and we ensure communities like ours continue to thrive for generations.

Speaker, earlier this year, I had the privilege of speaking on a motion brought forward by the member for Brampton East calling on Ontario to prioritize Ontario-made vehicles in provincial and municipal fleet procurement. That motion was rooted in the same core belief that drives Bill 72: When Ontario buys Ontario-made, Ontario wins. During that debate, I highlighted the strength of Ontario's automotive sector, with over 700 parts suppliers and more than 500 tool, die and mould companies supporting tens of thousands of jobs across communities like Windsor, Brampton, Cambridge and Alliston.

Those same principles guide my support for Bill 72 today. Whether we are talking about vehicles, construction materials, medical supplies, forestry products, software or advanced manufacturing components, the goal remains the same: Ontario tax dollars should drive Ontario jobs. This bill turns that belief into law.

Speaker, leaders in manufacturing—including the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, or CME—have expressed strong support for this legislation because they know it strengthens Ontario's supply chains, safeguards Ontario jobs and positions Ontario to thrive. Dennis Darby, president and CEO of CME, said the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters “welcomes the government's introduction of the Buy Ontario Act. Through CME's Ontario Made program, we have long championed the critical importance of local procurement, and this forward-thinking legislation demonstrates the government's commitment to turning this principle into action.”

Speaker, Bill 72 provides exactly that: protecting Ontario in uncertain times. We all know the global economic environment has become increasingly unpredictable. Harmful US tariffs are impacting industries across Ontario. Global supply chains remain fragile. Geopolitical instability has created risks we cannot ignore. Competition from foreign markets has intensified. We simply cannot afford to sit back and hope for the best.

Bill 72 is proactive, it is responsible and it protects Ontario workers from risks we cannot control. By keeping

procurement dollars at home, we reduce exposure to global disruptions, shorten supply chains for essential goods and services, strengthen domestic manufacturing capacity and build a more resilient economy. This is what real leadership looks like.

I want to continue to explain some more about how the bill works and how this legislation provides a clear framework for buying Ontario:

- public sector entities must comply with procurement directives that prioritize Ontario-made goods and services;

- supply chain managers and contractors must follow the rules;

- compliance reviews and corrective action can be taken when organizations fail to follow the directives; and

- any non-compliance will be met, ensuring accountability and fairness in the system.

This bill levels the playing field for Ontario businesses, particularly those small and medium-sized enterprises who often struggle to compete with large, multinational firms.

Speaker, this bill is not about shutting out global markets or abandoning value for money; it is rooted in common sense. When public sector organizations buy items like uniforms, software, cleaning services or construction materials, those purchases add up, and under Bill 72, for certain purchases under a set dollar amount, public organizations must look to qualified Ontario businesses first.

It's no different than, say, a family choosing the local plumber who knows the community and stands by their work. The job gets done, the money stays in the community and the local economy grows stronger.

It's like the small town hiring its local construction crew. They understand the neighbourhood, they take pride in their craftsmanship and every paycheque they earn goes right back into local shops and services that keep the community thriving.

Or it's like buying vegetables from your local farmers' market, which I know very well, given they are prevalent across Renfrew county. The produce is fresher, the growers know the land and every dollar you spend helps the very families who keep the fields green and the community healthy.

It's like the school hiring a teacher who grew up in the neighbourhood. They know the students, maybe their parents. They understand the community's values, and their work strengthens the very place that shaped them.

We will maintain value for money as a central principle of this legislation. We're not suggesting that an Ontario supplier should be selected just because they're local but ensure that they have a fair chance. If a local business meets quality standards, pricing and performance, why should they lose out to an offshore competitor whose profits leave this province? This bill answers that question decisively. Bill 72 supports job creation, keeps billions of dollars in the provincial economy, strengthens local supply chains, fuels innovation, builds public trust through transparency and helps Ontario respond to global economic uncertainty. It's about strategic economic development.

It's about ensuring the public sector leads by example, and, most importantly, it's about building a more resilient and secure Ontario.

Speaker, Bill 72 is not just a policy or procurement reform; it is a promise—a promise to protect Ontario workers, Ontario families, and, to communities like mine that have built their identity on manufacturing, agriculture, forestry, innovation and skilled trades, it's a promise that when Ontario spends, Ontario benefits. It's a promise that the prosperity generated by public dollars will stay in our communities, support our industries and build a stronger, more secure future for everyone.

1520

I urge all members of this house to support Bill 72 and help build a province that stands tall in the face of global uncertainty, a province that believes in its workers, its industries, its families and its futures. Ontario is ready to lead. Ontario is ready to grow. Ontario is ready to stand up for itself. Let's pass the Buy Ontario Act, 2025, put Ontario first and remain committed to protecting Ontario.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you to the residents of St. Catharines for letting me rise today and speak on their behalf.

Let me be crystal clear here: Before a single crane goes up and before the first beam is laid on the Garden City Skyway, this government must guarantee that Ontario workers and Ontario steel are up front and centre. Today I am demanding, on behalf of every steelworker, every fabricator, every tradesperson in Niagara, that this government commit now to using Ontario-made steel, hiring Ontario workers and ensuring this project is built by the people who live, work and raise their families in Niagara—no more loopholes, no more excuses.

Will this government be sending this bill to committee so local groups, like the Niagara benefits group, can ask questions and find out if we are going to be hiring local people to build the twinning of the Skyway in St. Catharines?

MPP Billy Denault: I appreciate the passion about buying local that the member is expressing. I, too, certainly share that passion, given the fact that the legislation at its core is about buying Ontario, about supporting those local supply chains, about building an economy that is stronger because of investments close to home.

At the end of the day, I think we all agree that when the public sector buys items like uniforms and cleaning services, these purchases add up. Of course, this is what this bill is all about, saying that purchases in Ontario should benefit Ontario-made businesses and protect Ontario's economy.

So I appreciate the question. There you go.

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

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I want to ask my colleague, if this bill is about competitiveness and resilience, why are community stakeholders, municipalities and sector organi-

zations excluded from any kind of meaningful Consultation?

MPP Billy Denault: I would say that, of course, we've consulted a number of times. I'll just name some of the major quotes from some of the major stakeholders.

The Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, as said in the speech, welcomes the government's introduction of the Buy Ontario Act: Through the Ontario Made program, CME has "long championed the critical importance of local procurement, and this forward-thinking legislation demonstrates the government's commitment to turning this principle into action."

I think we all agree that building an Ontario supply chain that is benefiting Ontario-made businesses is of great importance. I just hope to see the member, my colleague, my fellow class-of-2025 member support this bill.

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

Mr. Steve Pinsonneault: Thank you to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for the presentation. This bill introduces a formal definition of what counts as an Ontario business, which determines who can receive preference in procurement. Can the member explain in plain terms how the bill defines an Ontario business and how we make sure that definition is strong and enforceable?

MPP Billy Denault: I appreciate the question from the member there. The bill does provide a clear definition for an Ontario-made business: one that is headquartered in Ontario and local and is a medium-sized enterprise. So it's a very good opportunity to actually define what an Ontario-made business is, so that we can again have a bill like this legislation, this Buy Ontario Act, that benefits and ensures that local procurement opportunities are available for those small businesses.

I know one of my constituents who was very happy to see about this legislation would qualify and would be a clear example of that definition.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to follow up on the question that the member from St. Catharines asked.

This bill speaks about a buy-Ontario approach, procurement that supports local, but what we see is vague language that actually gives a lot of power to the few in the government. Steelworkers are asking for a buy-Ontario approach that is a real commitment.

So can we hear an answer from the member about whether that will be something that is part of this bill and whether it's going to committee?

MPP Billy Denault: The bill itself is about local procurement and about ensuring that local businesses have an opportunity and a level playing field to be able to bid. And of course, it's a clear example of how we are prioritizing Ontario first, then Canadian goods and services, while again maintaining that value for money for Ontario taxpayers, and protecting procurement and major infrastructure projects from undue delay. So it's a very positive

measure to ensure that local Ontario companies have an opportunity to participate, and it's one that I hope every member in this House will be supportive of.

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

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to my literal neighbour here in the chamber, the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, for his comments this afternoon and for his eloquent speech.

Speaker, this bill aims to promote Ontario-made goods and services. Similar to my question to the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore: How does this legislation balance this objective with the need to avoid discriminatory business practices and maintain compliance with trade agreements that we have?

MPP Billy Denault: Well, one of the benefits of this legislation is that it actually legislates and ensures that we are in compliance with the free trade agreements that we have signed.

I appreciate the question from my neighbour here. This bill is designed to help Ontario businesses, encouraging government agencies, hospitals and schools to buy goods and services made right here in our province. This bill also ensures that we play fair and follow important rules, that we don't break these trade agreements and that we don't treat anyone unfairly.

I want to explain a little bit in simple terms, as the member asked that. It lets the government sets rules so that Ontario companies get a better chance when bidding for contracts. For example, you know, if a school board needs a new computer, Ontario suppliers might get a preference, but the bill doesn't say that we can ignore everyone else or break promises we've made to other provinces or countries.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: I was listening to the member, and I think the member does agree that creating a level playing field for small and medium-sized businesses who are looking to access government procurement contracts is really key.

Now, a story just broke that a company was given \$2 million from the Skills Development Fund by the Ford family dentist. You know, \$2 million is a lot of money. His dentist also did contribute up to \$20,000 to the PC caucus.

Does the member feel, when these stories break, as they continually do, that this undermines and compromises confidence in the process? Because obviously trust matters, and we've heard from businesses that they are indeed looking for that level playing field, but they certainly shouldn't have to donate \$20,000 to have access to a fund like the Skills Development Fund.

1530

MPP Billy Denault: Thank you to my friend from Waterloo for the question. I feel that when the government buys things, like desks for schools or supplies for hospitals, people want to know that these decisions are benefiting the people of Ontario; that these procurements are ensuring and assisting in the local supply chain for

Ontario businesses; that when the public sector buys items like uniforms, that these purchases are benefiting qualified Ontario businesses first. That's the main crux of this bill and this legislation, and it's one that, again, I am hopeful to see that every member in this House will be supportive of, because it's a positive thing that we've heard and we should all be supportive of: protecting Ontario in this time of great economic uncertainty.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I'm very proud to stand and speak about buy Ontario. This is something that New Democrats have been talking about for a long time.

But before I get into the bill, I first want to congratulate the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery on tabling his first bill as minister, and I want to thank him and previous ministers in this ministry for the strong working relationship I believe we've had, as well as granting briefings and answering a lot of questions I've had for the legislation they table. I want to say that I appreciate it, and I want to appreciate the work of his staff in granting that, as well as previous ministers.

Now, returning to the bill: Last year, people might know, there was a presidential election; I don't know if it's common knowledge. And right after that election had happened, while Conservative members were still cheering, celebrating and exuberant with the results, many of them—well, I don't even know how they would be partying, but I can tell you that certainly they were very, very, very happy with the results of the American election; I can tell you that. While that was happening, very quietly on this side, New Democrats were introducing legislation—in fact, a motion about buy-Ontario policies, about putting more Ontario products on shelves—because we saw where things were going. We saw that even in the previous term of the current President, there were tariffs and a lot of talk about that sort of move at the time, and I think that made a lot of people, for many reasons, wary here, but that was certainly one of them. And at that time, we thought, “Look, we really need to get out there and we really need to talk about the importance of buying Ontario, and we need to protect ourselves to really move into that direction.” So I'm really happy to hear that legislation is being tabled to do just that, to buy Ontario.

And it is in stark contrast to what we have seen from this government, and there are a number of examples. In 2022, Ontario subway cars being produced in the United States: The amount of content requirements were actually dropped by this government, by this Premier, from 25% all the way down to 10%. And that saw this government at the time increasingly buying from the United States. Again, I say I'm happy to hear that we're debating buy Ontario, because past practice wasn't that.

In June 2025, the Garden City Skyway contracts were awarded to a consortium of foreign-owned companies. In July 2025, again, \$140 million of the Mississauga hospital façade contract was awarded to a US-owned firm. In July 2025, the WSIB and the Ford government confirmed that 26 jobs would be eliminated and actually handed to a

private company in the States. Again, in October 2025, Korean-made steel was being used in the E.C. Row Expressway and Banwell Road overpass in Windsor while steel jobs were actually leaving the province.

So what we have seen has been a pattern of this government reaching out, buying from the United States and leaving a lot of Canadian companies outbid. You could look at Ontario Place and what happened there as another example, where they took, really, one of the worst deals that they've ever done, which was to essentially spend \$2 billion to then in turn get back \$1 billion over 95 years and give it to a foreign company to put in a spa that nobody asked for.

So we've seen a pattern of this government making purchases outside of Ontario. I congratulate the minister again on his first bill and for tabling a buy-Ontario bill, because this is something New Democrats have been talking about for a long time. So, with regard to "buy Ontario," what I'd like to offer is in fact not criticism, but just thoughts around when you move forward with that.

How do you define "buying Ontario"? You have a large number of contracts that are currently in existence, where some of these companies might be procuring from the United States currently, and these contracts—do they get automatically rolled over? There's going to be a lot of these contracts that are out there, as we speak, and how do you move forward and address it—something that you should certainly be considering. How do you define that? I think what they're presuming is that, in some cases, they're willing to spend more if you buy local, if you "buy Ontario," if you "buy Canada." Of course, there is sense when it comes to that, because the money gets spent here, jobs are created here, if it's something that's being manufactured or produced—the money cycles, and it stays within our economy. Let's say you say, "We're willing to accept bids that are 5% or 10% or 15% higher"—it makes sense that the money will still stay in the province.

But I also want to caution—how do you set those criteria? Is it a hard number, is it a ceiling, is it a per cent that you're willing to pay more, if it's made in Ontario or Canada versus outside—let's say in Europe or other places? How do you actually address that? I think it's hard to quantify. What might cost you 5% more to purchase from this particular company in a particular project might be a far different scenario—maybe 15% would actually bring more money back into the province or back into the country.

Again, these are not criticisms. I think these are things that you should certainly consider as you move forward and you implement this.

What happens when companies—and we see this in so many large-scale infrastructure projects, where you know they come in and they underbid. We see this all the time with major projects. They come in and they tell you, "Don't worry. We're going to do this, and this is what it's going to cost you, and this is therefore what it's going to cost the taxpayer." And then, lo and behold—all you have to do is think about every transit project that has ever been

done, everything you can think of. They always come back at higher and higher costs.

Mr. Chris Glover: What, the Eglinton Crosstown didn't come in on budget?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: There's an example.

I'm sure the government must be frustrated to see this happen. How do you control that?

Again, this is not a criticism; this is not something negative about the bill. It's just something I really want to raise here.

What happens to these companies that promise a supply chain that is within Ontario businesses, Canadian businesses, that they're actually creating jobs here—what happens when those elements change? They come in and they say to you, "We're going to do this project for you. This is how many jobs are going to come in. This is the Canadian component." And then all of a sudden, that changes, because they tell you, for whatever reason, "This contractor changed their mind" or whatnot. You never know what they really intended at that point. Was this just a great slide deck they showed you? Who knows? How do you change that? How do you deal with that? I think this is something that the government has been very deficient in—and it has been enforcement—in many different ways.

When you bring well-meaning legislation forward—and of course, "buy Ontario" is something we have been talking about on this side of the House for many years now—how do you actually address that, when these companies that you're procuring from start to break the rules? What we've seen from this government, in the past, is legislation that comes back with all sorts of increases in fines in many different ways.

The Consumer Protection Act was rewritten again, to the credit of the previous Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery. This was a bill we supported. I had lots of positive things to say at the time about the bill—and of course, we asked for more. In that bill, just like in much other legislation that this government has tabled here, we've seen an increase in fines in many different ways, but we just never see the enforcement. You have Consumer Protection Ontario. You have a hotline that you can call. But there seems to be no interest in actually pursuing that.

So what I'd like to say to the minister as well is, getting that enforcement side really strengthened is absolutely imperative, not just for this bill but for so much legislation that is being tabled here. If you don't get the enforcement right, if you put out a set of rules and you say, "This is what we expect. This is what we're aiming for," and bids start to come in and people begin to start promising one thing and offering you something else, I really hope that this government is going to show its teeth when it comes to that and really put these people, these businesses in line.

1540

Because, really, enough is enough. We see it in so many different projects. I don't know why the government in so many cases have been so accepting of what's been happening, again, in the transit projects and other larger-scale infrastructure projects.

Mr. Chris Glover: Could be donations.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Well, I'm trying to be very positive today on this one, and those who know me know that sometimes I might—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: But with regard to this, I'd like to say that I'm really hoping that past practices of this government get shelved, because "buying Ontario" is certainly well-meaning legislation that we see and it is imperative that you get it right.

I'd like to say that I'm very happy to see buy-Ontario legislation being tabled. I'm very happy to hear that the minister is looking that way, and I hope—because this government has talked about this in the past, but we have not seen a pattern of that.

One of the criticisms that I have levelled about the ministry, though, in the past is that they're having a lot of sole-sourced contracts being handed out by this ministry. We saw it with regard to Staples and others. Companies, in many cases, just slap the word "Canada," but they're owned by private equity firms in the States and whatnot. We have seen this government constantly relying on sole-sourced contracts. We saw that over the course of the pandemic, how vaccines were being handed out and distributed. A lot of times, they go for the big-box retailer, many times really funded from big American companies, and they forego the smaller businesses that are Ontario-made. We see that now in the move to take ServiceOntario and put them in Staples. Again, money is being taken away from smaller Ontario operators and being put into the big-box stores. I understand, in many cases, the government will argue that it's easier to deal with one large company than many smaller ones, but the reality is, it's the opposite of what you're trying to achieve today.

What we want and what I want is for you to get this right, to be serious about what you say and to make this a reality. And, of course, as you set this up and the regulations come through, find ways to ensure that this government is not taken advantage of, and when you do procure and you go out there and you purchase those services, that you really get the microscope out, get the magnifying glass, and when they break their contracts, to punish them, because this is just going to continue and only get worse.

Of course, the government loves to put out omnibus bills, and this certainly isn't one of those where you literally need a team of people to walk in and weigh several pounds throwing it on your desk. There are, of course, multiple schedules to this bill. One schedule does talk about the Highway Traffic Act, that I'd like to get into.

This is one of those examples where this government and the police were on two different sides. This is with regard to the speeding zones. This is with regard to the cameras. Because, obviously, we're now seeing the schedule and it's talking about ordering municipalities to put up "Slow Down, Kids at Play" signs. Of course, we're all for signage, but signage is a reminder, a suggestion, at best.

If you look at the school zones and the school communities, even public—there's so much speeding that's going on, especially in the school zones. We've seen the fatality of children—the absolute worst tragedies that you can imagine: injuries, accidents. In fact, it's prompted many civilians that live in front of schools to go and put signs on their own private property begging people to slow down. Of course, most of the school zones have things like flashing lights, large signage and all sorts of other things to discourage speeding. But, Speaker, it might come as a shocker or surprise that people still speed.

And so when this government—and I know this government likes to govern and take advice from, again, a nebulous cloud of individuals and stakeholders around the PMO and whatnot. We see a lot of that coming out with the scandals like the SDF and others. But they also like to govern by the polls and what they think is going to be popular, not necessarily, in many cases, what they may even believe in. So in this regard, we are seeing them standing opposite of the police, health care professionals, doctors, hospitals, parent groups, school communities, because those cameras in front of the schools did slow people down. And this is what was reported by the police and many others when the studies were done. So to simply think that putting up a sign that says, "Slow Down. Kids at Play"—sure, it's a great reminder. Also, they're driving by a school; that might be a suggestion that there are children around. So I guess adding that second sign beside a school might remind people that, hey, kids actually go to school. I think most drivers understand that that's understood.

So again, this is just some populist move, and this is what they're basically saying, is, "We're going to put up signage, and miraculously, it's going to stop speeding," just like, I guess, they said that auto theft would end in the province of Ontario by taking away the licence of criminals after they stole a car three times. Lo and behold, that legislation passed, and it probably came as a shock that theft still happens in the province of Ontario when it comes to vehicles.

Interjection.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I know; it's a surprise.

So, really, I think what they did was they took away a tool that actually had teeth, and the police—don't take it from anyone here; take it from the police: It actually did reduce speeding. And I'm going to say that a number of people even on the government side were probably against it, but they did it anyway, because, hey, you know what? That's what the pollsters probably told them to do, and above all, they just want to be popular, which—anyway, I don't want to go down there, because they continue to do things that are absolutely baffling and not popular, but they still go down it. They really pick and choose what they want to follow.

This is one of the ones that they removed. I can simply tell you that putting up those signs is not really going to change anything, because those signs already exist. I can tell you, in the city of Toronto, if you drive by any school zone, you're going to see flashing lights. You are going to

see signs on private lawns and whatnot. So I guess you're trying to fix problems that you're making—okay.

The last thing I want to talk about is schedule 3, with regard to condo provisions. Again, I want to thank the minister and the ministry. I have been granted briefings, and we've had multiple conversations about changes in terms of condominium reforms and strengthening the laws to protect people living in condominiums, whether they own, whether they rent, and there's a lot more that needs to be done.

I can continue to tell you that there are multiple—and I know the minister knows this. These delegated administrative authorities, in every single one, you continue to see issues and challenges and problems. And I can tell you, there are going to be condominium communities, condos in your community that have had problems, whether it's been with a property manager or fights or whatnot internally, where they've gone to the authorities ultimately looking for that help, and they get frustrated.

So, there's a lot of work and reform that's needed there. The government has done what many on the side of the NDP have been calling for. In fact, we've all been calling for that: expanding the powers of that tribunal. And I know that they continue to consult and add more ways in which people can bring their issues not expensively and time-prohibitively through the courts but through the tribunals there. And it is a move in the right direction. But I really think they are taking far too long to continue to expand that. We see that when they want to move quickly, they move really quickly. But it's good to see that they continue to modify the acts to protect people within the condominiums. They really have to do more. I'm hearing it in my constituency. I know that you are, as well. Continue to expand that tribunal and continue to strengthen those laws.

Again, in the small amount of time that I have remaining: We on this side have supported a number of consumer protection measures that this ministry has had. We continue to make amendments whenever they come up within committee. We continue to table real, fulsome changes, like a consumer watchdog in Ontario, because as it stands right now, Consumer Protection Ontario simply is not doing enough. And I really hope that the minister—we have a new minister now taking on this file—will really consider what it means to have teeth to protect consumers.

1550

I want to thank the minister as well for bringing and talking about buy-Ontario policies. This is something we've been asking this government to do. This has been something we've been demanding. There is a pattern, a history that I repeat, where this government continues to procure and buy outside of Canada in many different ways, and they have signalled and they have tabled legislation in different ways claiming to “buy Ontario.” Let's hope that this time, under a new minister, they actually do what they say.

It is imperative that you get it right, because otherwise you will be creating more and more problems for yourselves. When those companies that you procure from come

in and promise and say, “We're going to be buying Canadian. We're going to be ‘buying Ontario.’ We're going to be creating jobs here. The money is going to cycle and stay within this economy,” and they break those rules—you know what? Hold them to account. You have to do it. Ontarians and taxpayers are counting on you.

I want to again thank you for the opportunity to talk and to discuss this bill, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much to my colleague the member from—it's very long.

Mr. Chris Glover: Humber River–Black Creek.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Humber River–Black Creek. I should know that—and a fellow colleague from city hall, back in the day.

Thank you for your speech. I am always captivated by your every word. I'm wondering if you had any thoughts on actually what is the best form of traffic-calming measures? Did you think it was the speed cameras that were so ridiculously removed or what? What would be your best idea to slow down traffic around our vulnerable populations?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I want to thank the member for the question. She works very hard. I know safety is something she cares about, and it's always great to listen to her speak in the House as well.

What I can say is this: It takes a lot of different ways to reduce speeding. Of course, you need to have a police presence. There are different ways in which you could build intersections and whatnot to discourage speeding. But of course, if you listen to the police and if you listen to the parents, the school communities, the hospitals, they all said that those cameras situated in front of schools had a reduction in speeds. When you talk to these groups, for them to just blanket-remove everywhere—really didn't look at what the situation is. Because simply saying, “We're going to put up a larger sign that discourages people from speeding” and thinking that's going to result in anything—really?

Speedbumps—like, what are you going to do? Put them on a highway and create—like, I don't know what. Some sort of a—what was that movie called when they were flying around crashing cars?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Planes, Trains and Automobiles?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Well, there's—anyway. You know those action movies. I mean, really—some of the things that we heard from this government. The Fast and the Furious, right?

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

Hon. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member for the speech; I appreciate that. You had some very positive comments in there. I think I get the sense that your party is probably going to support it, which is great. I don't want to speak on your behalf.

But there's been, I think, pretty strong support across the province for this bill from people I've talked to. I saw

one negative column in the Toronto Star the other day, which talked about how this bill was running in contradiction to free trade within Canada, which is, in my view, completely nonsensical. I wonder if you had any thoughts on—I'm not sure if you read the article or saw it, but it's basically saying that by supporting Ontario and Canadian businesses, we're not supporting free trade within Canada. Both of these, in my view, are worthy goals: free trade within Canada and supporting Ontario. Do you feel the same?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Again, I want to personally congratulate you for your first legislation as minister. I haven't read that article yet. I haven't seen that as well. But I can tell you that on this side of the House, we have been calling for more stringent buy-Ontario policies, and I understand that what I believe you will be looking at is obviously prioritizing “buy Ontario,” then “buying Canada” and then moving outward in that sphere.

It is imperative, especially in this time, that we protect the economy here, we protect the jobs. This is something we've been saying, and it's good to finally see that the government is listening to this side and joining us in the call for more “buying Ontario.” It's just imperative that this government gets it right. We've seen that it's been said in many different ways and there have been many examples where it hasn't, but when it comes to “buying Ontario,” we want to see it get done right. This is something we're asking for. We must protect our economy here in this province and our jobs. Again, I appreciate you for tabling the legislation.

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

MPP Jamie West: Thank you very much, Speaker, and thank you as well to my colleague from Humber River–Black Creek. I thought it was a great debate.

The concern I have with this bill is that there are a lot of bills that have fanciful titles, creative writing titles, that don't reflect what's in the bill. I know this is about “buying Ontario,” but we have tabled two motions about “buying Ontario” from the NDP; one last May that they voted against, where it was just simply labelling so you knew stuff was from Ontario. The second one was less than a month ago about just almost what they're claiming to do in this bill. They voted against both of those.

Now, you said in your debate as well that they contracted out jobs for WSIB, so 26 Ontario employees will lose their jobs to Iron Mountain in Boston. We know that the GE Hitachi American-made SMRs are reliant on an American fuel supply, and they're about five times over budget already. You mentioned Therme spa. For \$2 billion, 95 years later, we'll get a \$1 billion return on investment.

My concern is that in this bill, there's going to be “buy Ontario,” but it'll be business as usual, where they continue to buy American. Do you have concerns about that as well, or do you feel there are things in this bill that will hold them to account?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Look, this government has made many different promises that they haven't necessarily

kept. For sure, I don't think anything really binds them within this bill. I want to be optimistic and also pragmatic and realistic. If you look at past history, this is a bit of a—if not a full 180, it's certainly a 90-degree departure.

I think we're really going to have to trust in this government to go ahead, get it right and actually do what they say, because past history has shown that they have been handing out those sole-source contracts to American companies and whatnot, and this is a departure from what they're doing.

But considering the fact that we've continuously been calling for this, that they have been voting against it many different ways, I really want to see the government actually do what we've been asking them to do, which is “buy Ontario,” protect our economy, create the jobs here and keep the money cycling within this economy.

We are going to be watching like a hawk. When we see that they are actually going to be—especially now with this legislation—not doing this, you're going to be hearing from us, and I'm sure the media is going to be looking and reporting on examples of where they're not following this.

We are counting on them to get it right, and let's hope this time, unlike so many times before, they actually do what they say.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: I also want to echo what the member opposite said about the work that the ministry has been doing on this issue of the condo act reform and also the Buy Ontario Act. We had a briefing with the ministry staff. Both of us were really pleased with how forthcoming staff were and the ministry's real interest in coming up with an act that makes a lot of sense and is really going to help Ontario. That was both of our sentiments.

I have a question to the member for Humber River–Black Creek. I know you've done a lot of work around consumer protections for condo residents. If the government is looking at moving forward with reforming condo legislation, what would you like them to do?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I want to thank the member and actually really thank her for her leadership on many different issues. Of course, housing is something that's been near and dear to her, and she's really been a leader as well on condo reform.

We really need to expand the tribunal. We really need to expand what condo owners can do to get resolved and not have to go through a very costly and cumbersome time commitment of going through the courts. What we see currently right now is that individuals sometimes or owners are fighting boards, or vice versa, and a lot of the time their money gets wasted. Seeing a tribunal whereby condominium owners or people that live in condos can go there, quickly have it resolved in a way that's not time-prohibitive is something we really need to see. We know that the government has been adding opportunities for that, but we do think it's taking a little bit of time, and we're hearing that from people living in condos. So we want to see a lot more done with the regard to the Condominium Act. Thank you for the question.

1600

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We have time for a super fast question from the member for Newmarket–Aurora.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Super fast. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

This legislation and the associated policy redesign aim to open the procurement doors to local suppliers who previously struggled to compete. My question to the member opposite: Will you stand with the local businesses, including in your riding, and help these businesses?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): And a super fast response from the member from Humber River–Black Creek.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I and all New Democrats stand always on the side, especially, of our small-business owners and small business in this province. It is the backbone of our economy. We have been calling for measures to continue to “buy Ontario,” to prioritize businesses, jobs and the economy here in this great province that we live in.

We hope that what has been put in this bill is something that you take very seriously, because in many ways it has been a departure of past policy. But we on this side want to see “buy Ontario” and it has been a priority for us for all the years that we’ve been here.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate? I recognize the member for Beaches–East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It’s great to be here at Queen’s Park in the chamber, and especially to see you in the chair over there.

I’m happy to rise and speak on behalf of Ontarians and beautiful Beaches–East Yorkers about Bill 72, An Act to enact the Buy Ontario Act, 2025.

So, lots of bills coming out fast and furious, with a rapid speed—some of them missing committees. We can all get behind buying local, buying Ontarian, shopping locally and supporting our businesses, especially mom-and-pop shops, for sure.

Bill 72 enacts the Buy Ontario Act under schedule 1, amends the Highway Traffic Act under schedule 2 and amends the Legislation Act under schedule 3, as you’re well aware.

Schedule 1, section 3, of the Buy Ontario Act permits the Management Board of Cabinet to issue directives that would mandate public sector entities and the third parties working with them to abide by specific procurement policies, procedures and standards. One of these directives may be to give preference to Ontario- and Canadian-made goods and/or services.

Section 6 permits the Management Board of Cabinet to withhold funds from those entities described under the act if they fail to comply with previously mentioned directives, while schedule 7 introduces requirements for reviews of public sector entities’ compliance with the directives, and take action based on the result of the review. The act also excludes the government from liability under the

Discriminatory Business Practices Act. Note these reviews and directives are mandated under the legislation to be made public or available upon request.

I like that it says not only “buy Ontario” but purchase Canadian. This is a fresh change from this government that actually prioritizes transparency, and something that they could really do more of. As we know, there are not the most transparent things going on.

As my colleagues have noted, I do agree with taking measures to ensure that we prioritize Ontario- and Canadian-made goods. Most notably, the recent reckless actions of our neighbours to the south have necessitated that we ensure we support and promote local businesses and manufacturing.

Also, because Ontario is a terrific province, we have wonderfully talented skilled workers, inspiring creatives, and effective and knowledgeable teachers ready to instill their knowledge to new generations. And importantly, our strong workforce is composed of people both born in Ontario and Canada, and those who have chosen our wonderful province and nation as their home. As we know with Toronto, over 50% of the population was born outside the country—and we say diversity is our strength. That’s our motto and what makes Toronto such an amazing world-class city. Everyone brings their ideas, their culture and their knowledge here, which can only make us that much better. As I said, we are so lucky that so many skills and so much potential are in our province.

I have a few of these brilliant businesses that we do have in our province to showcase the capabilities of Ontario made right in beautiful Beaches–East York. We have a cookie factory called Mondelēz, and if you’re anywhere in the east end at any given time of day, you will smell the cookies. If you’re doing yoga on the beach in the morning, you will smell the cookies all the way from East York down to the beach. If you went door-knocking—I would smell the cookies. Actually, at the Remembrance Day parade in East York, marching around the neighbourhood, we could smell Mondelēz.

I toured Mondelēz—gosh, a couple years ago—and they employ 660 people in Toronto. They’re in the business and industrial area of my riding of beautiful Beaches–East York. They bake amazing cookies—you’ve tried them.

The thing that was really interesting to me was that, because they’re so talented at baking, they also bake the Premium Plus crackers, which I’m sure everyone in this chamber has had. They are so good at it that they now make the Premium Plus crackers for all of North America.

Get this: They only make unsalted for Canadians. They make salted for Canadians, and they make unsalted Premium Plus crackers for Canadians, but they don’t make unsalted Premium Plus crackers for Americans. I mean, it’s healthier. It’s healthier for you, and I feel that my colleagues on the other side are salty enough, so you could use some unsalted crackers.

I’m looking at an article from, I guess, quite a few years back, because it has the former member of provincial Parliament from Beaches–East York. Arthur Potts is in the picture. It’s when the province announced \$22.6 million in

funding for an East York food plant expansion, which was Mondelēz.

It's all fantastic there with that factory. If you want to come out and tour it and taste some deliciously locally made cookies and crackers, come on out.

I also recently met with the Water Environment Association of Ontario, who spoke of the importance of buying in Ontario and creating in Ontario. Despite having the need and ability to expand water treatment and other waste water management facilities, projects are held up despite all of the infrastructure being in place because we no longer manufacture some of the technologies, which is what we have to get back to—get back to the basics of manufacturing like in the good old days. We must import some of them from other nations, and when every other waste water project also needs some, it gets tricky, because we are sometimes last in the list to procure this technology.

What is just as important as buying Ontario is cultivating the next generation of Ontario workers. Last week—oh, yes, this is interesting—the government shut down the Ontario Liberals' opposition day motion, which was a youth career fund, kind of like the Canada Summer Jobs Program, to address the high unemployment rate of kids in Ontario these days.

This proposed program would have used \$450 million of the Protect Ontario account—chump change, really, for you guys—and could create 47,000 to 75,000 jobs for young people to learn valuable skills that would not only bolster our workforce now but ensure a fierce, gifted, competitive and effective future workforce. So we want to be thinking long-term, and we owe it to our young people to cultivate a future environment where they will have jobs and where they can apply their skills.

1610

And as I've told you a couple of times in the House—and I know that you were hanging on my every word so you would remember these stories. This will be the third time I'm telling you: I introduced you to a wonderful grade 12 student from Monarch Park Collegiate named Jane Maguire. She was up in the gallery, and she had come to see me to present her slide deck on youth unemployment and how worried she was, and is, about it. She was here and very supportive of our opposition day motion for a youth career fund. Who wouldn't be supportive of that? Well, this government was not supportive of it, which just baffles anyone's brains on that. Hopefully, maybe you're just thinking, "Hey, that was a good idea from the Liberals. I'll just put a bee in my bonnet and remember it and slip it into one of our future bills to make it even better"—because we don't need the credit; you take the credit, but just do the action.

So the buy-local directive is an admirable one, but we also must ensure that we bring stakeholders—the people doing the procurement, the people offering the goods and services and those responsible for implementing these goods and services—into the supply chain to ensure that this is a sustainable ask, that it is not putting on undue burdens that would cause organizations to have to shut their doors and communities to suffer, and that if it is, we

consider the actions to ensure that these organizations can actually benefit from Ontario-made.

That's all I have to say about schedule 1 for now, other than we do want Ontario products for sure, but we don't want to let perfect be the enemy of the good, and we would need to support all of Canada in this fight against the tariffs and the President's—I don't know—mindset, down south. So you can look at things that were manufactured all across Canada, as well as Ontario.

I just recently purchased a phone case. I don't know if you've heard of it; it's called Pela, and they're compostable phone cases. They're actually quite colourful and fun. They're made in Vancouver, and they're compostable. How great is that? I know how much you care about the environment—to the members across from me—so I know that you will want to be getting compostable phone cases from Pela in Vancouver, not just Ontario. But of course, we want to assist any business or any entrepreneur in Ontario as best we can.

Schedule 2: Well, we could talk for hours on this so, hopefully, I do have hours. It's back to road safety, keeping people safe on the streets. Remember, streets are for people, right? That's what many other world-class cities and countries around the world are doing. You look at Paris, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, New York City even—all these great places—and they're ensuring everyone is safe on those streets: pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, drivers, tourists, especially, who might not know the signage and the lay of the land.

Schedule 2: This schedule is the most recent entry in the municipal roads and community safety saga. First, this government tried to remove bike lanes—well, we know how that went down—and then they removed the automated speed cameras, which save lives. And we know that because you've been told that by the most globally renowned, amazing Hospital for Sick Children, SickKids. SickKids has given you the report and told you how automated speed enforcement significantly reduces speeding in Toronto school zones. Why wouldn't we want to do that to protect our children or to protect anyone going to school—parents walking their kids to school, grandparents walking their kids to school, kids walking on their own to school? It's just common sense that you would slow down around schools.

This government has called the speed cameras a cash grab. But as I said, it's not a cash grab because you have an option to not have to pay any cash, and that is, don't speed. It's cause and effect. It's logical. You don't want the ticket? You don't want to pay the money? You don't want to open up your wallet? Just don't speed. Slow down, take a yoga breath and take it easy.

Not only that, but you were told the same by the Ontario police chiefs: that they support speed cameras. It's been proven to actually work. You can put all the speed bumps in in the world—I've put in speed bumps as a councillor. They work for a hot minute. People are surprised at them and they're like, "Woah, speed bump," and they slow down, then they know there's a speed bump on that street. The way the cars are built nowadays, especially an SUV,

they can just fly over those speed bumps—no worries. They're not effective. What is effective is hitting people in their pocketbooks. There's an option: Don't pay; don't speed.

The latest thing on the speed cameras and community safety zones, school zones, is the sign. Shall we call it “signgate”? Have you seen these signs? Where is it—Ottawa? There was an Ottawa councillor who was laying on one of the signs and he didn't even come close. It could be like for Hagrid in Harry Potter, a sign at his house—or King Kong's “Slow down for traffic” sign, honestly. They're outrageous. How much money was spent on those, and who ordered them at that size?

Again, this government: The whole theme with you guys is you keep destroying what is working, instead of fixing what is broken. Just leave the stuff alone and let's get the actual work done.

You've tried to imbue yourselves with the power under the Highway Traffic Act to direct any municipality to install signs in community safety zones and anywhere within 500 metres of land used for a school, as long as the school is in a community safety zone—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Aris Babikian): I have 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.

Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, please adjourn the debate.
Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

BARRIE — ORO-MEDONTE —
SPRINGWATER BOUNDARY
ADJUSTMENT ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 SUR LA MODIFICATION
DES LIMITES TERRITORIALES
ENTRE BARRIE, ORO-MEDONTE
ET SPRINGWATER

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 26, 2025, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 76, An Act respecting the adjustment of the boundaries between the City of Barrie, the Township of Oro-Medonte and the Township of Springwater / Projet de loi 76, Loi concernant la modification des limites territoriales entre la cité de Barrie, le canton d'Oro-Medonte et le canton de Springwater.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Aris Babikian): I recognize the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

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Hon. Rob Flack: I am pleased to rise in the House this afternoon to contribute to the debate on this important piece of legislation. As Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, my number one priority is to continue to lay the foundation to get more homes built for the people of this

great province. There is no greater purpose I have than advancing this vision.

Through Bill 17 and now Bill 60, we have continued to move the needle to make it easier and more cost-effective to build right here in Ontario. We are proud of that record. We will never stop advancing policies that will see more Ontarians with a place to call home. This legislation before us today, Barrie — Oro-Medonte — Springwater Boundary Adjustment Act, speaks directly to the pressures our communities are facing, the choices we must make and the responsibility we have to get these choices right.

Ontario is growing at a pace we have not seen in generations. We are now 16.3 million people strong—more than double, I might add, Speaker, probably when you and I were in high school. Family after family is choosing this province because they see opportunity, they see stability and they see the promise of a better future. Businesses are investing, employers are expanding and hiring, and entire sectors are shifting their operations because here, they know we have the talent, the resources and the ambition to lead.

But with that growth comes a responsibility to ensure our communities are prepared—prepared to ensure that there is housing that people can actually afford, infrastructure that can support daily life and local economies that remain strong and resilient for decades to come. That is at the heart of this bill. It is not about maps or municipal boundaries in isolation. It is about building homes where people need them. It is about creating jobs from investment that people require. It is about giving our fastest-growing communities the room they need to plan and to build. It is about ensuring that growth does not happen by accident or out of necessity, but through a deliberate, coordinated, infrastructure-ready approach.

No community illustrates this responsibility more clearly than the city of Barrie in Simcoe county. Barrie has become one of the strongest economic anchors in central Ontario, drawing workers, students, families and employers from across the region. Its colleges, hospitals, transit corridors and employment zones support not only its own residents, but those of surrounding municipalities—municipalities whose residents work in Barrie, study in Barrie, rely on the services in Barrie and depend on the economic weight and the economic muscle of Barrie, Ontario.

For 20 years, the city has been planning to meet this growth. Decades of investments, hundreds of millions of dollars in roads, upgraded transit, expanded water and waste water capacity and serviced employment lands were all designed with one purpose: to support long-term, large-scale growth. They were not made casually; they were made because every projection demonstrated that Barrie would continue to grow at a rapid pace.

I would pause and say I remember, many years ago in my career, travelling to Barrie, the Barrie co-operative, and knowing at the time it was about a 40,000-person community. Watching it grow over the years has been unbelievable—now 170,000 strong, as I will say later, and planned to double in the next 25 years.

Yet even with all this preparation, we have reached a moment where the city simply does not have enough land within its current boundaries to accommodate the next 25 years of anticipated growth. The city planners know this; local employers know this; all municipalities involved know this and agree with this. And frankly, families, those trying to buy a home, find a rental or build a business, know it as well.

The question before us is not whether Barrie will continue to grow. It will grow; indeed it is growing. In fact, as I said, it is projected to double in the next 25 years. The question is whether we give the city the land and the certainty it needs to grow responsibly or whether we resign it to an artificial limit at the very moment when demand is rising and families are counting on us—counting on Simcoe county, counting on the city of Barrie—to help bring more housing to market. This government is not prepared to limit a community's future simply because the process to finalize boundary adjustments proved lengthy, complex and contentious.

In fact, the opposite was true. We've worked closely with municipalities for more than 18 months. This has been an ongoing process. In fact, even before the 18 months, this has been talked about in detail.

We set a deadline for September to get this across the finish line. It was extended multiple times. We encouraged collaboration, brought partners together, engaged the Ontario provincial land development framework experts and worked through dozens of technical proposals and counterproposals. There has been real progress—progress that is reflected in this legislation. There is a broad agreement across all municipalities on the principle of boundary adjustment. Where disagreements remain, it is narrow, largely technical and not substantial enough to justify further delay.

Yet time is not an opportunity we have to rely on. As such, we are running out of runway, hence Bill 76. As I say, time is money, but time is also homes. Time is also jobs. That is why action is needed now.

As municipalities head toward the next election cycle, boundaries must be finalized. If we do not act now, before January 1, local boundaries will be locked in place for years ahead, and if Barrie's limits remain frozen, there will simply not be enough land to support the homes or the jobs that need to be built and attracted in that time.

We cannot wait for crisis conditions to appear before we act. We cannot accept a future where families are priced out because Barrie cannot supply or meet the demand. We cannot allow a situation where young people grow up in a community only to find there is no housing for them when they start families of their own. Planning must be done years in advance, not as a reaction to pressures that were predictable all along. We have to proact, and that is exactly what we're doing.

That is why this legislation is needed. It gives Barrie the ability to accommodate long-term growth. It aligns housing opportunities with existing and planned infrastructure. It ensures that new development occurs along strategic corridors and transportation routes that already

support high volumes of commuters, goods movement and services. It allows the city to bring forward the housing, employment and community amenities that will sustain the region for over the next quarter century.

It is important to remember that housing supply is not just a local issue. The entire region—the entire county of Simcoe, along with Barrie—needs to rely on this ability to grow. Many surrounding communities and municipalities rely on Barrie for major services: specialized health care, post-secondary education, commercial centres, employment zones and transportation hubs. If Barrie cannot continue to expand these assets, expand these services, regional growth falters, job creation slows, local economies stagnate, and housing demand pushes onward into communities that do not have the infrastructure capacity in place to absorb it. The ripple effect can spread quickly.

This government is determined to avoid that outcome. We have been clear from the beginning: Housing takes too long and it costs too much to get built in this province, and we're changing that. Families deserve better, and we are delivering the reforms that will improve speed, predictability and affordability. The Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act laid that foundation. The Fighting Delays, Building Faster Act, 2025, moves that work forward, and the changes before us today complement that broader effort by ensuring the land base is in place for communities like Barrie to realize their full potential.

I've heard some question as to whether Barrie is prepared to take on the growth, but the facts tell a clear story. Barrie is ready because they've invested and continued to build that infrastructure for decades before. Families continue to choose that city because they know it offers opportunity. Barrie has the infrastructure, the planning framework and the regional economic role needed to support long-term growth.

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What the city lacks, and what this bill resolves, is the land base to match the capacity that they will have. Barrie has also pledged to use this land to enrich the entire area through city-run parkland that can be enjoyed by all. The parkland conservation trust will be bigger in this area, Speaker.

This bill is not just about building homes; it's about building communities—places for people to live, to grow and to find a home of their own. Responsible planning is not simply about approving housing, it's about ensuring the right housing is built in the right locations, supported by the right infrastructure. It means proximity to employment. It means protecting natural heritage, where appropriate, while still enabling new neighbourhoods to form, and it means ensuring municipal boundaries and planning tools actually reflect the realities on the ground.

The proposed expansion lands accomplish exactly that. They are located along key corridors adjacent to existing high-traffic areas and close to major infrastructure that has already been built and been paid for. They represent a logical, efficient and cost-effective extension of the city's footprint. Roads in these areas will not be haphazard, Speaker. It will be deliberate, coordinated and aligned

with servicing capacity. Every developable land in this agreement has been identified by the municipality's official plan for housing. Everyone agrees this is where we should grow, and the infrastructure exists today to make it happen. That is key, Speaker: The infrastructure exists today to make this happen.

We cannot afford to take a wait-and-hope approach to growth. If we fail to act, the consequences will be immediate and long-lasting. Housing shortages will intensify, prices will climb and regional employers will face recruitment challenges because potential workers cannot find a place to live.

Infrastructure is key to this program, Speaker. Infrastructure planning will stagnate if we don't, and Barrie, the city that has carried so much of the region's economic weight, will be boxed in at the very moment when its leadership is needed most, especially in Simcoe county. Our responsibility is to choose the path that prepares the region—the entire region—for success. That is what this legislation accomplishes. It ensures the growth is not forced into less suitable areas simply because municipalities could not finalize boundary adjustments in time. It prevents delays that would otherwise disrupt critical housing supply pipelines, and it provides the certainty that builders, employers and families need to make long-term decisions.

Speaker, we must also recognize that growth is not something to fear; it is something to plan for, it is something to embrace and it's something that now in this province, at 16.3 million people, we have to embrace, we have to deal with. Ontario is a province built on ambition. It is built on opportunity and on the belief that future generations deserve to inherit a stronger, more prosperous province than the one we inherited ourselves. That means building homes not just for today's families; it means building homes for tomorrow's families. It means ensuring economic regions have the land and infrastructure they need to compete, and it means standing firmly behind communities like Barrie that have demonstrated again and again that they are ready to lead.

I speak often with mayors in the region and continue to do so. I know their views; I know their opinions. While sometimes they may disagree, they all share an undying love, undying commitment and undying support for the people of Simcoe county. They want what is best for their constituents, and they are doing a good job. This bill is best for everyone in Simcoe, Speaker, and as we move forward with this legislation, we do so not in isolation but as a partner of a broader, province-wide effort to make housing more attainable, more affordable and more responsive to the needs of the people who call Ontario home.

Our government has introduced targeted infrastructure funds, reduced red tape, modernized planning rules, standardized development charges—eliminated them on long-term-care homes—and tackled the delays that hold back new construction. In other words, we're creating the conditions to get more homes built faster. We have strengthened accountability measures, invested in transit-oriented communities and established performance-based

incentives to ensure that municipalities are able to deliver more supply and are recognized and are supported. This bill fits squarely within that framework. It is pragmatic. It is evidence-based. It reflects the input of municipal leaders, planning experts and regional stakeholders. Most importantly, it serves the long-term interests of families, those looking for stable housing, for meaningful work, for a community to raise their children and for the opportunity to build a life in a region that is growing with confidence, not hesitancy.

Speaker, I want to emphasize that the work before us is not abstract. The decisions we make here today will shape the communities of tomorrow, including Barrie and Simcoe county. They will determine whether families have access to attainable housing. They will influence the economic trajectory of an entire region, an important region, as we grow in Ontario. They will define whether our planning system responds to reality or remains constrained by outdated boundaries and unresolved negotiations.

At a time when so many are looking for stability, our responsibility is to provide clarity, direction and leadership. This legislation does exactly that. It positions Barrie and the entire region for success. It ensures housing supply keeps pace with demand. It reaffirms our government's unwavering commitment to building the homes, infrastructure and communities that Ontarians deserve.

Speaker, it is also important to highlight that the legislation before us today is designed to be fair and measured. This is not a case of growth being taken at the expense of surrounding municipalities. The land being added to Barrie represents a small fraction of the Oro-Medonte and Springwater total area: less than 1% of Oro-Medonte and just over 2% of Springwater. These are lands that were already identified for future urban use in existing municipal plans. They are contiguous, practical and ready for responsible development. By clarifying boundaries now, we are giving all municipalities certainty, enabling them to plan effectively within their respective mandates and preserve the character of their rural and hamlet areas.

This legislation also incorporates mechanisms to protect residents and businesses from sudden impacts. The province will oversee the carefully managed transition, including regulations on tax phasing, servicing continuity and compensation where appropriate and needed. Existing approvals will be respected, agreements with landowners will continue to be honoured and local services will remain uninterrupted. This is a thoughtful, deliberate action, not heavy-handed intervention. It is designed to ensure that growth benefits the region as a whole rather than creating disruption for individual communities or residents.

We should also acknowledge the strategic nature of these lands. They are located along major transportation corridors, close to schools, hospitals and community amenities, and near infrastructure that has been intentionally expanded to accommodate such growth. Housing built here will integrate into established neighbourhoods, taking advantage of transit, roads and utilities that already exist, rather than forcing new infrastructure to be built at enor-

mous cost in more remote locations. The result is faster delivery of homes and faster delivery of jobs and community facilities in a way that is efficient, sustainable and very responsible.

Every year that passes without action is another year that families wait for homes, another year that businesses struggle to find space for their employees and another year that regional infrastructure is strained unnecessarily. The decision is simple: Do we act now to provide the land, the certainty and the infrastructure alignment needed to support decades of growth? Or do we allow delays to compound, making the housing crisis, traffic congestion and economic pressures worse?

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By moving forward, we are choosing a future where families have options, where communities grow with planning and purpose, and where the region can continue to thrive as one of Ontario's strongest economic regions. It is about building opportunity, protecting residents and ensuring long-term prosperity of the entire region, indeed.

I hope all members understand that we really have taken a lot of time working closely with these communities to come to a deal. We simply ran out of runway, unfortunately, to make sure we're ready for the next municipal election. But I am confident, as we continue to put this through, should this legislation pass, that we will be in great shape in the months and years ahead.

I urge all members of this House to support this bill for the responsible, future-focused planning it represents in helping Simcoe county and Barrie realize its full potential.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Minister of Housing.

Bill 60 passed through the Legislature this week. It was legislation that was very—we had a lot of people here who are very upset about what this would mean for their own stability and their own renting conditions. There are a lot of concerns. Afterwards, you were asked some questions by some reporters, and they asked you, “Who did you consult with when you developed Bill 60?” And the minister responded by saying, “Landlords, landlords and builders.”

My question to you is: What renter groups did you formally consult with in the development of Bill 60?

Hon. Rob Flack: Well Speaker, I thought we were talking about Bill 76, but I will answer the question, saying that in the middle of a scrum, you sometimes give answers. You get it.

I'm happy to share that we met with AMO. We met with the co-operative housing units. We met with not-for-profits. We consulted with many and continue to consult with them, day in and day out.

Bill 60 still is a great piece of legislation, whether the opposition wants to agree with it or not. I don't think spreading fear and fearmongering is the way to do this, especially when it comes to renters. For tenants, every protection has been protected. Before and after, we're seeing growth in the rental market in this city. In Toronto.

we're at a 40-month low, Speaker. I believe that Bill 60 is great legislation and I think it's going to continue to support continued growth in the rental sector.

I am confident that Bill 76, as well—which I hope we get to talk about today—will also complement an area that's growing in Simcoe county.

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

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Minister, I'll ask about Bill 76—

Interjections.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Not yet.

In your discussion of the bill, you talked about how—we understand about how growth has to happen, right? There's construction, we all want to see that.

You said that there's been agreement across all municipalities, with some delays. I look at Springwater township, where the mayor had to use the strong-mayor powers enacted by your government to get this done. In fact, one councillor was saying they had to meet over 30 times in the past two years to get some kind of agreement on this bill.

The belief is that if they didn't capitulate to this, they'd get a bad deal. Do you see that they actually believe they got the best deal they could possibly get, considering they had to use strong-mayor powers? There were strong-mayor powers used to get this through.

Hon. Rob Flack: Again, I want to emphasize that I believe at least two municipal affairs and housing ministers were dealing with this issue, trying to get consensus so Barrie could grow; so it could continue to support all the municipalities in Simcoe county.

That being said, we brought in a provincial land development facilitator a little over 18 months ago who sat down with all the regions, mostly with the mayors of each of those municipalities. I want to emphasize again and thank those mayors for their earnest and hard work to try and get this across the finish line. We got very close, Speaker—very close. Unfortunately, we ran out of runway, as I said during my remarks. But I really don't think the allusion towards Springwater has a lot to do with why we did what we did. We ran out of time. We really were close, and this, I believe, is a very good piece of legislation supporting the entire county.

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

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: I want to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for his leadership on this legislation.

One of the important pieces, I believe, in every legislation is that it solves a problem. We have to have problem definitions in order to understand the solution that the government is bringing forward—the why of the what. I know that this does solve a very significant challenge when it comes to housing and to the opportunities that would otherwise not exist.

I'm wondering if the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, a leader on ensuring that we have a ready supply of affordable housing, a steady mix of housing in this

province, if he could walk through a little bit more the problem that this legislation seeks to address and why it's so necessary for the entire Simcoe county, not just for Barrie but also for the good of the region as a whole, when we think of Barrie as really an economic driver in that part of the world. I'm wondering if he could elaborate a little bit more about that.

Hon. Rob Flack: I think that the end of your question, through you, Speaker, was key. Homes are important, housing is important, but creating the jobs, the economic development—the employment lands that are a part of this—is just as crucial.

I come from Elgin–Middlesex–London, where we were very fortunate to land PowerCo and, just last week, Vianode—1,000 new jobs that will be producing synthetic graphite in the production of batteries; an important continuum there in that auto sector. I see Barrie in the same light: creating those economic lands, creating those jobs, creating housing to support the people that are coming. It's going to be some heavy lifting ahead. What we're doing is setting the conditions so that can take place and that can succeed. Remember, it isn't just for Barrie; this supports the entire region—north and south Simcoe.

As I conclude, I want to thank the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for doing a great job in helping us land this important legislation. Well done, sir.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The government has before us Bill 76, which is with the stated goal of accelerating housing starts in Ontario. This government has passed 10 bills with that stated goal of accelerating housing starts. These bills have downloaded \$5 billion of development fees on to municipal taxpayers, jacking up municipal tax rates. It has given away greenbelt to donors so that the Premier's wedding guests could profit \$8 billion. It's given strong-mayor powers, which stripped Ontarians of their right to majority-vote decision-making in our towns and cities.

The result of these 10 bills to accelerate housing starts is that Ontario has the slowest level of housing starts in the country. We have 270 housing starts per 100,000. In Canada, the Canadian average is double that; it's 557. So how do we know that this bill would actually accelerate housing starts and it's not just another boondoggle that's going to benefit some Conservative donor?

Hon. Rob Flack: I'm not sure that was a question or a statement. But I would say that if you don't create the opportunity to build homes, you never will.

You know, through you, Speaker, we are in economic uncertainty. People have hit the pause button. The housing industry is in crisis. We acknowledge that. But at the same time, looking forward, 25 years from now, I think the member would realize that Barrie is going to double in size, and when they double in size, they need to have jobs and they need to have housing.

The housing crisis is going to end. We are going to see this turn around. What this bill does is create the condi-

tions, create the environment for housing to take place when the housing market turns.

If we don't do this, we are hampering Simcoe county and Barrie unfairly. It is the centre of central Ontario that's going to also lead to the Ring of Fire and support south-western Ontario. I think the member should realize to not correlate a housing crisis with what needs to happen in the future in Barrie.

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

1650

Mr. Steve Pinsonneault: Thank you, Speaker, and through you to the minister: One of the key features of the facilitator process over the last 18 months was the involvement of multiple municipalities, each with their own perspective, priorities and planning processes. While consensus was reached on the core problem that Barrie needs land to grow, agreement on the details was more challenging.

Could the minister describe how the legislation reflects collaboration between the province and the municipalities, respects local input and ultimately allows councils to focus on their strength, rather than leaving them mired with procedural deadlock?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Quick response.

Hon. Rob Flack: Quick response—Speaker, I want to commend all the mayors that came out throughout this consultation process. I want to thank the facilitators. They did a great job. We really came close. At the end of the day, I'm convinced all of these municipalities will join together to make a stronger Simcoe county.

Key here, again: Barrie is going to double in size. All of Simcoe is going to continue to grow. Creating the right economic lands in the right place, along with residential growth, is key to their success. This is an all-made-in-Simcoe solution.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: Speaker, it's always an honour to rise on behalf of the good people of Scarborough South-west to speak to any legislation. I am glad to be able to speak to Bill 76. I would also like to say that I am sharing my time with the member from Spadina–Fort York as well.

I listened to the minister actually speak about the bill, and one of the things I think the minister said was that the right planning requires the right location, the right land, supported by the right infrastructure. Honestly, I couldn't agree more. I have to say to the minister, that's exactly what we want. We want to make sure that we are providing the right infrastructure, the right support to have proper housing built and that municipalities are able to have communities—not just structures, not just buildings, but communities that support the people who live there.

So it's really important that, when we have legislation like this, we get it right. Right now, we have legislation in front of us where I have quite a few questions that I'm not

really certain about from the bill itself, because there are a few questions that I don't think the minister answered.

He spoke about Barrie quite a bit. This legislation in a nutshell covers Barrie, Oro-Medonte, Springwater and Simcoe county. What we have seen over the last little while—actually since two years ago, when Barrie actually proposed this legislation or this idea of annexation that this bill is proposing to do. We had the ministry that actually came up with the idea of the facilitation. The proposal was controversial at that time. The township of Springwater did some reports. They came up with maps. They had council decisions. The council was divided. When they actually had the facilitation, we still don't know what took place from that.

In June, the province actually appointed a deputy provincial land and development facilitator to facilitate that discussion between Barrie and Oro-Medonte and Springwater and Simcoe county on the annexation proposal. Yet without finishing that, they came back. Now the minister wants to take on that power, have more power to himself and the ministry and go through that annexation process by January 1, 2026. At the same time, one of the things that's really concerning to me is that the annexation is meant to accommodate planned growth for 2051 and 2061. We're talking about some really long planning in the horizon of housing starts.

What we've seen over the past years with this government is that we do not have housing built in the province, under this government. We have the lowest housing starts, under this government, and it is very concerning, with what's happening across the province, with the need for housing.

So when I look at this, I find that we have a few questions that we need the minister to answer when it comes to this legislation. The power that is necessary to go through annexation actually already exists within the powers of the ministry. And if you look at the current power of the minister, there is nothing that's stopping him—to actually go through the facilitation process, go through the consultation, and do exactly what he says he needs to do. So when I look at this, again, I'm unsure as to why that is necessary.

What I did find in this legislation is that the township and county's requests, when the three other townships that have now conditionally agreed—which means they have specific asks that are not highlighted within Bill 76. So, as written, Bill 76—it is unknown whether the minister will actually address the concerns of Simcoe county or Oro-Medonte or Springwater. There are leaders in those communities who have approved this conditionally, with specific asks for this annexation proposal.

It's very important that we respect democracy, that we respect exactly what people are calling for.

What we're witnessing right now is a deeply disturbing time in Ontario, under this government. This entire fall session has shown Ontarians that we have a government that no longer respects the very people who sent us here to represent them. Whether it was Bill 33 to Bill 60 to the Skills Development Fund, it shows what the government's

playbook is: to shut down debate, ram through legislation, pat themselves on the back for bills that do not actually help people. The voices of everyday, hard-working Ontarians are brushed aside as if they don't matter. “Not fair, not transparent, not accountable”—that's how the Auditor General described the SDF fiasco earlier in the fall. And sadly, those are the very words that became the guiding principles of this government for the rest of this session that we've just had.

Speaker, this House is supposed to be a place where we stand up for the people across this province, who trust us to fight for them—it's not supposed to be a rubber stamp to go through an annexation process without proper facilitation and consultation, or to help those few donors or the big developers. Ontarians deserve a government that listens to them—not the rich corporations, not the big developers, and definitely not the big donors.

So here I am, looking at this legislation, and I just have a lot of questions that I think the minister needs to answer before really kind of seeing light of this legislation—because I think he can just do exactly what the bill is saying it needs to do without all the power that the minister is giving himself. Right now, from just the looks of it, it's being rushed through the Legislature, local councils and residents are not sufficiently consulted, and—something that this government has done over and over again—we're seeing that municipal autonomy has been overridden.

In 2018, when we first got elected, a lot of us on both sides of the House—that was one of the first things that this government did. Again, with the strong-mayors power—which was used, by the way, in Springwater, here, and that's now being challenged and going through the courts. That's also a part of the undemocratic process that we're seeing, that has become part of Bill 76. It's really important that we highlight that, because it is being used inappropriately, undemocratically.

This bill really sidesteps the existing annexation process which is within the Municipal Act within the province. So you have Bill 76 that appears to do this, but it's actually bypassing all of what's within the Municipal Act right now and bypassing the safeguards. The government is just granting itself broad discretionary authority, including overriding a lot of the safeguards that we have to make sure we are protecting our municipalities, protecting land, and it's really important.

1700

Once you develop on farmland, you can't go back. I listened to my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane yesterday speak to this bill as well. He talked about farmland and being a farmer and what it means. Right now, in Ontario, 300 acres of farmland are being lost every day—that's actually doubled. Right now, that number has actually doubled from what it was before this government came into power. Once lost, you do not get farmland back.

It's really important that we pass legislation that protects people and the land, that we protect Ontario. When I look at this legislation, all I see, once again, is the government giving itself a lot of power without proper

rationale, without consultation, without proper respect for the people of this province.

Speaker, I thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member from Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank my colleague from Scarborough Southwest for her comments.

It's a pleasure to rise in the House to speak to Bill 76, An Act respecting the adjustment of the boundaries between the City of Barrie, the Township of Oro-Medonte and the Township of Springwater. This bill basically allows Barrie to annex 4,100 acres of land from Oro-Medonte and Springwater, and it allows the minister, through regulation, to make other boundary adjustments.

The next time the government wants to change the boundaries of Barrie or Oro-Medonte or Springwater, they're not going to have to have an introduction of bills. They're not going to have a debate here in the Legislature. They're just going to be able to do it through regulation. Basically, the minister will be able to sign a document; it will be posted on a website of the government that almost nobody looks at, and it will be a done deal. There will not be any further democratic process in changing boundaries in the future. You'd think that if the government's going to be changing boundaries of municipalities, they would have extensive conversations and consultations with the communities that are impacted.

My colleague the MPP for Timiskaming–Cochrane, who is a retired farmer, was meeting with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and farmers from Oro-Medonte yesterday, and they knew nothing about this bill, about this land swap. They know nothing about what the government has planned for the 4,100 acres that they are annexing from these other two townships. He also said that there's no information: Who is asking for this change? What do they want to do with this land? And if we follow the money, who is going to benefit from this boundary change? I think those are some pretty crucial questions that the government should be willing to answer, but there's no sign of them being willing to answer those questions. This is a real concern because this government is saying that the goal of this bill, the annexation, is seen as a means to support provincial housing goals.

So let's look at this government's record on achieving their housing goals. This government has passed 10 pieces of legislation to accelerate housing. They downloaded development charges onto municipal taxpayers at a cost of \$5 billion a year. If your municipal taxes have been going up by double digits over the last few years, you can blame it on this government because what they're doing is downloading costs on to municipal taxpayers.

They gave away sections of the greenbelt to the Premier's wedding guests and the wedding guests stood to make \$8.3 billion—actually not quite \$8.3 billion. They paid \$300 million for the farmland, and then when the government introduced legislation to remove the farmland protections, the profit they could make was \$8 billion to the Premier's wedding guests.

The other thing they did is that they passed strong-mayor powers all in the name of building housing faster, and these strong-mayor powers mean that the mayor and one third of city councillors or town councillors in Ontario can now overrule two thirds of municipal councillors. In Toronto, we've got 25 councillors, so the mayor and eight councillors could potentially overrule 18 municipal councillors. We've lost this very fundamental principle of the right to majority-vote decision-making all in the name of building housing in this province.

The names of the bills—I'll just read a few of them—Bill 60, Fighting Delays, Building Faster Act; Bill 17, Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act; Bill 3, Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act; Bill 136, Greenbelt Statute Law Amendment Act; Bill 76, the Barrie boundary adjustment, the one that we're on right now. All of these bills, all this work this government has done with the stated objective of accelerating housing starts—what is the goal? What is actually happening? What are the results of all this?

According to the Royal Bank of Canada, "Canada isn't in a Housing Starts Slump—Ontario is." That's the headline of the report. For the rest of Canada, the provincial average is it 559 housing starts per 100,000 population in each year. Do you know what it is in Ontario? It's 270. It's half of the provincial average.

All of this legislation, all of the increases in our municipal taxes, the loss of our right to majority-vote decision-making, the \$8 billion in potential profit that the Premier's wedding guests could make from the greenbelt—all of that has left us with the lowest level of housing starts in the country.

The bill before us proposes to pave over another 4,100 acres of farmland, even though the government's own task force said that there is enough room within existing municipal boundaries to build the housing, to achieve the government's housing goal of building 1.5 million homes. In fact, the government's task force said that you could build more than two million homes in the existing municipal boundaries. But instead, the government keeps expanding the boundaries onto farmland that suspiciously is recently bought by the Conservative donors. They end up winning the jackpot on that farmland.

The danger for all of us, the cost to all of us, is not just the loss of the farmland; it's our food insecurity. We are in a tariff war with the United States. Trump is threatening not just tariffs to undermine our economy; he's threatening our sovereignty. This government is paving over our farmland even though in Ontario, with a fairly small population, we import \$10 billion more food than we export. Only 5% of the land in Ontario is arable; only 5% can be used as farmland. This government is paving it over at the rate of 320 acres per day. And now with this bill they want to add another 4,100 acres.

The question is not that we should never pave over farmland. My colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane said yesterday, if you need to build something on farmland, you've got to ask is it more important than the ability to grow food? Not just for this generation, but for future

generations: for our children, our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren. The use that the government wants to make of this land, is it more important than their ability to grow food?

He gave a couple of examples, because Oro-Medonte is a farming community, and said if you wanted to build an abattoir up there, which is near the farms, that would make sense. If you wanted to build a vegetable-processing plant, which is near the area, which is near the Holland Marsh, which is one of the richest agricultural lands and a massive producer of vegetables for Ontario, then that would make sense. But if it's just going to be more sprawl and we're not actually going to achieve our housing goals, then why would we pave over that farmland? So it's an important question to ask.

The other danger—and I mentioned this at the beginning my remarks—is that this bill gives the government, the minister, the power to change boundaries through regulation. There are two processes here in the Legislature. One is the government introduces a bill, it's debated, there are three votes here in the Legislature, there are debates, there's committee consultation, then it gets royal assent and then it becomes a law. There's a very public process. This is the foundation of our parliamentary democracy.

1710

The other process is that once the law has been passed, the minister can make regulations to implement that legislation. What this bill does, and what this government has been doing, is expanding the power of the ministers to make major policy decisions through regulations. They are bypassing the legislative process. They are undermining the parliamentary process which is the foundation of our democracy.

This government sat four months in the last 12, and the reason they're able to do that is because, since 2018, every bill that they have passed has expanded the power of the government and of the ministers to govern through regulation. Basically, they are governing by fiat without the need to come back here to introduce a bill publicly, to have a public debate and a public vote on those decisions. This is undermining the fundamental democratic processes of this province. It's really frightening that we've got another bill that will again expand the power of this government to govern by fiat without proper public consultation, without a proper public debate and a vote.

Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak. I'm open for questions.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions? I recognize the Associate Solicitor General for Auto Theft and Bail Reform.

Hon. Zee Hamid: Thank you, Speaker. Sometimes I forget the title myself.

My question is for the member opposite. Over the past 18 months—the consultation actually started three years ago, but over the past 18 months, we heard from every single municipality involved that they agree on the core problem; they just cannot converge on a path to move forward.

Given that reality and given that municipal elections are just around the corner, and it's really important to identify ward boundaries to prevent—otherwise we're looking at stalling this process for another few years. If not now, then when is it appropriate for the province to actually get involved and make that decision or make the call?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Response? The member for Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: According to the people from Oro-Medonte, they knew nothing about this. The government can say there was 18 months of consultation, but the people living in that area knew nothing about this. I don't know what kind of consultation it was, but certainly it hasn't reached out to the community members that are going to be impacted.

The community in Oro-Medonte, their city councillors were saying one of the challenges with this is, if this land is annexed to Barrie, then they lose the property tax revenue from that and the potential property tax revenue if it is converted into housing property.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: In this Legislature, we've had a lot of conversations around this government's attempts to open up farmland to allow their developer donor friends to build homes on this very same farmland.

If we looked at these changes and we looked at what the boundaries are that are being changed, what's being opened up to allow for development, who individually owns these lands, and then we cross referenced it with Elections Ontario fundraising data, what do you think we'd find?

Mr. Chris Glover: Well, the track record of this government is that every time there's a land deal, one of their donors is benefiting. We saw it with the greenbelt, where the wedding guests of the Premier—the people who were sitting right at the table with him at his daughter's wedding—all bought farmland in September. Then in October, the government introduced legislation to remove the greenbelt protections and those donors stood to make \$8 billion.

The government rolled in demolition crews to the foundry, which is a heritage property, and they said, "Oh, there's nothing to see here." But then we later found out that they had made a deal with a developer friend of the Premier's to give that land to him without any buildings on it.

When the government is ever making a land deal in Ontario—to give one other quick example with Ontario Place: 2.2 billion taxpayer dollars to a private, for-profit Austrian spa. I don't think this government has earned the trust of the people of Ontario to make any sort of real estate deals.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: To my colleague the member from Spadina–Fort York, two questions: One is, what do you think the rush is with Bill 76? It's like a mad

scramble to get it in before January 1 and not be talking to the right people and engaging the stakeholders.

And also, do you think we should be building homes without access to transit?

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you very much to the member from Beaches–East York for that question. I don't know what the rush is. This is the problem with this government. This government is never transparent. They're not transparent. They're not accountable. The same thing with the Skills Development Fund, with the greenbelt, with the Ontario Place deal: Everything this government does is hidden behind the scenes. And then, when we finally cast the light of day on this, when we put in freedom-of-information requests and we dig, dig, dig, then what we find is that there was some dirty deal behind it.

I hope there's no dirty deal in this legislation, behind this legislation. But certainly, the government's record doesn't indicate that. The government's record does not build trust in their real estate dealings.

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

Mr. Steve Pinsonneault: My question is for the member opposite from Scarborough Southwest. We often debate on how to achieve infrastructure-led growth, but in this case, we already have a city that has invested hundreds of millions in water, waste water, transit and major roads.

Does the member agree that when land directly adjacent to fully serviced areas is available, it makes far more sense to grow there, push development and then push development further onward into unserviced rural areas? If not, could the member explain how they would justify bypassing existing pipes, roads, transits in favour of more expensive and less efficient greenfield expansion?

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you very much to the member for that question. I started my debate by saying I agree with the minister in terms of having the right infrastructure, right support when we do housing so that we can build communities. We need all of those pieces in order to do housing and make sure that people are benefiting from that.

What you're doing right now—and by the way, everything that you need to do already exists in the Municipal Act. I think it's schedule 5; I just don't have my notes any more with me. But there is an actual act that exists with exactly what you need to do in order to do exactly what the minister needs to for this annexation.

All you're doing is you're bypassing the consultation process and making sure that all of the different bodies who need to be involved are part of it. Simcoe county, Oro-Medonte and Springwater have conditions. By the way, those conditions are not in Bill 76. What I'm concerned about is whether Barrie has those facilities available or not.

It's important that we have all of the four parties at the same table to make sure that we're supporting people, and we're not eroding democracy and eroding the municipal leadership that we have.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: This is a question again to the member for Spadina–Fort York. When the member was talking, he mentioned how this bill could result in the government being able to change municipal boundaries, which means you can redraw where only farmland is allowed and change it so that development is allowed by just simply passing regulation. Could you clarify that for me? Is that what this bill does?

Mr. Chris Glover: That is the concern: that this government is giving its ministers the power to change municipal boundaries by fiat, by regulation, so that they will not have to introduce a bill in the Legislature. There will not be any public debate. There will not be any committee hearings where the public can actually have some input. The minister would just be able to sign a regulation, it would be posted on a website—on a website that very, very few people check—and the boundary would be changed.

It's an attack, really, on our democratic rights and our democratic process here in the Legislature. This is a real concern, that this government continues to bypass the Legislature and govern by fiat, and it's an attack on all of our democratic rights.

1720

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

Further debate?

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I am speaking on Bill 76 this evening, the Barrie — Oro-Medonte — Springwater Boundary Adjustment Act, 2025. I have to say that on its surface, this bill is straightforward. It's a boundary adjustment between municipalities, an annexation of portions of Springwater and Oro-Medonte into the city of Barrie.

We've seen boundary changes before. In many cases, they are tools for coordinated planning, for service efficiency and, yes, for supporting desperately needed housing development. But Speaker, as with so many bills from this government, what looks simple on the page becomes more complicated once we examine how we arrived at this point, who was involved and what kind of precedent this sets for local governance in Ontario.

This bill is presented as a seamless agreement between three municipalities working together to support housing solutions. In an ideal world, that is exactly how major municipal boundary changes should be made: collaboratively, transparently and willingly. But some of the testimony and commentary we've heard suggest a different picture. Representatives from Springwater and Oro-Medonte have indicated, if not directly then certainly in tone and context, that they felt pressure through this process, and not necessarily pressure from the city of Barrie, but pressure from the provincial government: a sense that if they didn't accept this boundary adjustment now, it would simply be imposed on them later; the feeling that they should accept the deal on the table because a worse one could be forced upon them in the future. That isn't partnership. That's not collaboration. That is a clear imbalance of power.

We also know that the mayor of Springwater used strong-mayor powers to push this arrangement forward. This is exactly the concern many of us raised when the government introduced those powers, that they would not be used for emergencies or efficiency but rather to override councils, to limit debate and to push through decisions that might not survive the full democratic process.

I ask if this is truly how we want major boundary adjustments in Ontario to be made, through powers designed to bypass the elected councils that are meant to represent local residents. We know housing is essential, and we all agree on that, but the process matters and local democracy matters.

This bill also gives the minister extremely broad regulatory authority: authority over ward boundaries, over the precise description of the annexed lands and over financial arrangements between the municipalities.

The legislation even allows the minister to replace the annexation description found in schedule 1 after the fact. That means that even after this Legislature approves the bill, the minister could change the boundaries through regulation. This, as mentioned, is an extraordinary level of central authority. If the boundary can be rewritten later, what certainty do residents have? What certainty do municipalities have as they plan infrastructure, service and budgets? This isn't a minor administrative detail; this is yet another example of authority that is being consolidated at the provincial level, bypassing municipal councils and bypassing this Legislature.

While I won't repeat or imply any unverified claims, the public is owed some clarity on this matter. Whenever land is being annexed, whenever values may change significantly and whenever major development potential is being unlocked, the public deserves a clear answer to a simple question: Who owns this land? This isn't an accusation. It's not partisan. It's just a matter of transparency, accountability and public trust. If the government wants to rebuild trust after multiple controversies surrounding land use decisions, then the simplest step is just disclosure. Get it all out there, put ownership information on the table and reassure Ontarians that this decision is based on planning principles, as I say, growth needs and genuine municipal co-operation.

Speaker, the government will no doubt argue that this bill will accelerate housing, and perhaps it will, but we have to ask, at what cost? Because we have seen a pattern emerge: applying pressure to municipalities, using strong-mayor powers, granting wide regulatory authority to ministers and doing all of this in the name of development. Ontario needs housing, but Ontario also needs good governance. It needs open and transparent process, and it needs a government that works with the municipalities, rather than above them. And a government that resorts to sledgehammer tactics as a means to bolster development—that's not needed.

This bill may pass, but the way we arrive here should concern everyone in this House. The pressure felt by municipalities, the use of exceptional powers, the ability

for the minister to redraw boundaries after the fact: Those aren't small issues. We can build homes without undermining local authority and local democracy, and we can plan communities, for sure, without sidelining municipal voices. We can grow Ontario without leaving the public wondering whether decisions were made in the open or behind closed doors.

So all I ask, Speaker, is that the government just explain clearly to all of us—to Ontarians—how this agreement was reached, why strong-mayor powers were required and who stands to benefit from this annexation? And, above all, I urge the government to end its pattern of forcing development decisions rather than building consensus for them—and if there's great consensus, please show it to us. Just as we've been saying for weeks: Open the books. Let's have talks about it; let's have meetings about it; let's have committees about it.

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

Ms. Natalie Pierre: My question is for the member opposite. In this region, population growth has outpaced earlier projections, and Barrie is facing land exhaustion within a decade. Knowing that planning horizons require decisions to shape outcomes in 20- to 30-year time frames, does the member believe that it's responsible to address those concerns now, or is it better to wait 20 or 30 years down the line and delay any action?

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you for the question. Look, when you hear this, you want to applaud. Yes, let's get it going. We know Barrie is growing. My son lives there now; he moved from Toronto. We see what's happening. The trend is there and totally understandable. But the process is the issue here. So let's just be open and transparent about how this happened.

Quickly, just reading about some of the process—in Springwater and Oro-Medonte, there was talk of a referendum on it in the municipal election. Now, I know you want to speed, cut the red tape, go through, go through, but if there's that much dissension, you know, at what cost, right? To move forward too quickly is the concern.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further questions? I recognize the member from Beaches—East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Beautiful Beaches—East York. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To my sensational colleague from—Toronto—St. Paul's?

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Correct.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I always mix that up. Thank you very much for your speech and for caring so much about Ontarians as a whole. Yes, I have the same questions as you. Why the rush, and why skip committees and rush through this bill when you haven't spoken—obviously, there's not consensus with the Springwater and Oro-Medonte councillors. It is their area. Again, this government is meddling municipally.

Do you think this government has actually thought about or really explored every avenue to add more density to Barrie, like building up the avenues, looking at brownfields and potentially provincially owned land, building up instead of out, which is more sustainable? Do you think they've actually done the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member in response.

1730

MPP Stephanie Smyth: To the member from beautiful Beaches–East York: I would have no idea. How would we have any idea? We don't exactly know anything that has been done in conversations, discussion, with any of the residents of Springwater, Oro-Medonte. So it's not really disclosed, the potential ways of development, at all.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Toronto–St. Paul's for identifying concerns that you have about the process with this bill. I've got some overall questions. If this bill passes, what impact do you think it will have on the development in Barrie and Oro-Medonte?

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you for that question, the member for University–Rosedale. Well, what we're seeing from disclosure by the various media in the area like simcoe.ca is that there's so much allotted for residential, so much allotted for business development, apparently some land used for environmental, but no word on transit, nothing like that—so some vague ideas of what could be developed but nothing really specific that we're seeing in terms of the number of hectares for types of residential. But residential isn't the full amount of the development; some of that development definitely is for business.

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member opposite for her remarks. Having seen boundary adjustments, certainly in my riding, I know sometimes it's difficult for municipalities to resolve their differences amongst themselves; they need a good referee. So I'm wondering if the member opposite would agree that coming to the provincial Legislature to resolve those differences might be a good idea.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: A referee here in the provincial Legislature? Well, I guess if we could get them to a committee meeting and we could all watch the conversation, that would be great, sure.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: It's a pleasure to rise on behalf of the residents of Wellington–Halton Hills to speak today about Bill 76, Barrie — Oro-Medonte — Springwater Boundary Adjustment Act, and to talk about growth and the future and what those communities need.

I'm speaking to a piece of legislation that is fundamentally about the future, Speaker. It's about vision, it's about responsibility and it is about the tangible actions we must take to ensure that the Ontario of tomorrow is a place where our children and grandchildren—our young people—can afford to live, work and raise families of their own.

Speaker, across this province, we are witnessing a period of unprecedented transformation. We see it in the cranes that dot our skylines. Even in Wellington–Halton Hills we've got a few cranes. We see it in the bustling activity of our manufacturing plants like the Jefferson Elora Corp. in Centre Wellington. We see it in the new

faces joining our communities from across the country and around the world.

Ontario is growing, and while growth is a sign of vitality and economic health, it also presents us with a profound challenge, a challenge that this government has accepted with open arms. That challenge is to build: to build more homes, to build more infrastructure.

I was able to announce \$6.8 million in Centre Wellington for the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund—that's quite a mouthful. But that's great news for the growth and infrastructure needs of that community.

We need to build stronger communities. In central Ontario, nowhere is that challenge and this opportunity more evident than in Simcoe county. Let's look at the facts, Speaker. They are undeniable and outstanding. The city of Barrie is not just growing; it is booming. In the last two years alone, Barrie's population has surged by almost 13%. Think about that for a moment: In just 24 months, the city has absorbed a level of growth that many municipalities take a decade to achieve. And this is not a temporary spike; this is the trajectory of the future. Current projections indicate that over the next 25 years the population of Barrie will double. We are talking about tens of thousands of new families looking for a front door to call their own. We are talking about new businesses looking for shop floors and office spaces.

However, Speaker, geography is a stubborn thing. As it stands today, the city of Barrie is effectively an island of urbanization with no room left to grow. The city has virtually no developable lands left within its current municipal boundary that can be added to the urban area to support this future growth. The cupboards are bare; every corner that can be built upon has been accounted for.

Without the action proposed in Bill 76, Barrie will essentially hit a wall. It will run out of residential land. It will run out of employment land. And when the city runs out of land, we know what happens next: Home prices skyrocket, becoming out of reach for young people and seniors; businesses look elsewhere because they cannot expand; the local economy stagnates.

We cannot allow the economic engine of Simcoe county to stall. We cannot watch as the dream of home ownership slips away for another generation of residents in this region. That is why our government is stepping up.

Bill 76 proposes a logical, necessary solution. This legislation, if passed, will transfer 1,673 hectares of land located in the townships of Oro-Medonte and Springwater to the city of Barrie.

I want to be clear about what this land represents. This is not just a transfer of dirt or a drawing of lines on a map. This land represents the future community of Simcoe county. By making this adjustment, we are unlocking the potential for up to 8,000 new homes. That is 8,000 families who will have a roof over their heads. That is young couples buying their first starter home. That is seniors finding accessible housing that allows them to age in their

community. That is the workforce that our industries are crying out for—finding a place to live near where they work.

In the midst of a national housing crisis, unlocking land for more homes is not just good policy, it is a moral imperative. We have committed to Ontarians that we will meet the generational challenge of the housing crisis. Every single project counts and goals of this magnitude is a cornerstone of our commitment to accelerating housing supply.

But, Speaker, we are not just building homes in isolation. We are building communities that are connected. We are building communities that make sense.

One of the key principles of good planning is aligning housing supply with infrastructure. It makes no sense to build homes where there are no roads, no transit and no services. Conversely, it makes no sense to build massive infrastructure projects if there are no people to use them.

This boundary adjustment is perfectly aligned with the historic investments our government is already making in the region. We are expanding the Barrie GO line, bringing two-way, all-day GO train service to the region. I was able to host the Minister of Transportation in my riding in Georgetown at the GO station to announce weekend service on the Kitchener line for the first time, which is great news for Halton Hills. We are moving forward with the Bradford Bypass in the Simcoe area, a critical link that will unclog the gridlock that has plagued commuters for decades. These are multi-billion-dollar investments designed to get people moving.

By bringing these 1,673 hectares into the city of Barrie, we are placing people and jobs right next to these transportation corridors. We are ensuring that the people who live in these new 8,000 homes can get to work on time and get home to their families sooner. We are ensuring that the goods produced in the new employment lands can get to market efficiently. This is integrated planning at its best. It is synergy between housing, transit and economic development.

Speaker, we must also recognize the role the city of Barrie plays in the broader ecosystem of Simcoe county. Barrie is the largest urban area in the county. It serves as the regional hub for transportation, for specialized health care at the Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre, for post-secondary education at Georgian College—where my wife actually got her degree for hairdressing; it's a great college—and for major employment sectors. People from Springwater, from Oro-Medonte, from surrounding areas and beyond all rely on Barrie for these critical services.

A strong Barrie means a strong Simcoe county. If Barrie cannot grow, the ability of the regional hub to provide these services is compromised. By transferring this additional land to the city, we are allowing Barrie to continue doing what it does best: anchoring the region's economy.

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Furthermore, there is a practical, fiscal argument here that respects the taxpayer. Barrie already possesses significant existing servicing capacity in water, waste water, and administrative infrastructure. Expanding the boundaries allows this existing capacity to be deployed quickly and cost-effectively to support new construction. To try to replicate this urban density elsewhere, starting from scratch in areas without that servicing backbone, would not only be slower; it would be far more expensive. It would drive up the cost of homes and place an undue burden on municipal taxpayers. By utilizing Barrie's existing infrastructure to support this growth, we are choosing the most efficient, fiscally responsible path forward.

I've spoken a great deal about housing, but let us not overlook the second pillar of this bill: employment lands. A community is more than just a collection of bedrooms; it is a place where people work. We know that Barrie is facing a critical shortage of employment land. Without space for industrial and commercial expansion, businesses are forced to turn away.

I was previously on Halton Hills council before coming to this place, and we actually passed a motion at that council to expand the urban boundary along the Steeles corridor, to add many acres for industrial land to our urban boundary. That's something that we have the benefit of being able to do in Halton Hills, but that's not the case for the city of Barrie.

The lands identified in this bill will provide the canvas for major economic investments. We are talking about manufacturing, logistics, technology and skilled trades. We are talking about creating jobs close to home so that residents of Simcoe county don't have to drive down Highway 400 to the GTA every single morning to find a good-paying job. By securing these lands for employment uses, we are bringing economic dignity and opportunity to the doorstep of Simcoe county residents. We are helping to balance the tax base, ensuring that residential property taxes are not the sole source of revenue for the municipality. This is about long-term economic sustainability.

Now I want to address the process and the partners involved.

Changing municipal boundaries is never a simple task. It involves history, it involves identity and it involves complex administrative details. We understand that this requires input from the townships of Oro-Medonte and Springwater. I want to express my gratitude to the leadership in all three municipalities—Barrie, Oro-Medonte, and Springwater—for their engagement on this file. We recognize that while the city of Barrie needs this land to grow, the townships have legitimate interests that must be respected and addressed.

That is why our government is taking a facilitated, collaborative approach to the implementation of this legislation. We are not just passing a law and walking away.

The Office of the Provincial Land and Development Facilitator, or OPLDF, will be intimately involved in

facilitating discussions with the impacted municipalities. Their mandate is to find the best way to implement this legislation, ensuring that the lines of communication remain open and that technical matters are resolved fairly.

We know that residents and businesses in the affected areas have questions. They want to know what this means for their property taxes, their representation and their services.

To support an orderly transition, Bill 76 provides the government with the authority to make regulations addressing these very transitional matters. This includes addressing ward boundary changes to ensure democratic representation is maintained. Crucially, it allows for regulations regarding the phasing-in of property tax changes. We know that tax rates can differ between municipalities. We are committed to ensuring that ratepayers in the annexed areas are treated fairly, preventing sudden shocks and allowing for a gradual, predictable adjustment period. This is about fairness. It is about respect for the property owners who are caught in the middle of this necessary administrative change.

Speaker, when we debate legislation, we must always consider the alternative. What happens if we say no?

What happens if we vote against Bill 76? If we reject this bill, we are effectively hanging a closed-for-business sign on the city of Barrie. We are telling the young families of Simcoe county that, despite the vastness of our province, there is simply no room for them in their regional hub. We are telling the businesses that want to invest millions of dollars in the region to take their capital and their jobs elsewhere. We are accepting gridlock, skyrocketing prices and stagnation as the status quo.

That is not acceptable to this government, and I do not believe it is acceptable to the people of Simcoe county. We were elected with a mandate to get things done, Speaker. We were elected to make the tough decisions that paved the way for prosperity. We were elected to look at the map of Ontario not as a static relic of the past but a dynamic blueprint for the future.

This bill is about looking forward to 2051. It is about envisioning a Simcoe county where the city of Barrie is a thriving metropolis of nearly 300,000 people, supported by robust transit, cutting-edge hospitals and vibrant educational institutions. It envisions a region where the townships of Oro-Medonte and Springwater continue to flourish, benefiting from the economic spillover of a strong regional core while maintaining their unique rural and community characters. It envisions a transportation network where the GO train and the Bradford Bypass work in concert with local transit to move people seamlessly between their homes in the new annexed lands and their jobs across the GTHA. This is a vision of growth that is managed, sustainable and optimistic.

Speaker, government is about making the pieces fit, like the Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries said about solving problems. It's about recognizing that a

municipal boundary drawn 50 or 100 years ago may not serve the realities of 2025 or the needs of 2050.

The reality of 2025 is that Barrie is full, but its potential is limitless. The reality is that we face a critical housing shortage, and this bill unlocks 8,000 of the homes that we desperately need. The reality is that we need jobs, and this bill unlocks the land to create them. By transferring 1,673 hectares, we are doing more than just adjusting a boundary; we're expanding the horizon of opportunity for every resident in Simcoe county. We are utilizing existing servicing capacity to save taxpayers money. We are employing the expertise of the Provincial Land and Development Facilitator to ensure the process is fair and the transition is smooth. We are supporting our municipal partners in doing what they do best: serving their residents.

I urge all members of this House to look at the facts, look at the growth rates, look at the housing needs and look at the infrastructure investments we are making. When you put those pieces together, the picture is clear: Bill 76 is the right step at the right time for the right reasons.

Let us support growth. Let us support housing. Let us support the future of Simcoe county.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: I was listening carefully to the member opposite, and one of the big questions I had was that the government's own Housing Affordability Task Force came out with a comprehensive report—you got to hand-pick who was on that—and they stated very clearly that in order for Ontario to meet its housing targets of 1.5 million homes, which you're not doing, you don't need to build on farmland. You've got more than enough land already zoned for development to meet our housing targets. Why, then, are we debating a bill tonight that would open up more land for development?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to the member for that question. As I mentioned in my speech, I was part of Halton Hills council when we expanded the urban boundary to allow for thousands of new homes and thousands of new jobs. These decisions are municipal decisions, and the municipalities of Barrie, Oro-Medonte and Springwater want to develop this land for growth, but it makes sense for that to be done within the city of Barrie where that servicing capacity is available, like I mentioned. So these kinds of planning decisions about where to build and how to build are done primarily by municipal governments.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question? I recognize the Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

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Hon. Graydon Smith: Thank you very much for finding me over here in the corner, I appreciate that. Thanks to the member for his comments today. I think they've been really insightful and helped this debate quite a bit.

You represent your riding—you've talked with your riding—but you've really talked about the impact that these adjustments would have on the affected area. From

your perspective, saying what you've said and knowing what you know in terms of the length of the consultation that's gone on and the depth of the consultation that's gone on, I'd just love to get your opinion on if you feel that the time is right, that an appropriate amount has occurred and now is time to act. If you can just maybe talk a little bit more about that.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka, and for all of his work he does on the municipal affairs and housing file as well. I understand he's going to be speaking at a housing conference later this evening. Thank you for the work that you do in making housing get built here in the province of Ontario.

This has been going on for quite some time, the discussions with the different municipalities and between the different municipalities. But time is ticking, as the member mentioned, and the community needs this change, needs this to move forward. Like I said in my speech, there will be regulation-making powers that are in this bill to ensure that that transition is fair for all those involved, so that everyone is properly compensated—both the municipalities as well as the ratepayers. While it's time for action, and our government was elected to take action, the consultations will continue after this is passed.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: You know, he's a new member. I appreciate it, and congratulations on one of your first, probably, occasions to speak in the House.

I want to simply say that you can't be blamed for the baggage of the government, but you have to understand that when it comes to land and decisions made around land and municipalities, you have to look no further than the greenbelt to see the amount of consternation that people have when it comes to that. There were all sorts of issues with regard to that.

Look at what they've done with regard to municipalities, where they gave heightened mayoral powers, and then when mayors come in doing things that they don't agree, they're immediately meddling and changing laws for municipalities. What assurances can you provide with regard to this particular legislation that the government has the best interests of Ontarians, and not donor developer friends or others at stake, which has been shown to be the case in so much of their other legislation?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to the member for his question. It's true, I am one of the new members here. I was proud to be elected as a part of our government's third majority mandate back in February, representing the great people of Wellington–Halton Hills, who continue to put their trust and confidence in this PC Party and this government led by Premier Ford. I'm proud to be a member of this government.

Our government is focused on getting housing built. We've introduced a number of pieces of legislation over the previous years to improve that. This is just another step on that road, to make sure that we can get 8,000 new

homes in Simcoe county built to ensure that people like me—young people, my peers—are able to own a home.

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

MPP Paul Vickers: To the minister: Growth must be balanced with preservation of rural character and local community priorities. Could the minister explain how this legislation allows Barrie to expand where infrastructure is ready, while ensuring that the townships can continue to maintain the low-density rural development patterns that residents value, and how this approach benefits the region as a whole?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Response? I recognize the member for Wellington–Halton Hills.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for his question. I'm not a minister yet but I'm happy to just be a member for Wellington–Halton Hills.

But, Speaker, this legislation allows Barrie to take on higher-density growth in areas already serviced by water/waste water, transit and roads. By clarifying which lands fall under Barrie's jurisdiction, Springwater and Oro-Medonte are free to focus on preserving rural- and hamlet-based development patterns that reflect their communities' values.

This is addition, not subtraction. It's coordination, not competition. Residents in all municipalities benefit because this region can grow sustainably. Families can access homes, businesses can access jobs and communities can maintain their character.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the member for Wellington–Halton Hills. What we have seen with this government over the last few years is they really like to download development costs on to the property tax base. I am worried that the impact of these changes will mean that the ratepayers in Barrie will see a property tax increase, or they will see service cuts in order for this development to proceed.

So my question to you is: Can you assure us that Barrie residents will see no property tax increase as a result of the bill that we are debating today?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: I'm not aware of any downloading that's taken place.

As far as the taxpayers of Barrie, when we see employment lands being added to the city of Barrie and businesses coming in, that actually reduces the cost on ratepayers in municipalities. So, overall, I believe that this will be a positive thing for the property taxpayers of the city of Barrie.

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

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: I want to thank the member from Wellington–Halton Hills for taking on this issue, and I appreciate your context because you were a

councillor. You understand the importance of knowing the area you're going to be presiding over and how to conduct the issues of council in a way that respects all taxpayers.

I just want to understand, as a councillor—because I was a former councillor as well—consultation is important. And I just want you to be able to clarify again for all of us the extent in which consultation was done, why consultation is so important for something like this and why the timeline is now—because we know elections are coming, right?

So why is it important for us to get this done now, and the consultation process to a councillor, from a councillor?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to the fantastic member for Brampton Centre for the question.

As I said, consultation has been going on for quite some time with this issue and that's going to continue after this bill is hopefully passed, and those will be dealing with what those exactly look like, how the different parties are going to be compensated.

Like you mentioned, there is a municipal election coming up next year and we don't want this to be an election issue. So we're coming in and we're acting now to give certainty.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Seeing the time on the clock, it is now time for private members' public business.

Report continues in volume B.

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Pinsonneault, Steve (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Northern Economic Development and Growth / Ministre du Développement et de la croissance économique du Nord
Quinn, Hon. / L'hon. Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security / Ministre des Collèges et Universités, de l'Excellence en recherche et de la Sécurité
Racinsky, Joseph (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation / Ministre des Affaires autochtones et de la Réconciliation économique avec les Premières Nations Minister Responsible for Ring of Fire Economic and Community Partnerships / Ministre responsable des Partenariats économiques et communautaires pour le développement du Cercle de feu
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Rosenberg, Bill (PC)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, 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	
Skelly, Hon. / L'hon. Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Speaker / Présidente de l'Assemblée législative
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre associé des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Smyth, Stephanie (LIB)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée des Petites Entreprises

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon. Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué à la Santé mentale et à la Lutte contre les dépendances
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Attorney General / Procureur général associé
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	Deputy Speaker / Vice-Présidente Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Tsao, Jonathan (LIB)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Vaugeois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Vickers, Paul (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
Watt, Tyler (LIB)	Nepean	
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	