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(Hansard)**

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Mardi  
5 mai 2026

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Speaker: Honourable Donna Skelly  
Clerk: Trevor Day

Présidente : L'honorable Donna Skelly  
Greffier : Trevor Day

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 5 May 2026

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE  
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 5 mai 2026

*Report continued from volume A.*

1800

**PRIVATE MEMBERS'  
PUBLIC BUSINESS**

ROBBIE'S LEGACY ACT (HONOURING  
BELOVED ORGAN AND TISSUE  
DONORS), 2026

LOI DE 2026 SUR LE LEGS DE ROBBIE  
(HOMMAGE À NOS CHERS DONNEURS  
D'ORGANES ET DE TISSUS)

Mr. Hsu moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 3, An Act to amend the Gift of Life Act in order to recognize organ and tissue donors / Projet de loi 3, Loi pour modifier la Loi sur le don de vie afin de souligner la contribution des donneurs d'organes et de tissus.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Pursuant to standing order 100, the member has 12 minutes for their presentation.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Bill 3, Robbie's Legacy Act, 2025, the first private member's bill tabled in the 44th Ontario Parliament, seeks to recognize the life-saving impact of organ and tissue donors. This legislation would, if passed, amend the Gift of Life Act to allow donors, both living and deceased, with proper consent, to be publicly named and honoured through memorials and tributes in hospitals.

I want to start by recognizing the parents of Robbie Sherren, after whom this bill is named, Lorraine and Derk Sherren, who have travelled from Kingston and are here in the gallery today. Thank you for your permission to name this bill in memory of your son Robbie.

I would like to thank, first of all, the member for Brantford–Brant, who himself gave the gift of life a couple of years ago. He was a living donor. He gave part of his liver to save another life. He, like other donors, are owed a debt of thanks. I would also like to thank him for his support of and advocacy for this bill.

Organ and tissue donations save hundreds of lives across the province every year. One organ donor can save eight lives and enhance the lives of 75 others through tissue donation. I encourage everybody to consider being a donor. Just look at the back of your health card to check if you are already.

As of May 4, yesterday, there are 1,724 people on the wait-list for organs, but only 35% of Ontario health card holders were registered as donors in 2025. That's why there is a campaign, the beadonor.ca campaign, to encour-

age life-saving organ and tissue donation. Nothing inspires people like the actions of people around them.

In 2016, after consultations with patients, families and physicians, Kingston General Hospital created a new organ and tissue donor memorial wall. It's located in the Kidd 2 wing. It's about halfway between the operating rooms and the intensive care units, which is a fitting place for people to be able to stop and reflect on the gift of life that donors have made. It was in the shape of a tree with the names of donors on the leaves. Other hospitals had similar memorials. Families loved the ability to honour and memorialize their deceased loved ones who had become donors.

In the subsequent years after the Trillium Gift of Life Network was put inside Ontario Health, concerns about privacy stopped this valuable practice for deceased donors.

Robbie Sherren was a young man from Kingston who lived a life of service and generosity. From a young age, Robbie was a prolific blood donor. I'm really surprised at this: In 23 years, he donated blood 121 times.

After a tragic accident, Robbie's family made the selfless decision to donate his organs. His heart was transplanted using a groundbreaking heart-in-a-box procedure, a Canadian first for an adult donor. This was a game-changing technology for heart transplants in Canada. This special resuscitation box provides blood to a donated heart and keeps it warm, beating and viable with oxygen and nutrients while en route to the recipient. I just learned today from Robbie's mother that it allows the heart to be viable for six hours instead of three hours, which means that it has a better chance to help a lot more people.

The day after tomorrow is the second anniversary of Robbie's death, when he became the first Canadian adult to donate his heart after cardiac or circulatory death.

According to one of Robbie's physicians, Robbie's donation was only made public after significant legal hurdles, despite the family's desire to honour Robbie's legacy.

This led eventually to a meeting in my office, and I learned that currently, the named recognition of deceased organ and tissue donors is no longer a normally permitted practice. That led to my decision to draft this legislation.

Bill 3, if passed, provides legal clarity. Its purpose is to establish privacy rules so that we will again be able to recognize organ and tissue donors by name.

Bill 3 contains the following safeguards:

—the memorial would only be posted if consent is provided by the donor or their legal substitute;

—only the donor's name may be publicly disclosed as part of recognition efforts; and, importantly,

—this disclosure would occur no sooner than six months after the donation, giving families time to grieve and reflect and to ensure that the donation is difficult to trace.

At Kingston General Hospital, names of donors are added to the memorial by their loved ones only once a year, every April, to mark organ and tissue donor awareness month. These conditions ensure that recognition is respectful, voluntary and focused solely on honouring the donor's legacy. Bill 3, if passed, would permit a return of the practices of allowing families to celebrate and memorialize their loved ones without unnecessary legal hurdles.

Public recognition of organ and tissue donors will promote awareness and education around organ and tissue donation, inspire more Ontarians to become registered donors and acknowledge the immense impact of donation on saving and improving lives.

Each organ and tissue donor has a legacy that deserves a chance to be publicly and proudly recognized. I urge all of my colleagues in this House to support Bill 3, Robbie's Legacy Act, 2025.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** I'm very proud to rise in support of Bill 3, Robbie's Legacy Act (Honouring Beloved Organ and Tissue Donors), introduced by my very good friend and colleague Ted Hsu, the MPP for Kingston and the Islands. I'd like to sincerely thank you, Ted, for introducing this important piece of legislation twice now—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I must remind the member to not use names.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Thank you, Speaker.

This bill is about recognizing and honouring organ and tissue donors by name, and as we've heard, it starts with an incredible man named Robbie Sherren. Robbie was only 40 years old when he passed away in May 2024.

Mr. Speaker, as Ted was mentioning, in Canada, heart donation is traditionally only possible after brain or neurological death when the heart is still beating, even after the patient is declared deceased. That meant at first, Robbie's heart could not be donated. But within hours of the initial "no," while Robbie was still on life support, the Kingston chapter of the Trillium Gift of Life Network stepped in.

After Robbie's heart stopped beating, it could be removed, resuscitated and preserved using the special technology which is often called "heart in a box." That technology keeps the heart warm, oxygenated and beating outside of the body while it's transported to a recipient.

There was a challenge, Mr. Speaker: That technology wasn't available in Canada. So a US-based surgical team was brought in along with the equipment needed to make Robbie's donation possible. On May 7, when Robbie passed away, he became the first Canadian adult to donate his heart after circulatory death, and that is extraordinary.

What makes this story even more powerful, as the MPP for Kingston and the Islands properly pointed out, is that this was not Robbie's only act of generosity. It's who he was. It's what his family is. Robbie signed up to donate blood as soon as he turned 17, which is the minimum age

required to donate, and over the next 23 years, he donated blood 121 times.

His mother Lorraine who is with us today is also a living kidney donor to her husband, Derk. This is a family that understands what it means to give life to others. Lorraine and Derk are here with us today, and I would like to thank you both personally for your incredible generosity.

**1810**

Bill 3 gives us a way to recognize and honour organ and tissue donors like Robbie, by name, with consent and with dignity. When we honour powerful stories like Robbie's in public, we are encouraging others to step forward and become organ and tissue donors, too. This is especially important at a time when 1,724 Ontarians are waiting for an organ transplant. I encourage everyone to register as an organ and tissue donor today by visiting [beadonor.ca](http://beadonor.ca).

Now, this is a simple bill, but it is an extraordinarily meaningful one and I am very proud to support it.

Monsieur le Président, ce projet de loi nous permet de reconnaître et d'honorer les donneurs d'organes et de tissus comme Robbie, par leur nom, avec consentement et avec dignité. Cela est particulièrement important quand 1 724 Ontariens attendent une transplantation d'organe aujourd'hui.

Donner ses organes, c'est offrir la vie à jusqu'à huit personnes. J'encourage tout le monde à s'inscrire aujourd'hui pour devenir donneur d'organes et de tissus à [soyezundonneur.ca](http://soyezundonneur.ca).

Merci à mon collègue et mon ami le député de Kingston et les Îles d'avoir présenté cette importante mesure législative.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** I want to thank the member for bringing this important bill forward. Organ donation is a way to save lives, and the people who make the decision to be an organ donor, the people who get to save lives, deserve to be recognized. They deserve to be honoured. They deserve to be thanked for what they have done, and this is what this bill will allow us to do in a way easier way than what we have now.

Ontario—and I would say southern Ontario; we don't do organ donation in northern Ontario—is recognized worldwide for organ donations. There are people from other provinces who come to Toronto, who come to Ontario, waiting for organs.

As has been shared, over 1,724 people right now are on the list; they are waiting for an organ. It is sad to say, but about every three days, one of them will die without ever having access to life-saving organs.

Once a transplant takes place, it saves a life. It changes a life. I have a very good friend of mine, Gary, who went through a double lung transplant. He's a miner from northern Ontario, had a severe lung problem, made it onto the lung transplant list and was a recipient. Actually, we celebrated his seventh anniversary of his transplant last Friday. And it's a day I will remember all my life, when

his wife texted me to say, “He’s been called,” and then texted me to say, “The surgery is done and all went well.”

And if you meet Gary today, you would never know. He’s a great big guy, like many miners are big guys, and he carries on with his life. You wouldn’t know. It was a good match. Sure, he has to take a few meds, but really, very few. He goes on; he’s able to do what all of us are able to do.

I had seen him just a few days before he got the call for the double lung transplant and he was really, really sick. I was very worried about Gary and wasn’t sure how much longer he was going to be able to wait. But it works. It is fantastic. And for all 1,724 people on the wait-list, I hope that they all get an organ transplant.

We have put forward bills from the NDP to help get more donors. Right now in Ontario, if you ask, over 90% of Ontarians say that they want to be organ donors, they want to help and this is something that they want to do. But when you look at the statistics on beadonor.ca, it’s 35% of the people who have gone through the signing up to be a donor. Thank you to the 35% of Ontarians who have done that, but there’s a big difference between 90% and 35%.

What we have suggested for many years now, it comes from Peter Kormos, who was an NDP MPP in this House for many, many, decades, who had brought this bill forward. Since Peter Kormos passed away, I have continued to bring this bill forward. It’s to bring what we call “assumed consent.” That is an option so people will opt out of organ donations.

When I first brought this bill forward, there was quite a bit of pushback. I sat down with the groups. There were some religious groups. There were communities that did not agree with this. So I sat down with them, I listened to them, and I made changes to the bill. Now, when we bring this bill forward, there is no more pushback.

Nova Scotia put a similar bill forward, and in Nova Scotia, the amount of organs that become available is way, way more than what they had before when people had to sign on. So this is something else that we could do to help people on the wait-list.

For all of us in the 90% of Ontarians who want to be an organ donor who haven’t gone through the process of going on the website and finding beadonor.ca and doing the registration and all of this, then when the time has come, the health care workers would ask the next of kin if the person has signed out. That’s where it ends. If the person has not signed out or signed in, then they would ask the next of kin as to, “Would you agree for your loved one to become an organ donor?” And the next of kin gets the last say as to yes, they think that their loved one would have wanted this, or no, they don’t.

But to have this opportunity to ask the family whether you have signed on on beadonor.ca or not changes everything. A whole lot more organs become available. The stats show that a whole lot more organs from young, healthy people become available, because we all know, when we are in our teens and early twenties, we’re immortal, we’re invincible, we don’t think about death. As we age, we think about it a little bit more. If you look at

the stats, again, the number of young people who sign on to beadonor.ca tends to be a lot lower than in other age groups. So, all of this could change so that we could celebrate more donors, we could say thank you to more families and we could make sure that more people get the organs that will save their lives.

I have another friend of mine, Hélène. Elle aussi a été récipiendaire d’une transplantation pulmonaire. Hélène était très jeune quand elle a commencé à avoir des problèmes pulmonaires assez sévères. Elle s’est qualifiée pour une transplantation pulmonaire. Parce qu’elle était jeune, petite, ça a pris pas mal de temps sur la liste—plus d’un an—avant qu’elle ne reçoive l’appel qu’on avait été capable de lui trouver un match. Je pense qu’elle avait 16 ans lorsqu’elle est allée sur la liste. Elle est maintenant dans sa trentaine. Elle est encore avec nous. Ça a changé sa vie, pour le mieux.

**1820**

Hélène, ce n’est plus une enfant maintenant; c’est une femme avec un coeur extraordinaire qui est toujours prête à aider, qui a toujours des bonnes idées, qui est toujours—on est chanceux de l’avoir dans notre vie, puis on est chanceux de l’avoir, point à la ligne. Mais rien de ça n’aurait été possible si ce n’était que quelqu’un a accepté de faire un don.

Il faut les honorer. Il faut leur dire merci. Il faut avoir un plan qui rend ça facile. Je suis certaine que lorsque le projet de loi va avoir été mis en place et qu’on va commencer à honorer les gens qui font des dons—on va commencer à les remercier de façon publique, en laissant savoir aux gens leurs noms, qui ils étaient—que le don d’organes va augmenter en général.

I feel pretty confident that, when the bill goes through and that we have an opportunity to honour donors, to respect them, to put their names, to say thank you—I’m sure that a lot of people that have not thought about putting their names forward will, because they know someone, because they realize that this is something good that people can do. For a few organs, you can have living donors. We have one of them with us today, who’s about to speak after me, but for many of the donors, the person has passed. But to say their name, to say thank you, to honour them is something that we should do. This is what good people do. What they have done changed, often, not only one life; they have a chance to save many lives; they have the chance to help many people through tissue donation. And all of this deserves a thank you. I know that some hospitals in some places try to do some of that, to have it province-wide, where we speak as a group, we say thank you, we honour them; to me, this is something fantastic. This is a way to be kind to one another, a way to honour the sacrifices that have been done, and I say that, from the NDP, we are all in favour.

Ça va nous faire extrêmement plaisir de voter en faveur de ce projet de loi. C’est quelque chose que—je suis un peu surprise qu’on n’est pas encore rendu là, mais on a la chance aujourd’hui de dire merci; ne la laissons pas passer. Votons en faveur et assurons-nous que le projet de loi se rende à la deuxième lecture, troisième lecture et à la sanction royale.

Let's make sure that this bill gets through second reading, third reading and royal assent so that it becomes law and we can say thank you in a way that will make all of us proud.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

**Mr. Will Bouma:** I will just say right now, Speaker, I'm probably not going to make it through this in one piece, but that's okay.

I love private members' business. It gives us all an opportunity to set our partisan stuff aside to talk about things that really matter to us, and I commend the member from Kingston and the Islands for bringing this piece of legislation forward.

It's an honour to be able to rise and have the opportunity to speak to the Robbie's Legacy Act and to acknowledge the intent and the circumstances that have brought this proposed legislation before the House today.

Speaker, at its core, this bill speaks to themes of compassion, it speaks to themes of remembrance and it speaks to themes of respect. It draws attention to the profound generosity of organ and tissue donors and to the lasting impact they have on individuals, the lasting impact that they have on families and the lasting impact that they have on communities across Ontario.

Every transplant represents not only a medical intervention but a deeply human story—a story that is marked on the one side by loss and a story on the other side that's marked by generosity and the possibility of a renewed life.

Organ and tissue donation continues to save lives in this province. In 2024-25, more than 1,300 life-saving organ transplants were performed in Ontario, made possible through the generosity of living and deceased donors. Thousands more Ontarians benefited from tissue donations that restored mobility, that restored sight, that restored quality of life. These outcomes matter, and they remind us of the importance of treating donors and their families with care, with dignity and with respect.

At the same time, the need remains significant: More than 1,600 Ontarians are currently waiting for an organ transplant, and each year there are families who wait for a call that does not come in time.

Speaker, as you may know, I donated 40% of my liver two years ago and became part of the living donor program. I remember reading the story about Jason Shawana in our local Brantford Expositor, a gentleman who needed a liver transplant. I remember looking at my wife and I said, "Joni, what do you think?" She said, "Yes, just respond to the email. Go ahead."

For colleagues, if you ever want a really, really deeply personal, incredible physical, sign up to be a living donor. You'll have every test done under the sun. I had multiple CTs, MRIs, blood tests, stress tests and everything, and it turns out I'm healthy enough. But they did say to me, "Mr. Bouma, you're a perfect candidate, but you're too fat and you have a fatty liver." So I exercised an hour and a half a day. I went on a 900-calorie-a-day diet, and I lost 30 pounds in a couple of months under medical supervision. Then I went in for another MRI, and they told me, "You're good to go." Three days later, on a Monday morning—I

was actually in Ottawa for meetings—they gave me a call and they said, "We've got a match. Can you come in next Monday?"

Actually, I offered to do it again; I can't, because they won't let you do it again for 10 years, and then I'll be too old. But it turns out I'll never be addicted to opiates because, boy, did I ever react to the pain management they gave me at the hospital. But to this day, the knowledge that there's someone running around this province of Ontario who, believe it or not, even to the colleagues who think I'm crazy across the way, is only alive because they have a piece of me living inside of them is something that gives me incredible satisfaction.

Which is why, this evening, when we left the hospital—boy, did my wife and I ever bawl when they gave that to us—sorry, Speaker; this isn't through you. They gave me a challenge coin in a lovely box and a pin signifying my organ donation, and tonight I couldn't help but give that to Robbie's parents. So thank you to my colleagues across the way who bore with me while I ran up and did that, because it does mean something.

Speaker, the reality of organ donation underscores the importance of continuing to strengthen public confidence in Ontario's donation system and ensuring that it operates in a way that is ethical, transparent and trustworthy.

If I can add one more personal anecdote, Speaker: When I got on this list, I remember speaking to Dr. Mark Catral—I apologize to Hansard, that's not in my speech; you'll have to sort that out—he said, "You know, when we do this, you have to know, sir, that we bend some ethical rules." The doctors across the way will know this and the nurses. I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, the person who's receiving the piece of your liver is—they're dying. They're actively dying. They're this close to dying." And if you've ever seen that, as I have with the fire service, people who need a liver transplant look really, really bad. They're yellow; they're at death's door. But he said, "The ethical quandary comes with you, because we make a promise when we become doctors that we will first do no harm. We have to tell you that there's absolutely nothing wrong with you and we will be causing you significant harm."

**1830**

In fact, the Premier said to me, "You're crazy. I had a friend go through this, and it's like months and months of recovery. You don't want to do this. Don't do it." But I said, "Sir." And he looked at me and he said, "You're going to do it anyway, aren't you?" And I said, "Yes. Yes, I am, sir."

When the doctor told me that and asked me what I thought about that, I said, "You know what? What that tells me is that I'm in very, very good hands here at Toronto General Hospital." And I was. I was in very, very good hands.

Anyway, Speaker, Ontario has a well-established and carefully governed organ and tissue donation and transplantation system. Through the Ministry of Health and Ontario Health's Trillium Gift of Life Network, the province supports designated hospitals, tissue banks and transplant centres that work together under rigorous

clinical standards and informed-consent requirements. The system has been built deliberately with strong safeguards, accountability and respect to personal health information.

We also know that, while a large majority of Ontarians support organ and tissue donation in principle, far fewer have taken the step to register. Speaker, trust matters, confidence matters, and families matter, particularly at moments of profound grief and decision-making.

That is why, Speaker, while we recognize the intent behind Bill 3 and the focus that it places on recognizing organ and tissue donors, it is important—and I'm sure the member from Kingston and the Islands will agree—that this legislation receive careful study through the committee process. Should Bill 3 proceed to committee, we are prepared to support its thorough examination to ensure that any donor-recognition framework appropriately addresses issues of privacy, consent and data protection. Any measures that involve personal or health-related information must align with Ontario's existing legislative framework and uphold the high standards that Ontarians expect when it comes to stewardship of sensitive data. That's the technical side from the Ministry of Health.

Privacy is not a theoretical concern. Public trust in institutions can be fragile, and we see how quickly confidence can be challenged by misinformation or misunderstandings. When it comes to organ and tissue donation, maintaining trust is essential not only to honour those who give, but also to ensure that Ontarians feel comfortable making informed and voluntary choices.

Ontario Health and the Trillium Gift of Life Network continue to invest in public education, community outreach and culturally appropriate engagement to strengthen awareness and understanding around donation. These efforts are grounded in consent, transparency and respect—principles that must also guide any legislative changes related to donor recognition.

Speaker, Bill 3 may have the potential to complement this work by encouraging reflection and gratitude towards donors and their families. However, it is essential that any such approach be implemented in a manner that is thoughtful, that is respectful and that is consistent with existing laws, including the Gift of Life Act, and with Ontario's broader commitment to protecting personal information.

I believe, Speaker, that committee study will provide an opportunity to hear from families like Robbie's family, clinicians, privacy experts, Ontario Health and the Trillium Gift of Life Network. That process will allow members to assess how best to strike the appropriate balance, recognizing donors in a meaningful way while safeguarding privacy, respecting family wishes and preserving public confidence in the system.

Speaker, respecting donors means respecting their choices, including how their information is used and how their legacy is acknowledged. Getting this balance right is not only a matter of principle, but one that supports our shared objective of saving lives through organ and tissue donation.

In closing, Speaker, we acknowledge the intent that underpins Robbie's Legacy Act and the personal experiences that have informed it. We are prepared to support

this bill moving to committee so that it can be carefully reviewed, strengthened where appropriate and aligned with Ontario's values of compassion, privacy and trust.

Speaker, I would like to thank the other members who have spoken on this bill, the member from Nickel Belt and also the member from Orléans, and the member from Kingston and the Islands for bringing it forward.

You know, he did call me looking for support for this bill. He even offered me the opportunity to co-sponsor it with him. But what I said was, "This is just a piece of good legislation. I don't need my name on it." And I think that's the intent of what organ donors are all about. Yet to be able to acknowledge the sacrifices that are made, to do that in a way that's tangible and promotes more organ donation is incredible.

So I look forward to this bill passing tonight. I think it will be unanimous—unless the member calls for a vote just for fun so we can do it in the House tomorrow, which is totally cool with me, and passing it unanimously that way, on a recorded vote,

But again, Speaker, I love when we have the opportunity at the end of the day to get together as people from different perspectives, different ideologies and different sides of this House and do good things for the people of Ontario. This is another such opportunity, and I commend the member from Kingston and the Islands for bringing that forward.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** We often begin our remarks by commenting, "It's an honour to rise in the chamber." Of course, it always is, but this is a really special one. It's a special one because I get to acknowledge a truly heroic and courageous family. I learned about a new member who has exhibited and exemplified some of that same courage and heroism as well, and of course, I'm talking about the member from Brantford—Brant.

I want to begin by thanking the member from Kingston and the Islands for bringing this forward.

I want to wish every person in this House a long and happy, healthy life. For every single one of us, at some point—hopefully many, many, many years down the road—it will come to an end, and I hope it ends the right way. Far too often, it comes with sadness; sometimes it comes with tragedy. In any and all of those circumstances, there is still an opportunity for a very special silver lining. That silver lining is very literally a gift of life, an opportunity to provide an organ to someone that may be at death's door, someone who may be very sick, someone that we can really help.

In my training and subsequent practice, I have had many opportunities to be exposed to our province's transplant system. Regrettably, I've had patients who have passed away who have become candidates for donating their organs. I've also had the very special privilege of participating with teams who have gone to harvest organs from donors who have passed away. I've also had the very special privilege of being parts of teams who have delivered organs and followed a patient afterwards whose life was saved.

It is difficult to describe in words how special and significant of a gift this is. It's difficult to describe them. The member from Brantford–Brant has gone a long way towards illustrating that and sharing that with us, but it is truly special. It's hard to capture.

But thankfully, there are a few things that we can do. The member for Kingston and the Islands has brought forward this legislation, and in so doing, we are honouring one very special individual and a very special family.

Every year, there are countless individuals and countless families who exhibit that same heroism and for whom we should, with their permission, be allowed to celebrate that. My hope is that in so doing, not only can we honour those individuals and their families, but we can inspire other people to follow in their footsteps. I hope that there are people in this chamber or who are watching online or on television around the province who are inspired by the member for Brantford–Brant.

I don't mind sharing that—I double- and triple-checked my driver's licence, but I'm a donor. I encourage everyone to be a donor. I hope that when people walk through a hospital and see a list of tens, hundreds or maybe even one day thousands of names, they too can decide and be inspired to have the opportunity to change someone's life as well.

1840

It's for that and many other reasons that I'm proud to support the member for Kingston and the Islands and to honour the family in whose name this bill is titled.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

**Mr. John Fraser:** It's an honour to be able to speak to Robbie's Legacy Act. I want to thank Robbie's family for being here. You give meaning to it. It's good for us to have a connection here. As importantly, I want to thank you for going to see your member of provincial Parliament, Ted, who I'll say nice things about later but not right now—a very good man.

This is what private members' business should be about: a family or a person coming to the member and saying, "I have this problem. I need you to help me solve it." Then it becomes legislation and we have a debate in here that's about stuff that's really important. It's not that other stuff's not important, but at the end of the day, this is the stuff that matters. It matters that we recognize a gift of life. It matters that we promote organ donation.

I want to thank, as well, the member from Kingston and the Islands for his very thoughtful approach. If there's one thing I know about the member from Kingston and the Islands, it's that he's very thoughtful and very thorough, very kind and very generous. In that way, he invited three of his colleagues as well as the member from Brantford–Brant to co-sign on his bill, to be part of that, to be able to debate it, to put our names to something that's really important.

In closing, we have about 12 days left in the legislative session. I would just encourage, if we're going to pass this bill unanimously, that we do what we can to get it to committee, that we do what we can to get it together in the form that we've all agreed on here and that we see it

through to the finish line. I'm not suggesting that there would be no intent to do that. In my experience, sometimes you have to put a deadline on things to drive towards.

I know there's a lot of goodwill all the way through here for Robbie's Legacy Act. This bill will be a legacy for Robbie and for the Sherren family. I just am really very pleased that I was able to be part of this debate tonight, here with all of you, and hear about the member from Brantford–Brant—if I needed a piece of kidney, I'd be okay with his.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate? Further debate? Further debate?

The member has two minutes to reply.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** I want to thank all of my colleagues who rose in the House this evening to speak to this bill, like my colleagues from Ottawa South, Orléans and Don Valley East, who spoke about Robbie and the heart-in-the-box technology, experience as a physician and the importance of organ and tissue donors.

Je remercie ma collègue la députée de Nickel Belt, qui a raconté les histoires de ses amis et comment leurs vies ont changé, and most of all, my colleague from Brantford–Brant, who spoke very truly about the need to take care in passing legislation. Also, I would say he almost didn't need to say anything because he's already said so much by his actions. It inspires me.

I want to thank everybody for taking the time to speak tonight and to express your support for this bill. I look forward to its continuing through the legislative process.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Mr. Hsu has moved second reading of Bill 3, An Act to amend the Gift of Life Act in order to recognize organ and tissue donors.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?  
Carried.

*Second reading agreed to.*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Pursuant to standing order 100(h), the bill is referred to the Committee of the Whole House.

I turn to the member.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** I wish to send this bill to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** The member has asked to send it to the Standing Committee on Social Policy. Is the majority in favour of this bill being referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy? Agreed. The bill is referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, we can now move to the late show.

## ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

### EDUCATION FUNDING

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** The member for Orléans has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Education. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter,

and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

I recognize the member from Orléans.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Mr. Speaker, earlier today, I asked the government about something that should be basic. It wasn't complicated. It wasn't theoretical. It, frankly, wasn't partisan. It was basic: the conditions in which our children learn and what this government is allowing to happen to the men and women who keep our schools clean and safe.

Parents in Ottawa are already worried about those fundamentals. And their expectations, frankly, aren't all that high or unreasonable. They expect clean classrooms. They expect safe buildings. They expect that when their child turns on the tap at school, the water is safe to drink. That is not a particularly high bar. That is the bare minimum. And yet, across the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, that confidence is being shaken. Multiple schools have reported that lead exceedances in drinking water exist—lead in water in schools.

Let's be clear about what that means. Lead contamination is not cosmetic. This is not something that you can ignore and come back to later. Lead is a neurotoxin, and there is no safe level of lead exposure for children, and yet, in Ontario, the provincial threshold for what is considered acceptable is twice as high as the federal standard—twice as high. So when parents hear that a school has exceeded the limit, they're often left wondering, "Exceeded the already higher limit? Exceeded it by how much? Exceeded it by how many times? Over what period of time?" And too often, they don't get clear answers because the other problem we have in addition to the lead is the lack of transparency. Parents are finding out after the fact. Information is inconsistent. Reporting is unclear. Confidence erodes not just because of the risk, but because families feel like they aren't being told the full story. And at that exact moment when confidence needs to be restored, this government is allowing the system to be weakened.

Today, we learned that custodians and maintenance staff in Ottawa schools are being laid off. Think about that. At a time when schools are dealing with water safety issues, the very people who maintain those systems are being shown the door; the very people who flush the lines, who maintain the fixtures, who ensure that buildings are safe, clean and functional—gone.

Mr. Speaker, this isn't just about water. Custodians are the backbone of our schools. They work late into the night to ensure that classrooms are ready in the morning. They support the community use of schools so that kids can play sports, so that families can gather and communities can connect. They're the quiet professionals who make the entire system work, and this government is cutting them.

**1850**

Let me put this all together for you, Mr. Speaker: lead exceedances in school drinking water; standards that lag behind federal guidance; a lack of clear, proactive transparency for parents; and now, cuts to the very staff responsible for maintaining safe school environments. That is a

system under strain—a system that clearly the government has no plan for.

Confidence in our schools is built on those basics—clean classrooms, safe buildings, water parents can trust—and when one of those is in doubt, confidence starts to slip. But when all three are in question at the same time, confidence collapses. Parents shouldn't have to wonder if the water is safe. Teachers shouldn't have to question the conditions they work in. And students shouldn't have to carry that burden in the classroom. Yet that's exactly where we are.

After eight years, this government owns the state of our schools. It owns the standards. It owns the funding decisions. It owns the consequences.

So the question tonight is simple: Will the government raise the standard, restore transparency and protect the front-line workers who keep our schools safe?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** In response, I recognize the member from Kitchener South—Hespeler.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** I'm pleased to have the opportunity to rise tonight and address the question from the member opposite.

I did want to give a shout-out to my good friend Jim Schmidt, who had run for the PCs in Kitchener Centre. Jim was a custodian and superintendent for 20-plus years with the Waterloo Region District School Board, the Catholic school board and also the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board. He taught me an awful lot about how boards run and operate and maintain their schools.

I certainly agree—we owe so much to the custodians and other workers who keep our schools safe.

As the member opposite is aware, Ontario maintains one of the most comprehensive provincial testing regimes for lead in drinking water in Canada. We require that every fixture used to prepare food or provide drinking water to children in schools, private schools and also child care centres be regularly tested for lead. This isn't an optional thing. It is a requirement. It's a safety standard that's designed to protect Ontarians.

Schools are also required to routinely flush their plumbing systems and to sample and test drinking water to ensure ongoing compliance with health-based standards and, most importantly, to keep students safe.

Should lead levels be tested as exceeding provincial drinking water quality standards, facility owners—including school boards and operators of private schools and child care centres—are, again, required to take immediate corrective action. Those actions are carried out under the direction of the local medical officer of health, ensuring that focus on public health remains the priority.

Our government will, of course, continue to work closely with all partners involved in safeguarding Ontario's drinking water system, which includes system owners and operators, accredited laboratories, source protection authorities, the Walkerton Clean Water Centre and the Ontario Clean Water Agency.

I would like to note, though, that beyond simply water safety, as a government, we are making historic investments in the spaces where students learn and grow. I feel that has been particularly obvious in my area, where it

seems that every time I turn around, I'm at a new groundbreaking for a school or a renovation to a school, an expansion to a school.

Since 2018, this government has invested more than \$6.4 billion in capital projects, including 179 new schools and 134 additions and major renovations to existing school buildings—which is especially important when we consider the lead question, as those renovations and new buildings are so important. Those investments have created more than 132,000 new student spaces as well as 10,200 new licensed child care spaces located within schools.

Just last week, we were able to announce an additional \$1.6-billion investment in 79 school construction projects across Ontario. These projects will be delivering approximately 29,000 new student spaces and more than 1,900 licensed child care spaces.

Ultimately, Speaker, certainly we will not be following the pattern of the members opposite on building safe, modern and sustainable learning environments for students, given their somewhat poor record on delivering infrastructure projects and maintaining Ontario's school infrastructure while they themselves were custodian.

Through legislation such as Bill 101, government is providing the minister with stronger tools to intervene when school boards fail to properly manage capital projects. We've seen that happen, unfortunately, in some jurisdictions, where school boards managing those projects have almost run them into the ground. Ultimately, these are complex undertakings that cost tens of millions of taxpayer dollars, and the public rightly expects them to be delivered responsibly, efficiently, on time.

What I can tell you, Speaker, and the member opposite, is we will continue to make record investments in our schools, including \$23 billion over the next 10 years to ensure that Ontario's education infrastructure remains safe, modern and sustainable. And we will also continue to ensure that those that are responsible for delivering these projects are held accountable for their actions, their spending and their leadership so that Ontario's students can learn, grow and thrive.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** There being no further matters to debate, pursuant to standing order 36(c), I will now call for orders of the day.

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### PUTTING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT FIRST ACT, 2026

### LOI DE 2026 DONNANT LA PRIORITÉ À LA RÉUSSITE DES ÉLÈVES

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 4, 2026, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 101, An Act to amend various Acts in respect of education and child care / Projet de loi 101, Loi modifiant diverses lois relatives à l'éducation et à la garde d'enfants.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** I'm very pleased to rise this evening in strong support of Bill 101, the Putting Student Achievement First Act, and the important school board governance reforms that are before this House.

*Interjections.*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** My apologies to the member. We will have to hold off on your presentation at this time.

The last speaker was the member from Kitchener South—Hespeler, so we have questions and answers scheduled for that time frame.

I call for questions. I go to the member from Perth—Wellington.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Hi, Speaker—or, thank you, Speaker; it's been a long day.

My question to the member from Kitchener South—Hespeler is—really, I appreciated her remarks on this important piece of legislation. I was wondering if she could speak about the important aspects in this legislation but also that were outlined in the provincial budget around the school resource officers, additional support there—obviously a money bill, so the financial component there, but through this piece of legislation and her role as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education around the importance of those school resource officers.

I had the opportunity to host the member from Kitchener South—Hespeler in my riding of Perth—Wellington. We met with the Stratford police and we were talking a bit about some of that important work. Luckily, in my riding, the school boards there have kept—one of the school boards I have—the school resource officers, but I was wondering if the member can explain why this is important across Ontario.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** Thank you for the question. As I said yesterday, it's where one of my interests intersects even more with the portfolio and makes this legislation so exciting to me. Obviously, this is continuing the work done by Bill 33 to make sure that school resource officers, youth liaison officers can return to our schools.

When I was thinking about Bill 101 and some of the work that it does, I was thinking about my own boards in my region, which were some of the boards that unilaterally and in a knee-jerk reaction voted to remove police officers from schools. As somebody that believes that having police officers interacting with children in a controlled, pro-social manner—I think it is so incredibly important to make sure that we actually have the opportunity to build those relationships and not be bound by boards' ideological decisions.

1900

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

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Last week in committee, we learned that the Minister of Education didn't consult a single education worker or teacher or parent organization or trustee association.

Today we learned that the minister very quietly changed the date on a regulatory consultation so that people thought they had an additional week to submit comments, and when they went to submit comments, they found out that

the minister had very quietly changed the deadline without letting anybody know.

The minister is also using this bill to shut down any capacity for people to hold him accountable in the courts.

It's very, very clear, on top of the fact that they only held one day of committee hearings, that the minister just doesn't want to hear from anybody about what's happening in education.

Why does the member think this is a good bill if the—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the member for Kitchener South–Hespeler.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** I have to say, I do sometimes wonder what the NDP does with their time. Consultation is not simply a formal process; it's also something that happens organically. I have been with the minister on many of his visits, and I know that many of the people in this chamber have gone with him as he has toured schools, spoken to child care operators, spoken to teachers, educators etc.

Even from my own perspective, when I go door-knocking in my area, I encounter many teachers. And I'll be honest, the number one frustration that they have all shared with me has been the conduct of the boards—in my area specifically, focusing on hiring expensive consultants while their classrooms may not be appropriately served.

So, again, I think that there's been a lot of consultation, a lot of thought put into this.

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

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** I see the member from Kitchener South–Hespeler talking about hiring consultants at boards. I'm wondering where in this bill the member thinks that hiring high-priced consultants would stop under this bill.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** What I think is so great about this bill is that it recognizes the fact that a school board budget, particularly in Ontario given the size and the complexity of our province, is something that really needs to be in the hands of experts—educators and experts; a co-operative aspect, I think.

When we talk about consultants and driving education forward, the idea behind this bill is, again, to get back to basics, to make sure that what we are focusing on is educating our kids—their writing, their reading, their math, making sure that they are prepared for the jobs of the future, but also really developing those neurological pathways that are so important in early childhood and in school to make sure that they're able to keep up with the more complex patterns that will be introduced to them in later grades. I think it's wonderful to have a bill that's so strongly focused on making sure that that is the purpose of education in Ontario.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Questions? I'll go to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Thank you, Speaker. As you can see, I'm very anxious to get into this debate, and I'll have a chance, no doubt. But I do want to ask a question to the excellent parliamentary assistant to education and the excellent member.

Building on the answer that was given to the question from the member for Ottawa West–Nepean and the listen-

ing that occurred in the lead up to this bill further to Bill 33, how does the intention of this bill and the wording of this bill reflect the importance of this in terms of putting students first along with teachers and parents?

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** The media and the news and this House have been full of stories of boards that have simply been running amok, where their focus has in no real way been focused on student achievement and making sure that we're actually seeing those results in our schools. So this is about making sure that we are focusing in, again, on what our education system is actually supposed to deliver versus whatever ideology or message a trustee may want to contain. Certainly, in my area, we've seen a number of conversations and actions with our boards that, from my perspective, had nothing to do with actually educating our children. This, again, is about making sure that we're focusing in on that.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the member from Waterloo.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** It's interesting that the member from Kitchener South–Hespeler has said that the boards have nothing to do with educating children. Neither does this bill, so you should read it.

The other part our critic has mentioned: no consultation with any education stakeholders, essentially—otherwise people who know what they're talking about, including First Nations trustees.

How do you reconcile the lack of reconciliation as you push forward with this pretty much unconstitutional piece of legislation?

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** It's not unusual in this chamber to have debates where we are debating something that has literally nothing to do with the actual bill that is in front of the chamber, and I think that's one of the things that is happening here.

What this bill is about is improving governance. It is improving governance because a lack of responsible governance is one of the main things that is currently blocking our ability to deliver the quality of education that we should actually expect in this province. That is the focus of this bill. That is the purpose of this bill: It's getting rid of all of the obstacles and the ideology and the mess and the fuss and the constant conversations that are actually distracting all of our incredible educators away from the job that they go to school to do every single day, which is to educate the children of Ontario. That is the purpose of this bill: It's to focus on governance—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Next question?

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** I heard the member speak earlier around police in schools. My question around that is, what approach should be taken? Should they be imposed top-down, or should they be invited in in a collaborative way? This has been a debate across our province, and I think it's really important, after noting the member's comments, to really understand if it should be a top-down approach or if it should be a collaborative approach from the bottom, invited by the community.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** I'm surprised, given some of the comments that have been coming from the Liberal Party, to hear something that sounds so hesitant and concerned about the idea of police officers building positive relationships in our schools.

What Bill 33 did was it said that if a police service is willing to provide a youth liaison position, a school resource officer position, then a board doesn't have the ability to deny them access. I did a wide range of consultation on Bill 33 and on police in schools, and what I heard over and over and over again from every single police service and every single board I spoke to was an immediate emphasis on co-operation, coordination, achieving the same goals, making sure that we were building relationships, creating mutual respect, forming positive connections in the community. That is the purpose of this. So the idea of top-down, bottom-up—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** It is a pleasure to rise tonight in this late-night debate about public education. It is an issue that has really guided my journey to this place.

I want to start by quoting Thames Valley District School Board trustee Marianne Larsen, who had this to say when Bill 101 was introduced by the government just a month or so ago. Marianne Larsen, who is also a former faculty member at the Western faculty of education and, as I said, an elected Thames Valley District School Board trustee, said, "Today, with the introduction of the Putting Student Achievement First Act ... the Ford government is finishing the work started 30 years ago, of destroying the foundation of our education system in Ontario—democratically elected school boards."

Some of you in this place may recall the former Conservative government under Mike Harris in 1997 introducing legislation that forced a dramatic amalgamation of school boards across the province. In Thames Valley District School Board, there were actually four boards, three rural boards and one urban board for the city of London, that came together to create this mega board, a very large, amalgamated school board. That legislation, in 1997, also saw very strong provincial control over school boards, as funding moved from local ratepayers to the province, which is as it should be. The province has a responsibility to fund public education, but the funding that is delivered to school boards has to be sufficient to support the educational needs of students.

**1910**

In 1997, we also saw, with those big, amalgamated boards, much less local accountability. School boards were much larger, and so that connection with the local communities that were represented within the school board was really lessened.

We also saw in 1997, with this big amalgamation, with the cut to trustee honorariums to \$5,000, an immediate crackdown on getting interested people to run for the position of elected school board trustee in these new boards. In the Thames Valley District School Board, the then chair of the board actually put out a media release

asking Londoners who are committed to public education to consider putting their name forward to run as a school board trustee because they were so worried in that first post-amalgamation election in 2000 that nobody would want to run in this environment.

I was one of the people that did run in 2000 because I care deeply about public education and I understand the important role of school board trustees in being that voice, not just for parents of kids in school, but a voice for the community. Because whether you have a child in school or not, you still have a vested interest in making sure that our public education is supporting students, is enabling all children to reach their full potential and to move forward with their lives.

But to get back to Marianne Larsen's comments at the introduction of the bill, she also says, "The legislation falsely claims that the problem in our education system lies with elected school boards and, in so doing, deflects attention away from the chronic underfunding of public education in Ontario since this government came to power."

A lot of people who've been following the progress of this bill agree completely with this perspective that was put forward by my friend Marianne Larsen. This bill is a complete distraction from the real issues in our public education system: the fact that we have class sizes that are bursting at the seams. We have a chronic lack of mental health supports for students. We have kids with special education needs who are not getting the resources or the school staff that they need to be successful in the classroom. We have classrooms that are lacking the most basic supplies.

But instead of dealing with these problems, instead of investing in our education budget, which this government had the opportunity to do in its budget last month—instead of doing that, this government has brought in legislation that is all about further concentrating power not just in the government, but directly in the hands of the Minister of Education.

This bill gives the minister increased power over schools, school boards. It gives the minister the ability to decide what books are going to be used in schools, what education resources are going to be used, how trustees can communicate with each other. It gives the minister power over grades and exams; school board budgets; board communications, as I said; land acquisition and other capital projects; trustee pay and expenses. It seriously reduces the powers of trustees and school boards in their ability to represent their communities. Instead, it transfers power to an appointee of this government, a new chief executive officer—CEO—who has to have business or financial qualifications, not knowledge of our public education system, not expertise in pedagogy or the supports that students need to be successful in schools.

In the Thames Valley District School Board we have learned a little bit about what happens when the government puts responsibility for students' education in the hands of appointees who know nothing about public education. Thames Valley is one of the eight school boards

currently under supervision—and at significant cost to the public, I may add, Speaker. The Thames Valley District School Board supervisor, Paul Boniferno, was appointed in April 2025 and has so far billed the government a total of almost \$240,000.

What has the public got from this investment in supervising the Thames Valley District School Board? Well, we saw the waits for psychological assessments, the wait-lists for students who have been referred to a psychologist, who need an assessment in order to access special education supports—we saw those wait times more than double under a supervisor, compared to a year ago.

The supervisor's response to the doubling of the wait times was not to do something to try to get more assessments done, to ensure that students were getting the psychological assessments they needed. No, what the supervisor did was change the criteria as to who gets added to the wait-list, and then, magically, Speaker, this artificially reduces the number of students and the wait times because they're no longer allowed to be added to the wait-list for a psychological assessment. That has forced parents to have to pay out of pocket for private assessments as they look at waits of a year or more. They have to do that in order to be eligible for the special education supports that are available.

We also heard from the special education advisory committee chair for the Thames Valley District School Board, Alison Morse, that the supervisor has increased secrecy about board activities. It has led to a complete loss of transparency, and it has led to decisions being made without public scrutiny. The SEAC chair, Alison Morse, says, "Trustees play a vital role in school boards by providing accountability and transparency through public meetings. Trustees are democratically elected and serve at the will of the local community." And since the appointment of the provincial supervisor, Alison Morse notes that there has been a significant reduction in community engagement and a real loss of transparency about what's happening at the school board.

None of this is good for students, none of it is good for families and none of it is good for the communities in which schools function.

I want to spend a little bit of time, Speaker, on two schedules of the bill that are part of my responsibilities as shadow minister for colleges and universities. The first schedule I want to talk about is schedule 4, the changes to the Ontario College of Teachers Act. What this schedule does is it allows the government to make changes to teacher education programs that override the institutions at which these programs are located. The changes can override that institution's own academic governance. And it says that these changes can address areas such as areas of study, delivery, practical experience, timing and, really, anything else that the government would like to do in teacher education.

#### 1920

Certainly, we know that there is a need for more qualified teachers in Ontario. We have heard that there are over 70,000 Ontario-certified teachers who are currently

not teaching and that there is a 30% increase in teacher retirements expected over the next five years, so we do have to address workforce issues around teachers. But instead of investing in improving teaching and learning conditions, which would be, you know, a way to retain teachers, to make sure that young people who train to be teachers actually go into the profession—instead of doing that, what the government has proposed in this bill are changes to allow the ministry and the government to determine the content of teacher training programs.

This is a very troubling precedent, Speaker, when the government is permitted to overrule university governance processes, faculty senates, academic councils, other governance structures that have been established—through legislation, I may add—in universities across the province. Keeping the government out of determining the content of programs like teacher education programs has been important to ensure the academic integrity of those programs, and now, with this bill, all of this will be at risk.

The second schedule that I wanted to talk about is the schedule that eliminates the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, or HEQCO. That institution has been around for decades, actually, Speaker, and its mandate is to bring evidence-based research to the continued improvement of the post-secondary education system in Ontario.

It's a curious thing—maybe not so curious—that this government decided to eliminate HEQCO. We have seen repeatedly that this is a government that has no interest in using research and evidence to inform policy. In fact, this government often makes decisions that fly in the face of good policy. So it is indeed unfortunate that this government is getting rid of the one institution that could be relied on to generate very thoughtful research and policy recommendations to guide government decision-making.

I want to now talk about one of the other changes in the bill, which deals with attendance. The minister has noted that only 40% of students in Ontario are attending school regularly. There is an issue, because kids can't be successful if they are not in the classroom. But, to get back to the importance of research and evidence, Speaker, you have to understand why kids are not in the classroom in order to take effective measures to keep them in the classroom.

I want to quote a very thoughtful op-ed by Iris Gorfinkel, who is a family physician from Toronto. She agrees: "Missing school is a pediatric crisis. Chronic absenteeism strongly predicts worse emotional skills, mental illness and economic difficulties." However, she goes on to say, "If Ontario responds to this crisis with marks"—because that's what this government has proposed with this bill, that students will be given marks for attendance—"instead of treatment and support, absenteeism will worsen."

This bill does nothing to address the real issues that are keeping students away from school. Mental health struggles, the lack of community supports—to go back to the Thames Valley District School Board and the example of the wait-list for psychological assessments—you know, not only are there very limited supports in the community

with long wait-lists to access programs, but even within the school system, kids are waiting years or more in order to get the assessment that they need to qualify for special education programs.

To wrap up, Speaker, this bill really does nothing to address the chronic underfunding of public education, the issues that so many families and students are encountering on a daily basis. The government took this bill through a very short committee process, one day of public hearings, five hours—just five hours—for the public to appear before the committee or to submit written proposals. But there were many people in Ontario who care about public education and who took the opportunity to provide written submissions to the government. More than a hundred written submissions were received; the vast majority of them were strongly opposed to the bill.

It is worrisome that the minister stated during the committee process that there's not going to be a single penny more given to school boards to cover the new layers of bureaucracy that he has created: the new CEO and the new CEDO, who has teacher qualifications, who will be working with the CEO. But there were no changes made to address some of the recommendations that came forward during the committee process: no changes to help vulnerable students; no changes to address the fact that the other thing that this bill does is to take accountability away from the government—57 clauses to protect the minister, the cabinet, against legal cases and only one clause in the bill that addresses student achievement.

This is a pattern that we have seen with this government to build in legal wording that would remove them from liability over the changes that they are making. It is a reason, one of the many reasons, that we absolutely cannot support this bill.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** It's time for questions and answers.

**MPP Mohamed Firin:** Speaker, last week I was at social policy committee here. I know some of the members were here as well. We heard from Mr. Anwar Knight, who represents an organization called holding parents accountable. We've heard some of the horrendous stories of what's happening in schools. Mr. Anwar Knight's son was beaten at school.

I'm a parent and I have two daughters. Before running, I spent the last seven years taking my two daughters to school every single day. Their safety is paramount for me, personally.

So, what Anwar described was that his son was beaten and there was no accountability within the school board.

But then he even told us a sadder story that was really sad, and what he said was that there's a young girl who was sexually assaulted at a school. Both her parents were teachers, but they were not able to notify the authorities or notify the school board because they were afraid of repercussions. So the grandmother had to go call the cops and had to go to the school board.

Now, what I want to ask the member—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the member from London West.

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**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** There is no question that we are seeing a significant increase of violence in schools across the province, but the reason for that increase in violence is the lack of funding that the province is providing to schools. If you want kids to be safe in classrooms, you need to provide the personnel, the caring adults in the school who will be there to support the students. We hear about the chronic shortage of EAs, the chronic shortage of ECEs and other school board personnel.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further questions?

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I really enjoyed your presentation, particularly when you started talking about then-Premier Mike Harris, who attacked schools and teachers, closed schools. That upset the unions that represented those teachers to a point that they had days of action all across Ontario. But the one that was really big was in Hamilton, where 100,000 people turned up—and which I attended with my sister, by the way. I'm showing my age a little bit.

Do you believe that this bill is worse than the Harris attack on education?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** Thank you to my colleague for that question. I'm not sure if it's worse; certainly, it is equally bad, and it really continues the work that was started under Mike Harris to dismantle school board governance and attack the role of locally elected school board trustees in this province.

School boards are the oldest form of governance in Ontario—they predate the Legislative Assembly—because people recognized the importance of having locally elected representatives who could advocate for students and who could make sure that schools are providing the kinds of supports students need to be successful.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further questions?

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** I listened very intently to the remarks that were delivered by the member from London West, and, of course, I also listened to the concerns raised by the member from York South–Weston.

I wanted to ask, if this bill is not the solution to the safety concerns that the member has raised, what would be a superior approach to improving the crisis in our schools?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I do appreciate the question from the third party because, to go back to some of the comments I made in my remarks, there has been a legacy of chronic underfunding of public education under this government. We need to invest in our schools. More than \$6 billion has been cut from public education budgets for K-to-12 education under the Conservatives. Those cuts have consequences, and we are seeing those consequences every day in the number of special education students who are excluded from school because the EAs aren't available to support those kids in the classroom. So investing in public education would be an enormous help.

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

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Thank you to the member for London West for her presentation this evening. Obviously, coming from the particular neck of woods that the member

represents, I would make a couple of points. Number one, when she was a trustee at the Thames Valley District School Board, I think it's acknowledged that she did a great job and represented her constituents very well. That being said, since her time here—too bad she left, but glad she's here serving. At the same time, I think supervision of some kind was needed. You may not like what happened, but, at the end of the day, the Thames Valley District School Board needed some change—ineffective management, bad management.

Does she agree, at the very least, that Bill Tucker, the current director of education—interim, filling in—has done a good job of bringing back respect and integrity to the Thames Valley—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the member from London West.

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** There is a constant narrative that we hear from this government that the Thames Valley District School Board needed to be put under supervision. But I can tell the minister, and he certainly should be aware of this, that the decision to send senior administrators to the Rogers Centre for a staff retreat was made by the director of education. The trustees had absolutely nothing to do with this. The trustees in the board are looking at what kinds of supports students need to be successful. They are looking at advocating to the Minister of Education to get the mandatory costs that they have to provide to staff to have that covered by the government. They are doing the work on behalf of—

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

**MPP Catherine McKenney:** Thank you to my colleague from London West.

We learned at committee that there are some 21,000 children that are excluded from school entirely. One in four students with disabilities can't attend for full days or full weeks. The core education funding is being un-addressed here, the shortfall of \$850 million. And the minister's response, in his answer to disabled students being left out of school, is an exemption from the attendance requirements.

I just wonder if my colleague could respond: Is there anything in this bill that you see where there are resources that would allow for students to actually attend school?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I want to thank my colleague for the question. There's absolutely nothing in this bill that will help enable students with special education needs to get back into the classrooms where they belong, where they have a right to be able to learn. This government has made it such that schools cannot provide the supports that those students with special education needs require, because, again, they are not funded to the level that they need to provide those supports.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Question?

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** As many people know, and likely share my concern, there is an epidemic of mental health challenges across society and that seems to be amplified in our schools. Do you see anything in this legislation that would help to address the crisis of mental health in our schools?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** There's absolutely nothing in this legislation that is going to address the crisis of student mental health. There is nothing in this legislation that is going to address the needs of students who have special learning needs and are excluded from school because the supports aren't available for them in the classroom.

What there is in this bill is legal wording to protect the government from lawsuits from parents who want to make sure that their kids get the education they deserve.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

**MPP Tyler Watt:** I will be sharing my time with my amazing colleague from Don Valley West.

I'm here to talk about the Putting Student Achievement First Act, but honestly, it should be called the putting the education minister first act because everything I see in here is just the centralizing of power to the Minister of Education. I don't see anything in here that's actually going to help put student achievement first.

I'm deeply concerned about the corporate language that is being used as of late by the minister, even referring to school boards as enterprises and things like CEO positions for the boards.

Last week, this bill had the opportunity to go through committee—a rare treat with this government, actually going through to committee—a critical stage that was meant to allow students, parents, educators and stakeholders to scrutinize its intent and assess whether it truly serves the public interest. I know that members from the Ontario Liberals put forward many amendments, and it's disappointing but not surprising that the government voted them all down.

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Instead, we saw this process undermined. Rather than engaging in meaningful dialogue, the government deflected responsibility, shifting blame onto teachers, education workers, school board leaders, while limiting the very hearings designed to ensure transparency and accountability. Listen, we know that some not-so-great stuff has happened within boards, but we can't paint an entire population with the same brush.

This matters because this bill contains measures that will materially weaken our education system. It drives larger class sizes, increases strain on already overburdened educators and reduces the quality of support that students receive. The success of Ontario's publicly funded education system has been built on contributions from teachers—trust and respect for professional experience, not bureaucratic control.

Now, some suggestions of what I would think would be in a bill that is about student success: We could repair the school backlog. We could have easily used some of that \$29 million for the Premier's luxury private jet to start addressing that backlog. We should be investing in smaller class sizes and capping those because, with less students in a class, that gives the teacher more time to actually focus on providing a meaningful education. We need more supports for education workers, including ECEs, who are deeply undervalued and underpaid by this government.

We need to address classroom violence. The amount of stories that I have heard from parents and teachers and support workers in our system about the violence is really shocking. We have people that are being choked out in class. We are not addressing the violence that is going on. We're not addressing the mental health crisis that is going on. There is nothing in here about addressing the mental health crisis and providing those supports.

One of the first things to be cut under these supervisors is special education. Teachers should not be taking on so many hats. They're there to be a teacher. They're there to help teach and help grow the next generation of kids and students in this province, but they're having to be a nurse, a mental health worker, a social worker, doing all of these things instead of what they are supposed to be there to do because there just aren't enough supports. It has gotten totally out of control.

We've already seen effects caused under ministry oversight in my very riding of Nepean, and in Ottawa. Under this ministry's current oversight of school boards, we have seen the layoff of hundreds of custodians and support workers in schools. This came out today. In my riding of Nepean, this has been a major issue: 35 lead hands, two fourth-class engineers, five carpenters, one plumber and several other necessary and integral roles, gone under this minister's watch.

Our custodians and support workers are the backbone of our K-to-12 schools. They ensure that students and education workers have a safe and clean space to learn. Lead hands oversee maintaining the school grounds, ensuring that things like ice and snow are cleared. Engineers maintain the HVAC systems and fan units, ensuring students and staff can learn and educate in reasonable conditions. These are staff members who are necessary to keep in our education system as without them there would not be a properly maintained school to learn and teach in.

Schools don't shut down at 3 p.m.; there are often community events. These leads, the majority of which received layoffs today, are responsible for that, making sure that things run smoothly. Without them there, it's just going to be chaos after school hours. They're going to continue being used by the community, by students and after-school curricular activities.

Today, though, after those layoffs were posted, there was a job posting for a senior strategic adviser to the director with a salary up to \$176,000—front-line workers gone but this. Sure, I see where this government's priorities are. You have to respect those blue-collar workers. The Premier talks a big game about this, but actions speak louder than words. Them being the first to be laid off from this is not acceptable.

What Bill 101 does is it grants the minister binding authority to set policies governing all learning materials in Ontario classrooms. It replaces localized, professional educator judgment with centralized political decisions.

I thought that the Conservatives were all about small government, not big government that is running everything from Queen's Park. And we are seeing this not just in

education; we are seeing the centralization of power in many of these ministers' portfolios. This is a huge risk, because it disconnects learning from students' lived experiences. It flattens Ontario's diverse educational communities into a single government one-size-fits-all approach.

Mandating educational materials such as lesson plans and teachers' guides risks transferring teaching into a scripted activity. Students deserve a curriculum grounded in evidence and stability, not one that risks being shaped by shifting political priorities.

When I work at the hospital, I wouldn't want to be given directions from the Minister of Health on how to do my job. I was educated and trained and have years of experience as a nurse. Trust my clinical judgment. Trust the teachers and the education workers who are the professionals working on the front lines. Trust that they know what they're doing. They don't need this oversight and power grab from this Minister of Education, who clearly has a chip on his shoulder towards unions and teachers alike.

This bill also grants the minister power to set mandatory policies governing all public communications by school boards. So he's going to decide what school boards are allowed to say. I have a sneaking suspicion I know what that's going to be: "Everything is great. The government is doing an amazing job." That's going to be the communication messaging that is going to be coming out from them, this centralized government oversight of speech by publicly accountable local institutions. Trustees may hesitate to speak publicly about shortcomings in provincial policy. Board officials may self-censor to avoid sanctions. Educators silenced when professional assessments conflict with official narratives—this doesn't improve governance; it removes early warning signs from the system.

As I come to an end in my speech here, I don't understand why, when we're going to make such major changes to one of the most important systems in this province—early childhood education and intervention is everything. It sets them up for the rest of their lives, especially when it comes to their health.

So why wouldn't you sit down with key stakeholders like teachers, like ECEs, principals, admin folks—all of the people who are actually working on the ground? You have amazing leaders like Phil in my riding of Nepean who is one of the heads at OSSTF, responsible for custodians and those support workers—those very ones that have been laid off today.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Phil's a good guy.

**MPP Tyler Watt:** He's an amazing guy who has plenty of stories and ideas that could tell you how we can actually start to address and fix the system.

Bill 101 concentrates power at Queen's Park that has always belonged to local communities, parents, trustees, educators and students. Across four schedules, the same pattern repeats: local accountability is weakened, democratic representation is reduced and the government insulates itself from scrutiny. This bill does not put students first; it puts the minister first and calls it reform.

We must understand that putting students first should not be a partisan issue. It should be a universal goal to want to ensure that all of our students have the resources and opportunity to equally succeed.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Dave Smith):** The member from Don Valley West.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** It's an honour to rise tonight to speak about Bill 101. Speaker, there's been a lot of concern about this, and rightly so. This bill is a real attack on our public education system, and I'm hearing about it from my constituents in Don Valley West, from teachers, from principals. They are very worried.

So let's just talk about the money first. As the finance critic from our Liberal caucus, that's something that I pay a lot of attention to. We know that per-student funding has fallen under this government by \$1,500 per student. And that is having direct impacts every day in our classrooms.

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I've shared this story before, but in visiting some schools in my riding, they were talking about their support staff, the support workers, the education workers, and they said, "Well, this year we have two, but in September, we'll only have 1.5." Another one said, "Well, we have 1.5 education workers for the whole school; in the fall, we'll only have one." These are the kinds of cuts that have taken place under this damaging Conservative government, and they're the cuts that my constituents are worried about.

We look at the education budget: The education budget is going up by less than 1%. Guess what? Interest on debt is going up over 7%. Why? Because this government is taking us to half a trillion dollars in debt. They have got \$30 million to buy a private jet, a luxury jet for the Premier, but they don't have money to put the education workers that we need in our classrooms to support kids.

I was in another school in my riding recently. The teachers are devoted. They are devoted to their kids. I want to thank the teachers who work in the schools in my riding in Don Valley West and across our province because I know that they care deeply. I have a number of teachers in my family—aunts, uncles, cousins—and I know that they care deeply about public education because it brings such opportunity.

When I was in this classroom, I had the chance to see some kids with special needs. The teacher, of course, had a full class, and the kids with special needs—sadly, there was no one to help them. So those kids are needing that extra attention, and the teacher is torn between giving that extra attention to the children who need it and trying to carry on with the rest of her lesson plan for the other children. So these are the kinds of things that we know are hurting our education system. They are hurting our kids, and people are paying attention and they're worried about it.

It's the pattern of this government that they break something, blame someone else and don't take any accountability. We heard earlier about the number of clauses in this bill that give the government a get-out-of-jail-free card. If anything goes wrong, "Oh, no, you can't blame us." If they were so proud of this legislation and thought it

was going to do so much good in our public education system, I don't really see the need for these kinds of clauses. They need to be able to stand up and take accountability for what they're doing.

We know that schools aren't safe. We know that teachers, administrators and principals are retiring at record rates because they feel unsafe, and they are telling us that the way to have safe classrooms is to have more adults in those classrooms. So, again, it comes down to priorities. We have a government that is prioritizing luxury private jets for the Premier and spending who knows how many billions—we don't know, because the government won't tell us. It's billions of dollars, potentially, to expand an airport in downtown Toronto, which may or may not be feasible, and yet we have schools that are unsafe, we have teachers who are leaving the profession, we have principals who are retiring early, and they're all talking about this. When they come to Queen's Park and meet with us as MPPs, when they come to committee to talk about this bill and budget bills and other important legislation before this chamber, they talk about what the cuts to public education have done to our children.

Class sizes are too big, and this bill doesn't fix that. Children with those exceptional needs are not getting the attention they need, and this bill doesn't fix that. It's not going to ensure that parents have a voice through their trustees. These 72 CEOs—high-paid, high-priced CEOs—it's a very strange term for an education system. And don't expect that you're not going to have big paycheques to go with those big titles. People get a big title; they expect a big paycheque. Just look at all the ministers over here and all of the parliamentary assistants. They all got big pay raises when they got their big titles.

Speaker, let's listen to what the experts have to say. Groups like the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association have raised concerns, saying that "Bill 101 would significantly expand ministerial authority across governance, finance and classroom practice."

As my great colleague from Nepean just said, a nurse doesn't need the Minister of Health telling him or her how to do their job, in the same way a teacher does not need the Minister of Education telling them how to do their job in the classroom. They said that this bill "Reduces the role of locally elected school boards, limits responsiveness to community needs and concentrates decision-making at Queen's Park."

Speaker, we know that, again, this bill is another move to centralize control and take away a voice and input from our local trustees on the ground. It was local trustees who actually brought forward the idea for all-day kindergarten. I wonder if any members on the government side would say that all-day kindergarten hasn't helped their children. Those are the kinds of ideas that come from having local voices who see what's going on in their community. Once again, this government has a hate-on, it appears, for Toronto, because the Toronto District School Board is going to get the number of trustees they have reduced to 12. So the remaining 12 trustees will now have double the number of students that they already have and try to support the parents, the needs.

Speaker, I get these calls too sometimes because parents are not getting the response they need from the supervisors. So a parent comes to their trustee, or now, in this case, they're coming to their MPP, to say, "Hey, my child—we moved part way through the year." They want to stay in their existing school. They're having some troubles with schedules and different things, and they just need some help to navigate the system. These are practical day-to-day challenges that parents and children have when they're trying to navigate the system. They deserve a voice to help them with that.

Speaker, on the topic of attendance, look, of course we want our kids in school. I think everybody could agree that that is a good place for our students to be. But you've got to look at the root cause. We know that a study by Global News found that just 40.2% of high school students attended at least 90% of their classes last year, a steep drop from about 60% in 2017-18 before the pandemic. A quote from Robyn Urback at the Globe and Mail: "There is also an Ontario-specific issue keeping kids out of class: There are not enough aides or support workers to help out in classrooms that have attempted to integrate children with behavioural challenges. Those kids are being sent home from school or asked to stay home altogether, and other students are missing class to avoid the disruptions and sometimes violent confrontation."

Speaker, we know that, again, we need adults in our classrooms to help our kids. The challenges that were caused by COVID have not gone away. We know that our kids will need more support for years to come. That's why it's so important to have those mental health supports, to have education workers in the classroom, to support all our kids, because we want all of our children, all of our students in Don Valley West and in every riding in this province, to reach their full potential. I think we need a strong public education system to do that, and this bill hurts that.

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

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** I want to ask the member for Don Valley West—and I appreciate her comments and concerns, but it's no secret, because I did speak first and I have to wait my turn, that I am supporting this bill proudly. I was going to say to the opposition whip, in her submission—that member had been a trustee; I was a trustee back in the 1990s and we didn't have an issue with expenses having to be controlled from the centre. We just didn't have an issue. Maybe I'm just looking back with rose-coloured glasses at the great days when we were trustees. We propose to maintain local, elected trustees for all boards with this bill, but we have a problem with expenses.

Would the member want to allow the expense abuse to continue, or would she instead support this bill, which eliminates that problem?

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** I want to thank the minister and the member from Durham for the question. As a chartered accountant, I absolutely believe in strong expense control. I find it kind of ironic, to be honest, that this member is rising to talk about that tonight when his

leader, his own Premier, in fact, every member of the cabinet, approved a \$29.8-million private luxury jet for the Premier. That's what I call bad expense management, bad expense control.

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So for this government to stand here and say, "Yes, of course, there are bad apples, or people make mistakes on their expenses"—and those should absolutely be corrected, but let's start with the tone at the top and the tone at the top of this government is all wrong.

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

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I rise today as the former president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association and the vice-president of the Canadian School Boards Association because education draws people into public service.

It's really interesting because the Canadian Civil Liberties Association has echoed some of your concerns. This bill looks to:

- control education materials and curriculum resources;
- control boards' public communications, including those of trustees;
- control land acquisitions, building projects and repairs; and
- approval authority over board budget estimates.

When you see a government so desperately trying to control another level of government, what do you think of?

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** I want to thank the member from Waterloo for her question. I know that she's a dedicated public servant, and I appreciate her voice in these matters because she knows of what she speaks, Speaker.

Absolutely, silencing voices around education, silencing voices of the public school board association—and, in fact, members of provincial Parliament, who are being told that, "Do you know what? Sorry, that class visit? Cancelled. We have been told we can't have politicians in our classrooms."

Speaker, last time I checked, civics was still in the curriculum. Government matters, and if this government thinks that having an elected representative come into a classroom is about politics, it absolutely is not, unless that's what they are doing. When I go into a classroom, I am talking about the levels of government, what we do, how we work together. We talk about debate. I think it's an important part of the conversation.

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

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** I wanted to reflect a little bit on the remarks from my colleague the member from Nepean. I actually shuddered when he invited the analogy of the Minister of Health offering to influence his clinical decision-making. At the same time, I've heard the Minister of Health being quite condescending towards you in this chamber and during question period. I think there is a pretty strong parallel, potentially, with what we may see with this Minister of Education. Have there ever been instances or can you point to examples in which the Minister of Education may have demonstrated the same kind of condescension that we have heard from the Minister of Health?

**MPP Tyler Watt:** Thank you to my colleague for that question. Yes, certainly. I was there that morning when we had all of the unions who came in for breakfast together and the Minister of Education gave a shockingly out-of-touch speech to all of these education workers and advocates, basically waving his finger at them and talking about what a colossal mess the system is because of them. When you start talking down to our front-line workers like that, it just fills them up with disrespect, right? They're already burning out in these jobs. They are dealing with the ongoing crisis that we're seeing in schools. They want to feel listened to, not talked at and certainly not directed at.

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

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** My question is to the member from Nepean, the critic for colleges and universities. Our government has made a historic \$6.4-billion investment into the post-secondary sector, including over \$150 million specifically to strengthen teacher education, supporting thousands of additional seats and increasing per-student funding by nearly 30%.

This bill builds on the investment by ensuring our training model is not only well funded, but also modern, efficient and aligned with today's workforce and parent needs. This way, talented individuals can enter the profession faster while receiving high-quality, practical training. So I ask the member opposite, through you, Speaker, if you claim to support students and educators, will you now support a bill that expands opportunity—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the member from Nepean.

**MPP Tyler Watt:** The bill doesn't do any of that, so I will not be supporting this bill. As I said in my debate, there's nothing in here that's actually going to help students. This is all about control and centralizing power to the Minister of Education.

There's nothing in here about mental health supports for students and education workers. There's nothing in here about addressing violence in classrooms. There's nothing in this bill about special ed. There's nothing in this bill that's actually going to do what the title of the bill says it's supposed to do. So, no, I will not be supporting this bill.

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

**MPP Lisa Gretzky:** Speaker, this is to either of the Liberal members that got up to speak.

I was also a public school board trustee for the last year before I became an MPP. I was the vice-chair of our board. I can tell you that, in eight years—one of the things that sparked me to run to be a trustee was the Liberals bringing in Bill 115 attacking education workers, which was supported by the Conservatives.

Year after year after year, we were begging the Liberal government to properly fund special education, which has only gotten worse under this Conservative government. We saw a Liberal government that threatened school boards to withdraw funding if we didn't rip up agreements and stop paying for post-retirement benefits for non-

bargaining units—an agreement that had been in place for decades. But I digress.

My question is, if the government is saying that this is about trustees, and some sort of untoward behaviour by trustees, why would they put in the legislation that they're protecting themselves from any type of—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the member from Nepean.

**MPP Tyler Watt:** Thank you for that question. First, I want to address Bill 115. It's something I would never support, never vote for. Our leader has apologized for it. I know there's a lot of reparations and atonement to do beyond an apology, but I'll just be crystal clear about that. We have a new generation of Ontario Liberals here, and we are here today standing up for students and education workers.

Now, getting to your question, why would they put that in the bill? They're just trying to hide. They're trying to hide themselves from accountability. Look at what's going on with the FOI system, the Premier's phone records. They just want to hide from accountability. They want to hold trustees accountable, but not themselves.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** A very quick question.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** For either of my outstanding colleagues, could I ask you to elaborate a little bit on how the potential reduction or changes in school trustees fits within the broader framework of this government undermining our democracy?

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you to my colleague from Don Valley East for the question. Look, as I said, in Toronto, instead of 24 trustees, we will have 12 now. That means that each of those trustees has double the work, the number of students and families that they're trying to support. That means that they may not be able to adequately stand up for their concerns and share their concerns here in this Legislature, and that definitely erodes democracy.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate? I recognize the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Now it's definitely my turn. To repeat, I am proud to support Bill 101, the Putting Student Achievement First Act.

At its core, this legislation proposes to guide by a simple but non-negotiable principle, and that is that every decision that we make in education must put students first—not politics, not ideology, not institutional self-interest, but students first and foremost.

Now, that principle, Mr. Speaker, is not an abstract principle to me. As I indicated in my questioning earlier, between 1993 and 1997 I had the opportunity to serve as a trustee with the Roman Catholic Durham Region Separate School Board, now known as the Durham Catholic District School Board.

And let me explain that, because we did not have four-year terms back in the 1990s. I was appointed to fill a vacancy the final year of a three-year term, from 1993 to 1994. Then I ran for election, not re-election, in the November 1994 election, and I won by three votes—two on the recount.

2010

**Hon. Steve Clark:** A landslide.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Yes. So they nicknamed me “Landslide McCarthy.”

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** So close. So close.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Yes. Actually, the current mayor of Pickering was the trustee from Pickering on the board with me; he gave me that nickname. I also served, like the opposition whip, as vice-chair for a time during that full three-year term.

I can say that I did witness first-hand what local governance can look like when it is focused, disciplined and anchored in a shared sense of purpose. Like others who have served as trustees in the past, including, no doubt, the opposition whip, we did have that shared sense of purpose in Durham.

Trustees at that time understood their role very clearly. We were advocates for our communities. We were stewards of public trust and, above all, partners in ensuring that students had every opportunity to succeed. There was debate—there always should be—but it was debate rooted in outcomes. Decisions were evaluated through one basic question: Is this helping our students, who we’re here to serve, to learn, to grow and to succeed? Because when governance works, it elevates the entire system, but when it loses focus, students are the ones who pay the price.

Now, to understand why Bill 101 is necessary, we must be honest about where Ontario’s education system has been. When our government took office in 2018, student achievement was declining. Foundational skills—reading, writing and math—were not where they needed to be. Parents were confused by curriculum changes that prioritized process over clarity. Educators were frustrated by vague expectations and constant policy churn. Too often, teachers found themselves caught between parents and boards, engaged in disputes that had little to do with classroom learning.

Now, this didn’t happen overnight. For decades, school boards and trustees were left to their own devices without authority, expertise or clear accountability. The result was uneven delivery, inconsistent standards and, in some cases, deep governance dysfunction. Simply put, too many boards drifted away from their core mission, and since 2018, our Ontario PC government has worked deliberately to reverse that trend. We paused failed experiments. We returned to a back-to-basics approach, grounded in evidence, and proven instructional methods. We listened to educators instead of sidelining them and we brought parents back into the conversation as partners rather than obstacles.

The results are real and measurable, Mr. Speaker. EQAO scores are rising, particularly in both reading and writing. Ontario’s students are once again achieving among the highest results internationally. Educators consistently tell us that clearer curriculum expectations and better supports have allowed them to focus on what they do best: teaching. That progress happened because leadership was restored—leadership that did not shy away from responsibility; leadership that accepted that student achievement is ultimately a provincial obligation.

But governance problems at the board level did continue to undermine the progress we made. Therefore, through Bill 33, our Ontario PC government proposed, and this House approved, providing the Ministry of Education the ability to intervene earlier when boards are failing.

What we found once we stepped in was deeply troubling: trustees ignoring conflict of interest rules; capital projects spiralling into chaos; directors of education evaluating themselves and awarding illegal compensation; millions of education dollars spent on litigation, consultants, association fees and internal disputes instead of on our students and our classrooms. In some cases, parents raised safety concerns year after year to no avail. Teachers worked in environments riddled with uncertainty and instability. And yet, once decisive oversight was applied, problems that had lingered for years were resolved instantly. That tells us something very important.

The issue is not about whether or not governance is local. The issue is that roles have become blurred, accountability has been weakened and focus has been fragmented. This is not about blaming individual trustees or staff, but it is about acknowledging that the system, as constructed, allowed dysfunction to persist.

Bill 101 proposes to correct this. The legislation modernizes school board governance by clearly defining responsibilities, restoring professional management and refocusing trustees on what they themselves consistently say matters most: representing their communities and advocating for students.

Trustees will continue to play an important role—make no mistake about that—but it will be a role with sharper focus. We will continue to have elected trustees in school boards. The number of trustees will be frozen province-wide, we propose, and in Toronto, reduced to align with comparable boards. Honoraria will be capped. Expense accounts will be strictly limited. These measures respect the public trust and they ensure that educational dollars are directed to learning, not governance overhead and not milkshakes at midnight.

At the same time, Bill 101 introduces a professional management model consistent with other major public institutions. Each board, it is proposed, will have a chief executive officer responsible for operations, finance, capital projects and human resources. And now a separate chief education officer is proposed for each board to be responsible for academic leadership. This proposed separation ensures that complex financial and infrastructure decisions are handled by professionals with the right expertise, all while educational leadership remains laser-focused on what matters most: student achievement.

Education dollars will also be better protected. Funding will no longer be used for external trustee associations or discretionary advocacy. Those are not educational expenses, Mr. Speaker, and families, parents expect better stewardship. Every dollar is redirected back into classrooms and, when it is, it’s a dollar working for our students. That is what the core function and core mission of school boards ought to be. It was at one time; they lost their way. We’re getting back to those basics and that core mandate.

Collective bargaining will be modernized as well. Now, with the exception of constitutionally protected denominational matters for our Catholic boards, trustees will no longer sit at bargaining tables. Professional management will lead negotiations, ensuring consistency, stability and fairness across the province, while keeping trustees out of roles they were never intended to fulfill.

Bill 101 also proposes exactly what educators have told us they need inside their classrooms. Teachers have been clear with us that curriculum expectations in recent years became too open to interpretation, forcing our teachers to spend countless hours searching for resources instead of teaching. This legislation would allow the ministry to provide standardized, approved curriculum tools that promote consistency and reduce unnecessary workload.

Bill 101 also proposes to restore province-wide final examinations for our students in grades 9 through 12, and this would ensure that attendance and participation are meaningfully reflected in assessment. That is proposed in this bill. Chronic absenteeism is a challenge that teachers faced long before the pandemic, and one that, sadly, has worsened since. Educators have told us plainly that clear, consistent expectations around attendance and evaluation improve classroom order, engagement and outcomes. These changes reflect a simple truth about life beyond school: Success requires showing up, participating and demonstrating what you have learned.

#### 2020

There was a great mayor of Toronto named Allan Lamport many decades ago and his motto—I don't know if he made it up, but he said 90% of life is showing up, and he was right. Now more than ever in this post-pandemic world, that is a recipe for success. That is reflected in this bill with it comes to our students, addressing the absenteeism that has lingered on post-pandemic.

Finally, Bill 101 would ensure that school boards remain focused on their core mandate when communicating with parents and the broader community. Official school board communications will be limited to education-related matters, those being student learning, school operations, safety and general community information. Parents want to know how their children are doing, whether buses are running and whether schools are safe. They do not expect boards as institutions to comment on issues far outside their mission or mandate.

Individual trustees would remain free to speak, but boards themselves will stay focused on what they are there for, that is, education, student learning, student achievement and preparing our students for the future beyond elementary and secondary education to a world that is ever changing, to careers that will emerge in the future that they will be well equipped for.

Mr. Speaker, my own experience with local school board governance in Durham taught me the value of local voices when those local voices are paired with clarity, responsibility and, as I indicated previously, shared purpose. Bill 101, if this House sees fit to approve it, would preserve that local voice. That is what is proposed. As I said, democratically elected, local trustees will

continue, starting with this election campaign period, for which the registration has begun as of May 1, just a few days ago. That will continue for 2026 and beyond with the proposal in this bill. That local voice will ensure that the province meets its responsibility to deliver consistent, high-quality education for every student in every community across Ontario. That oversight will be there alongside the local voice.

It is the provincial government that has had the constitutional jurisdiction since Confederation over education. The province is asserting that very important constitutional responsibility under section 92 of the original British North America Act of 1867, now the Constitution Act of 1867. This bill respects French-language education rights under the charter. This bill respects denominational school rights under the original BNA Act and is strongly enforced today.

But at the same time, it brings discipline where there was disorder. It brings clarity where there was confusion. It brings leadership where it was missing. And most importantly, it puts our students—Ontario's students, our future, the future of this province and indeed of Canada—back at the centre of our education system.

Bill 101 consists of five schedules. It proposes to make amendments to the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014, and the Education Act. That's the lengthiest part of the proposed bill. Schedule 3 consists of proposed amendments to the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario Act, 2005. Schedule 4 addresses the Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996, and schedule 5, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2014.

The bill is based on thoughtful reflection, on listening to educators and to parents and to the students that the boards are there to serve. It reflects what we have learned from the disorder and the lack of focus and the failure to fulfill core mandates that we've sadly seen over the last number of years, for most of the time between 2003 and 2018, in particular. Again, it preserves that local voice.

I think of the balance that our proposals in this 44th Parliament, the proposals for legislative change that this Progressive Conservative government brings under the leadership of Premier Ford. It is about balance. Like the Conservation Authorities Act amendments that were approved under Bill 97: We have, for the first time, a central guiding agency, the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency. We did not have that before. We have nine consolidated regional watershed-based conservation authorities throughout the province—no community being left behind; no community previously served by a conservation authority not continuing to be served. And the local voice—because we listened in our consultations of the need for that local voice, the local watershed councils.

Again, you have the essence of what was begun by a Progressive Conservative government 80 years ago: conservation authorities focused on flood prevention and watershed management, better and more equally resourced, guiding central agency authority to ensure consistency across the board, to ensure the core mandate is met, and then the local voice of local watershed councils.

That type of balance, that type of approach, which is the best of every possible world, is what Bill 101 is about: that central guidance from the Ministry of Education, that division of responsibilities between a chief executive officer responsible for financial operations and infrastructure and a chief education officer laser-focused on learning and our students' achievement.

Then the local voice, the trustees, will still be elected, will still be that essential local voice, but they will be focused on the core mandate of what trustees were supposed to be all about, and were all about most of the time since Confederation.

Let's not forget as well the constitutional respect contained in this bill, respecting French-language education rights and our charter, the Constitution Act, 1982, and the Constitution Act, 1867, and denominational school rights, a foundational principle in the founding of this nation. It would not have been possible to achieve Confederation—with Ontario being one of the founding provinces of Confederation—it would not have been possible without that grand bargain. That is respected and preserved with Bill 101. We will continue to have elected trustees, Catholic, French language and public.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen the opposition be persuaded to support other government bills—four when I was Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement. I urge them to take another look at the bill, consider my comments and those of my colleagues and vote in favour of Bill 101.

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

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I'll be honest, I've always voted in favour of good bills. Unfortunately, this isn't a good bill.

This government hasn't put a dent in the \$17-billion repair backlog in our schools. They can't even manage to keep students in safe buildings. Why should they be able to take more control from trustees?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Well, I can't tell you how disappointed I am with the member. We have agreed on some things. He has voted for bills that I've tabled on behalf of this government, and I appreciate that. I thought he might actually keep me in suspense for a while, but he just lead off with a big no. So I am disappointed.

I do have to say that I believe we've struck the right balance here. I think we have it right and we're going to have the best of both worlds. We're going to have the constitutional protections here. We're going to have that local voice, with proper guidance, to ensure that core mandates for school boards are met.

2030

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

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** I have a question for the minister who just spoke. He made an observation, something along the lines that 90% of life is showing up. I'm wondering if the minister can provide us his observations using that particular theory and applying it to the current state of the chamber with the Liberal benches and the government benches.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** I appreciate the question from the excellent member for Essex. I wasn't here during

the 42nd Parliament, nor was the member. We were both elected in 2022, for the first time, so we were here post-pandemic. But I know that the members who were here made every effort, even in those challenging times, to be here with protocols that were followed so that we were here in person. I'm proud of that.

I love the tradition that we have to be in our seats to vote. That means you've got to show up live. There's no virtual voting here and I'm quite proud of that.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further questions?

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** The member mentioned that he was very much opposed to the expense of a milkshake, which I thought was fascinating, because the member is one of the cabinet ministers who unanimously approved the Premier's purchase of a \$30-million jet.

So I am wondering, given the minister's feeling that expenses shouldn't be made with taxpayer dollars that might be considered a luxury, whether he thinks that the expense policies that will now apply to trustees under Bill 101 should also apply to the Premier and the cabinet.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** I am very proud, Mr. Speaker, of the Premier's leadership on all fronts, especially when it comes to the fact that we are a government that has never raised a tax or fee. If anything, we have cut taxes and fees.

The Premier has said, and we all support him in this, that the worst thing to do is to hand your money over to government. Put the money back into the pockets of people. That is where it belongs. Keep taxes low, cut taxes and be responsible, as the Premier and this government are with every taxpayer dollar. We will, therefore, have oversight over trustees who are not responsible with the taxpayer dollars. That's what this bill is about.

*Interjections.*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Before I go to the next question, I will ask the House to quiet the chatter so that we can hear the members with their questions and answers.

The next question goes to the member from Don Valley West.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** I want to thank the minister and the member for Durham for his comments. I do find it interesting, again—the member from the official opposition mentioned the milkshake. We have a government that has yet to table a balanced budget, something that they think school boards should do. Yet, again, they cannot lead by example. It's quite ironic when you have a government that cannot balance their own books, that spends \$30 million of taxpayer money on a jet that they say they're all proud of. In fact, the member says he's proud of it, yet he can't say the word.

I challenge the minister: Can you actually say that you voted for the jet?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Speaking of voting, I did a lot better running under the leadership of Premier Ford when I ran in 2022, and then again in 2025. I did tell this House, I only won by three votes and two in the recount for trustee in 1994, but I won by over 10,000 votes in 2022,

and I got up over 50.5% of the vote in 2025. Believe me, that wasn't so much about me as it was about our great Premier and our fantastic Progressive Conservative Party because the people of Durham loved this man.

But what I can say is, I'm one of the rare ones in this House that has served locally, here in this provincial Parliament and in the judicial branch of government, as a deputy judge, so I see governments from all branches.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further questions?

**Hon. Graham McGregor:** Look, I don't want to compare electoral numbers, but if we are saying them, it was 45%—actually, 44.99% to be honest—in 2022, but it was 57.52% in 2025.

But I was wondering—you know, it's sad to see the opposition be so partisan on this issue. We should all be coming together, whether we're Progressive Conservatives, New Democrats, Liberals, independents, Greens—I think I might see a Green over there, maybe not. We should all be coming together to support students.

Could the member explain, maybe—one last pitch. We've heard from the New Democrats, we've heard from the Liberals. They don't want accountability in the school boards. Could the member make one last appeal to maybe help our friends across the aisle change their minds and see the light in their ways?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** I only heard one no for sure over there. I thought he was going to keep me guessing, that member, but I'm still hoping that debate matters and I'm going to make the appeal again. As I said, the member raised a good point.

When I had the privilege of being Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement, the opposition unanimously supported the new Consumer Protection Act—Bill 142—in the 43rd Parliament. They unanimously supported—we thank them for this—the Building Infrastructure Safely Act; that was Bill 153 in 2024, and then, abolishing NOSIs, those fraudulent consumer registrations, and then the modern AI and cyber security protection, Bill 194. If they could do it for those bills, let's come together in a non-partisan way, support our teachers, support our students, support our parents and support our local trustees and give them the right guidelines—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further questions?

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** The government's education bill only mentions "protecting student outcomes" three times, but it mentions "liability" 43 times. The Canadian Civil Liberties Association says that the bill contains some of the most aggressive liability-shielding provisions seen in Ontario legislation in recent memory and that this arrangement is fundamentally incompatible with the rule of law's requirement that government be answerable for its actions. Bill 101's liability provisions come dangerously close to insulating provincial decision-making from all meaningful legal accountability.

As a lawyer, how can the member opposite possibly vote for a bill that is fundamentally incompatible with the rule of law?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** I thank the member for the question because it gives me an opportunity to say and build upon what I already said: I'm one of the few that has been a member of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, so it gives me a unique perspective.

What I can say is this bill is reflective of our great traditions of constitutional monarchy, responsible government, parliamentary democracy. The minister named in the bill and the oversight by that minister and the Ministry of Education is based on the principle of responsible government. Less than 200 years old, the province of Ontario, but that minister, like all ministers of the Crown, must be elected by his or her community, must be responsive to this House as an elected member to this elected House, and this bill has to pass democratically. A majority has to vote for it. That's what I call constitutional monarchy, parliamentary democracy and responsible government.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** A very quick question from the member for Don Valley West.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** I'd like to give the minister another chance—talking about expenses, talking about accountability, responsibility. He voted for the jet. Could he just say he voted for the jet and take responsibility for that?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** All I can say, Mr. Speaker, is if the member opposite and other members don't support this attempt to rid ourselves of inappropriate expenses by trustees then they're going to be answering—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Before I begin my formal remarks, I'd like to mention that I will be sharing my time with the member from Waterloo.

It's always an honour for me to rise and speak on behalf of the great people of London North Centre. If this government were actually listening to educators on the front line—if they were actually speaking to parents of young people in education—they would hear stories that are happening in our classrooms that are absolutely appalling. You see, on movies, on television, on video games, there are warnings when there is objectionable content, when parents want to perhaps make sure their child does not engage with that content. And yet, every single day in classrooms across Ontario, there are acts of violence—student on student, student on educator. There are also young people who are struggling with mental health needs, struggling with behavioural exceptionalities, who are hurling disturbing language towards their peers and educators.

**2040**

Part of that reason is because of this government's chronic destruction and underfunding of our education system right now. Yet this government has the audacity, in a late-night sitting, to say that they stand for young people. What we're seeing in real time is part of the program that was begun by the Harris Conservatives in the mid-1990s. You see, they stripped a billion dollars out of

education. They separated and divided educators and administrators against one another so that they were on competing factions, rather than working on the same side.

Once the Liberals took over for 15 years, they never returned that billion dollars that the Harris Conservatives cut out of education—in fact, they made it far worse.

So, today, I rise to oppose Bill 101. It's a bill that raises huge concerns in my riding of London North Centre, and it's raising concerns in communities across Ontario among parents, educators and advocacy groups who have dedicated themselves to the well-being of our children.

Parents have reached out to myself and my Ontario NDP colleagues to urge us to remain firm in our opposition toward this bill because they understand that it will harm their children, especially those with special needs. Speaker, they're right to be concerned. Across Ontario, families are asking, where is their voice in this process?

That's why we're standing here late at night in this chamber, because this government wants to pass this legislation, like their budget, under the cover of night. It's a very weak will that we see from this government, Speaker. It's a lack of a backbone, that they're trying to do this when they hope people aren't paying attention.

Despite everything—the testimony from critics, educators, concerned citizens and advocacy groups—this government is still charging ahead with Bill 101. It's a bill that is not only unfair and harmful, but one that also completely ignores the local realities of our communities. What's even more troubling is the way this government is pushing this bill forward with careless disregard for the public input they promised to take seriously. We have to ask the question, what happened to our democracy?

We're being asked to allow this Premier and his government to unilaterally dictate changes that will directly impact students, families and communities across Ontario. How is this acceptable? These decisions are not simply abstract policy, they affect the lives of our children and the future of our communities. These are also deeply personal choices, and they need to be made in full consultation with those who will be affected the most.

During this process, Speaker, the government allowed just one day of public hearings on the bill, with five hours of input allowed from the public. Of that time, the minister took an hour. The vast majority who applied to speak at committee were denied that opportunity. With a bill as serious as this is, on a topic as serious as this is, this government has actively shut out local voices and the voices of concerned people.

The minister himself actually shut down the livestream of the special education advisory committee. You see, parents of young people who have exceptionalities might have difficulty getting to that meeting in real time. So the livestream was a real benefit for them so that they could tune in, and they didn't have to have somebody look after their child. And for no reason whatsoever, the minister shut that down. The minister shut out parents of young people with special needs.

In my riding of London North Centre, parents are demanding to know why their voices are being ignored. They're asking why they're being shut out of a process that will have such a profound impact. This is a call for accountability. Why is it that those in power are pushing through these changes without listening to the people they're supposed to serve? Again, this is not democracy, this is the picture of weakness.

Parents in my riding do not want to give more power to elected bureaucrats. They want to have a say in how their children are educated, especially in the system where there's so much at stake. This is not about having control for the sake of control, this is about accountability. Parents deserve the right to advocate for their children, to ensure that their children's needs are being heard and addressed. And these are not just administrative issues, Speaker, these are the issues that will affect children's futures, their mental health, their education and their well-being.

But I want to touch on the liability provisions that are very curiously present in this bill. As has been mentioned before, this comes up numerous times, to the overshadowing of the more important pedagogical issues which should be the main focus of this bill. When the minister was asked about these provisions, he quickly dismissed these concerns, saying they were simply standard protections for ministers. But I think that the Canadian Civil Liberties Association said it best when they described these provisions as "some of the most aggressive liability-shielding provisions" we've seen in Ontario legislation.

If you are not doing something wrong, you shouldn't be worried about having to protect yourself. So the fact this government is actively trying to create this shield does make one wonder what they're actually up to behind closed doors.

Now, these provisions go so far as to insulate decision-makers from any meaningful accountability for the consequences of their actions. It's not about ensuring government officials are protected when doing their jobs in good faith. This is about giving those in power blanket immunity. It undermines accountability that is supposed to be at the heart of our democracy.

I need someone in the government to justify and explain why this is in this bill. How can we sit back and trust this government if they are going to make decisions that harm students, families and communities and not be subject to any legal consequences whatsoever? No one should be above the law.

And yet this government, like that child who—you know, I think about some children, Speaker, and I think about the young person who might lose at a game a number of times. Once they lose at that game a number of times, suddenly they want to change the rules. And this government is clear evidence of that. They're so upset by being held back by the law in this province that they changed the goalposts. They always want to change the rules. They want to change everything to make sure that they can win at all costs, at the expense of education, at the expense of students, at the expense of educators and of families.

As we've heard, this bill is not only harmful in its contents, but also in the way the government has rejected common-sense amendments that could have improved it. The NDP, my colleagues, have proposed amendments that would have protected the most vulnerable in society, enhanced accessibility and ensured that the education system worked for all students. These touched on such aspects as protecting the constitutional rights of Franco-Ontarians to manage their own education system. Another would have ensured accessibility for disabled students, making sure that every student, no matter their ability, had an equal opportunity to succeed.

We also proposed that the Dreams Delayed report recommendations on anti-Black racism in Ontario's education system be adopted. But these, like all other common-sense resolutions that we brought forward, were rejected by this government.

In my riding of London North Centre, we are also home to a vibrant francophone community that deeply cherishes its language and relies on us to protect French language rights. When I attend events with the francophone community, I'm always struck by their pride, their cultural strength and their commitment to preserving their language for future generations. This is exactly why these protections matter—not in theory, but in real communities like mine.

Speaker, in difficult times like this, it does beg the question why this government wants to undermine our democracy, why they are straining the democratic process, why they do not listen to people and do not value students.

Speaker, I urge this government to move past their empty, vacuous, meaningless words about standing up for educators, standing up for students. It's abundantly clear what this bill is all about: This bill is about protecting themselves. It's about seizing school board assets. It's about wresting control to make sure that they can fill school boards with their unelected bureaucratic friends to make sure that they can all join in at this gravy train and feed at the trough. That's what this government is about. It's about control, it's about money and it's about undermining democracy.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the member from Waterloo.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I just want to acknowledge that the member from London North Centre, a former educator—when he talks about the classroom and those students, he does with care and a sense of professionalism that really is indicative of the lack of respect that this government has for teachers. I just want to publicly thank him for being an excellent educator. I mean, right now, he's actively trying to educate you—to no avail, apparently. Classroom management here is really off the rails, I might say, Speaker. Feel free to interject at any point.

2050

It makes me really think about how the Minister of Education and this government has really disrespected the education sector and, quite openly, with a lot of animosity,

with very little empathy for how difficult it is to be a good teacher.

Because I want to tell you, my sister is watching right now—Julie Wood from the Peel District School Board. She's an amazing teacher. She just got an award. But there is emotional labour in the profession, and it's disheartening to see the government often talk and disparage educators in this province.

It makes me think of this grade 10 student from the Waterloo Region District School Board. Her name is Uzma. She wrote to me, Mr. Speaker. I want to put it on the record because it's so indicative of how smart our students are despite the challenges of poverty, despite the challenges of an underfunded system, despite the challenges that youth have today with addictive algorithms on their phones and the pressure that they experience in today's society, which is actually quite different than what we had. So I think that's why it's so important to listen to them.

But Uzma wrote me a letter. It's entitled "How to buy a jet." She says, "Ms. Fife, do you know how difficult it is to buy a jet? Whether to buy a private jet—you can start to explore the possibility by carrying out a cost-to-benefit analysis." I'm sure the government did that in the cabinet room. The rule of thumb is that if you or your executives, meaning the Premier, spend 350 to 400 hours in the air each year, then the expense of fully owning a private jet is likely not worth it.

She goes on to say, "Part of the analysis that I came up with, Ms. Fife, is that in the initial outline involved in buying a jet aircraft, you'll also have to understand what it will cost to run your private jet." And then she goes into a really detailed and thoughtful analysis, Speaker, about how complex it is to buy a private jet if you're the Premier of the province of Ontario.

She goes on to say what it will cost to run the private plane: These running costs include fuel, repairs, maintenance, insurance, airport taxes and landing fees, catering, flight personnel, along with the cost of layovers and stayovers. She says, "The Premier will need to create a financial buffer into your costings."

I'm sure that this is all going to become very clear when the Trillium or Global News gets their FOI—oh, wait. They can't do that anymore, right? Because this government has shut down the government's—you're no longer the most transparent government in the history of the province of Ontario.

But she goes on to say, "If you don't have a flight department to oversee the management of your jet"—these are cost projections—"you'll want to hire an aircraft management company." I'm pretty sure the government likely has an aircraft management company. "They will take care of pretty much everything to do with the running of your jet, from maintenance to repairs to the hiring of pilots and on-board catering." We know catering is very important to this government. "This can cost as much as \$250,000 a year"—

*Interjection.*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Order, please.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I'm reading a letter from a student who's indicative of how smart our students are in the province of Ontario.

Now, you may not want to hear how great a job our teachers are doing despite the huge challenges that you've created in the system, but I must say, she goes into how much most jets cost on average: up to \$500 million. The cheapest one on the market right now, she says, is \$1.2 million. But no, this Premier decided to buy a \$30-million jet. But you know what? That will only hold eight passengers in comfort, although this would hold six lobbyists, the chief of staff and the Premier.

She actually develops an aircraft cost calculator—

*Interjection.*

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Oh, I know you don't want to hear from Uzma, but I do, and I'm going to share it today.

The running cost details on actual—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the Minister of Indigenous Affairs on a point of order.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** A clever workaround, but she can't use a letter to go completely off-topic from a bill about education. Sorry. It's just not on.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I will remind the member to stick to the topic of the bill.

**MPP Lisa Gretzky:** I know you don't like clever women, but—

*Interjections.*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I ask all members to come to order.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Actually, that's as complimentary as it gets around here.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I've been tolerant this evening of a lot of chatter, a lot of side comment. I will not be tolerant of the back-and-forth. Please keep order in this House.

I turn back to the member.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I'm just going to finish Uzma's letter, because this is a voice of a student in the education system—I'll send it over to you—and she has costed out what the government has not chosen to provide. I really do appreciate her in-depth knowledge and, quite honestly, her interest in what's going on in the Legislature in Ontario. She says hiring a private pilot for a small, rented plane can cost up to \$2,000 to \$14,000 per hour, and then she goes on to say that the total—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the Minister of Indigenous Affairs on a point of order.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** We've been through this in previous debate—I believe it was in education—when a document came out of an envelope in a completely unrelated matter and introduced discussion about something that's not related to what we're currently speaking about. I would kindly ask that the member return to the debate at hand.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Stop the clock, please.

I will ask the member to stick to the bill and the topic at hand.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Bill 101, which is a completely undemocratic piece of legislation that this government has brought to the floor of the House, which undermines our democratic institutions in school boards—our longest-serving democratic institution in the history of the province is under attack by this government.

Uzma, a student from the Waterloo Region District School Board, has reached out to me and said, "Where are the priorities of this government?" Clearly the priorities of this government are not with students, and they certainly are not supportive of educators, Speaker. She just finishes by saying, "You know, the Premier should be very careful and have a business plan, because the cost of fuel is really going up a high level"—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the Minister of Indigenous Affairs on a point of order.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Once again, returning to the letter to talk about subject matter completely unrelated to the debate at hand is not acceptable.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I will once again ask the member to move on to the topic of the bill and not the other topics.

Now I return to the member.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you very much, Speaker. It is not surprising that this government does not want to listen to the voices of students and educators in Ontario, especially this member. And I know that they're a little sensitive about the jet, because the jet is off-brand and the jet scandal is not going away, right?

But I will go back to the fact that this bill increases the control over educational materials in curriculum resources. It increases the control over public communications, including those of elected board members. It has sweeping approval authority over all land acquisitions and building projects and repairs—which, I will say, pretty much is the heart of this bill, because this is a real estate bill where this government is looking for real estate to solve the problems that you created on the housing file—and, finally, Speaker, the approval authority over board budget estimates, which is so interesting coming from a government that is running up the debt and the operational deficit in the province of Ontario.

There's no wonder why Conservatives across this province are referring to you as the new Liberal Party, because you certainly know how to spend money, you certainly don't know how to be fiscally responsible and you certainly do not know the value—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Through the Speaker, please.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** —of public education in Ontario—

*Interjections.*

**2100**

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Before I go to questions, I once again wish to remind this House that the side chatter is disruptive to the overall function of the House. Please keep it to a dull roar, as my parents used to say.

I recognize the member from Don Valley West for a question.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** What a lively debate we're having tonight. Isn't that fun?

I want to ask a question to the member from London North Centre, who I know is a former educator, and I know he cares deeply about education.

We've talked about the faults of this government with education—cuts of about \$1,500 per student.

We've talked about the problems of the Harris government, when they cut ESL, they cut music, they cut phys ed, they closed libraries. We know the damage that they did.

We've talked about a mistake that the Liberals made. And again, I think it takes a big person to admit that.

I wonder if you want to talk about whether or not the NDP government of the 1990s, under the Social Contract Act, where teachers and educators had to take 12 unpaid days of work—was that a mistake?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I've got to say that it is very surprising and refreshing to hear a Liberal actually use the words "Bill 115"—the horrible way in which educators were treated. So kudos to that member.

I think it's important that the member also recognize the good things that the Rae government did for educators—allowing them control of their own pension fund, which has grown to one of the best-managed and most lucrative pension funds in the province and in the country.

It's really quite interesting, when you consider the history of what the Liberal government did to education. They would pat themselves on the back for all-day kindergarten, and yet they would not want to admit the 600 schools they closed—the way in which they decimated rural Ontario by really taking away the heart of a community by closing those rural schools.

The Liberals' record on education is terrible, and the Conservatives are digging even deeper and making it worse.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further questions?

**Hon. Michael S. Kerzner:** I want to ask a question to the member from Waterloo, and I specifically want to talk about the role of the trustees.

One of the things I really think is important in this bill is to make sure that—this indoctrination of conversation that the trustees have brought to date in some of the boards, like in Toronto and like in Ottawa, is not in the best interests of our education, and it's not in the best interests of students. It's bringing in conversation that doesn't belong there. What the Minister of Education has done is made sure that the priority is always with the students.

So I'd like to ask the member opposite, does she feel that the indoctrination, the misspending that the trustees had is helpful at all to our students?

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Mr. Speaker, it's really interesting, Bill 101 increases the power over schools and school boards, including books, grades, exams, school budgets, board communications, land acquisitions, building pro-

jects and trustee pay and expenses. It's basically the Voldemort education bill.

The level of overreach that your government is having into public education is actively undermining creative processes in education.

I will tell you, as the past president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, that trustees come to those board tables each and every single day with an interest in public well-being, which is actually legislated. And you should know that.

This bill, quite honestly, is completely unsupportable.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further questions?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** My question is to my London colleague, the member for London North Centre. I just want to ask his opinion about the supervision of the Thames Valley District School Board, because that experience of supervision is kind of a mini preview of the damage that this bill is going to do to public education.

So my question is, is centralizing power, is delegating the management of the school board to a government appointee who has no knowledge of the education system—has that worked in Thames Valley to improve public education for our students?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** Thank you to my colleague from London West for an absolutely excellent question.

Really, what we saw in the Thames Valley District School Board was this government blaming trustees for behaviour of the administration. We saw that the administration took a trip to a Blue Jays game, and it's really unfortunate that this government was using the trustees in such a manipulative and deceitful way.

The supervisor, since they've come to Thames Valley, does not attend the special education advisory committee meetings, does not answer questions to parents, does not speak to the media. We see just another opportunity for one of these Conservative, unelected, appointed insiders to feed at the trough the Conservatives have created.

They have taken every public system and are trying to find ways to insert their friends and take money from the public purse.

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

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** My question is to the member from Waterloo.

Being a past president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, I'm very curious for your thoughts around this government's approach that I think will potentially mean the end of OPSBA and the Catholic school board association as well, and what that impact might have on school boards across the province.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I want to thank the member from Ajax for that question.

It's a very good point. This government has whittled away at our democratic processes here in this House, shutting down public consultation on legislation, preventing FOI access to data that we need to do our job. And quite honestly, Bill 101 will increase ministerial control over the public communications of elected trustees. This is par-

ticularly concerning and may infringe freedom of expression under section 2(b) of the charter.

So if you had any questions about whether you're doing the right thing, the answer is, you are not. If you are truly interested in strengthening public education, you would listen to the people who are in the system and invest appropriately.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further questions?

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** This to the representative from London North Centre.

Ontario students deserve access to well-trained, high-quality teachers that you heard about earlier. Our government is taking action to meet that need by modernizing teacher education, reducing unnecessary barriers while strengthening hands-on classroom experience. This bill ensures, Speaker, we can get more qualified teachers in the classroom sooner without compromising standards.

If this bill expands access, strengthens training and responds directly to workforce needs, will the member opposite support it, or will he continue to stand in the way of getting more teachers into Ontario classrooms?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I'd like to thank the representative from Whitby for a very strangely 1984 question. I mean, he talks about well-trained, high-quality educators. This is the same government that was attacking educational assistants with the "notwithstanding" clause. It is the same government that has ignored classrooms which have seen such struggles since the pandemic. We see a government that is actually firing teachers through their actions.

Educational assistants who do tremendous work within our school boards are grossly underpaid because of this government, as are early childhood educators. These positions, as mandated by the government, are not respected by the government. If they were respected properly, they would be paid properly. This government has an abysmal record on respecting educators.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** A quick question.

**MPP Catherine McKenney:** My question is to the member from Waterloo.

We do know what students need. They need smaller class sizes. They need more teachers, educators in schools, schools that don't leak, mental health support and special ed.

Do you think that the operating costs that your student outlined in the letter, that would have gone towards operating a jet, could go towards some of these resources?

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Actually, Uzma just finishes her point, saying:

"Ms. Fife, the overall cost of owning a private jet is extremely expensive, typically requiring a net worth of \$50 million to \$100 million for comfortable ownership, with total costs often exceeding \$1 million to \$5 million annually. Beyond the \$2-million to \$75-million purchase price, owners pay for crew salaries, hangar fees, insurance and heavy maintenance."

Do you know what I want to tell you? This is money that would be well spent in the education system, especially for those 21,000 special education students that are exempted from—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

2110

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** I think we've got a little bit of a bigger audience than usual here during a late sitting.

*Interjections.*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** The members will not make reference to the absence of members.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** It's actually a lot of folks.

Speaker, it took me a while to find the words for this bill because when I look at how this government is managing education, honestly, I think it leaves me speechless. The actions of this government are driving chaos and crisis in our education system at a record pace. It doesn't put student achievement first. It doesn't make our schools any safer.

When we look at the real issues in public education right now, we talk about things like class sizes and the retention crisis within our schools, where we see educators that are burned out, that are leaving—EAs, ECEs that are leaving—and not even able to recruit, sometimes, enough custodial staff within schools. Those are some of the challenges that we're facing within our public schools. We see this bill doesn't support kids with special needs. It doesn't ensure that they have the tools that they need to succeed.

When I look at the bill and I look at the intentions behind it, it feels as though we're playing a bit of a shell game. It feels as though it's a little bit of a mirage when we've seen 5,000 classroom educators lost since 2018, \$1,500 less in per-student funding when adjusted for inflation, a crisis in special education and violence in schools that are really linked to unmet supports for students. And then there's a lot of rhetoric around student achievement. Really, Speaker, it's a mirage; it's a distraction from the real issues that are going on in public education.

It really does feel as though this minister and government are interested in creating chaos in our system. Looking at what's rolled out since this bill's been at committee, and now back here, it's very clearly a government and a minister that are in crisis, trying to put a very positive spin on a bill that hasn't been well received, that hasn't been well thought out. It almost feels as though the minister in this case is making it up as he goes along, because all of this talk about getting rid of trustees—we saw them, for months and months and months: "We're going to get rid of trustees—those trustees, those trustees." The government's keeping trustees.

So why else, then, would the minister be at committee, as we saw very recently, trying to argue with witnesses? I don't think I've seen that before in my time watching this, and in speaking to others, it's very rare—almost never—to see something like that happen in the past. But then taking those exchanges and posting information on social

media that doesn't reflect what happened during the committee meeting?

The minister at that committee meeting asked one of the heads of the school boards if they would agree about some of the dollars that are spent on outside organizations and would that have a positive impact on education. Well, the clip then that was posted by the minister cut off the part where that head of an education union said that there have been \$6.3 billion in cuts in education. The whole quote was that that would be "insignificant compared"—and it was cut—"to the \$6.3 billion in cuts" we've had in education.

I hear a lot of the debate around this bill, and the government—in some ways, rightfully so—is calling out some of the expenses, some of the challenges and some of the waste that you have seen within education. But then they say that they want to put that money back into public education, but in the same breath, we see a government that's talking about spending \$28.9 million on a private jet that we saw reversed so quickly, and almost \$2 billion at Ontario Place and moving the Ontario Science Centre—which is a place for learning, a place for children—moving that away and spending \$1 billion on doing the science centre at Ontario Place, when to redo the science centre on its current location would be about \$250 million.

So spending \$750 million more? Well, we can funnel that money into schools. We can funnel that money into supporting student achievement. We look at the \$1.4 billion spent to put booze in convenience stores and grocery stores, including paying, though, \$225 million to do that a year early.

So we want to talk about \$100,000, \$200,000, \$300,000, which I think are sometimes fair arguments to make when you're not spending all of this other money and wasting it all over the place. We look at \$8 million to staff the Premier's office, the most expensive Premier's office in our history. And God knows what a 401 tunnel is going to cost, \$150 billion? So we talk about all these big numbers and never have we seen a government spend so much to deliver so little, but then we're going to look at these very small amounts and say, "That's going to fix education." I don't buy it; I don't think the public buys it.

At the end of the day, this is a government that is increasingly out of touch from the reality of what's going on on the ground, whether it's in our schools or whether it's in our communities in every part of our province.

So now we saw the government was going to cut short the consultations in Bill 101, the regulations behind that bill. The public comment deadline online was shortened by nine days, from May 13 to May 4, and then now we've seen that reversed again. This is clearly a government that is spinning its wheels on public education, that is quite literally making it up as they go along to fix a crisis that was created by this government in the first place.

The minister is scrambling on this. They didn't do their homework. There's no plan for stability in here. It almost looks like they're doing it on purpose, Speaker. That's what it looks like. It looks like this government is mis-managing our public education system on purpose. It feels

like Mike Harris 30 years ago creating a crisis. That's what it feels like when I look at this bill and the rhetoric that we've seen from this minister.

Recently, the minister spoke and said he didn't care if it would take one, two or 10 years to bring school boards out of supervision. We need a plan for normalcy back for those boards. We're not seeing that happen.

So what does the minister then have to say to those voters and families in those boards where elections are being held for positions where maybe we'll have duly elected trustees in a board that's still under supervision, the direct control over this—

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** It's pretty good. It looks pretty good.

*Interjection.*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Order.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** So why is the minister against local Ontarians being able to have a say within their schools? They created a situation, where, "Well, elected trustees can't do any work, and then we're going to bounce parents into a call centre," and shutting down any shred of transparency.

The minister said we won't let those supervisors talk to the public, not to the media, not to trustees. So who do those supervisors talk to, Speaker? Are they \$400,000-a-year puppets of the minister? I don't know.

Parental options are now essentially a call centre or a minister who won't respond or will just deflect and distract and not address the real issues. That's really democracy at work here, right, folks?

Now, on labour relations: It's not doing any better when we look at this bill. The minister claimed in this House that they'd be moving bargaining away from inexperienced trustees, trustees who don't know how to do collective bargaining. But if we actually look at the process in which that takes place, the Ontario Public School Boards' Association has professional staff who are human resource professionals, who are experienced in labour relations, who are doing that central bargaining. It's not left up to any Tom, Dick or Harry; that's a school board trustee doing it.

Frankly, when we look at how bargaining's going to work, there are no details released on how that transition from OPSBA is going to look like or going to work. Back in early March, we saw a joint call from the education unions calling for bargaining to start now, because the contract is going to be coming up sooner than we think. Collective bargaining takes time. It requires discussion. It requires problem-solving, finding solutions.

The education unions have said, "We want to bargain. We want to do that now. We want to address the issues and make our public education system work better in the interests of students, their families, for parents." But we've seen this government and the minister refuse to engage on that.

The collective agreements are going to expire soon. So why isn't the government interested in bargaining early?

It doesn't make any sense unless the intention is to create chaos and to further weaken our public education system.

**2120**

And we see this government attempting to weaken the role school board associations play—associations that provide shared services, governance training, labour expertise, policy and communications guidance. Those services help prevent disputes and reduce legal and consultant costs for school boards. We've heard tonight the government is very interested in talking about consultant costs; well, let's actually reduce those, absolutely, and promote consistent informed decision-making across the publicly funded education system.

In Peel, actually, the savings that they've had from being a member of OPSBA is about \$700,000 a year. It's a pretty good return on investment, actually saving money by being a member of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association.

Collaboration is very important within education. That's being diminished. We don't see the government now going after all of the different municipal conferences that take place, or these other things, because it's important to build capacity. It's important for people to share stories. That's where you learn how to deliver services better in our public education system or whatever other sector it might be. The role of associations has been to collaborate and work with the ministry to make our system better, to support students, staff and parents.

On safe schools, it looks like this government isn't interested in data to inform decision-making. It's really the equivalent of putting your head in the sand. Climate surveys potentially being removed: There's going to be less data on bullying, less data on student safety, less insight into the mental health of our students.

We're seeing rising violence in our schools and classrooms. Again, it's not a kid with a knife showing up to the school in this case; it's a kid that's struggling, that isn't getting the support that they need, that's acting out. There are not enough adults in our schools, and some of the very serious and complex mental health challenges aren't being addressed.

We see through some of the actions and rhetoric a damaging of trust with Black communities. The situation of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board is one example, and shows the risk of when you have provincial Queen's Park control, putting your hands and fingers into every single school board. It will backfire. It will create more issues. It will diminish trust. And it will make our communities less safe. We see this, and what the result is is doubling down on harm, silencing lived experience, reinforcing bias, increasing mistrust in our public school system. So what's the outcome? Unequal discipline risk, systemic racism ignored and schools less safe for everybody.

Now, let's look at school boards all across Ontario. We don't have to look very far to see what cuts to staffing are taking place and what the impact will be. Very recently at the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board—and this is through the hand-picked supervisor, by the way, at that

school board, cutting custodial and skilled trade staff members—the union head there said, “There's nowhere left to cut. I hear from workers every day that they're exhausted. There are injuries every day because of the physical nature of the job.”

It snows quite a bit here in Ontario. So what happens when it snows? Well, the custodian is at the school first thing in the morning. The custodian is at the school ensuring that the walkway is plowed, so that kids and parents can get to school safely, can walk on a path that's salted, doing tireless work. And through the actions of this government, I think they're saying, “Well, we don't care about what's going to happen there. We don't care about dealing with the maintenance issues that we see in many of our schools.” That's not a recipe for success, Speaker.

In Peel, we're seeing 331 teaching positions cut; in Toronto, hundreds, including 40 vice-principals; in Waterloo region, 148 teaching positions cut; and the list goes on and on and on. So we see that this bill is weakening our public education system. It's diminishing trust, and the entire way our systems operate, our government operates, is built on trust. It needs to be built on trust. That trust isn't there.

I hear from parents. They don't trust what this government is doing with their public education system. They don't trust that their kid is going to get the support that they need in the classroom. They don't trust that this government is going to be able to boost student achievement, because they're too interested in distractions as opposed to addressing the very real and serious challenges within our schools. It's not going to be accountable to parents, the way our education system is being re-organized, shuffled around the table. It's going to centralize control over schools, really, in the backrooms at Queen's Park and ultimately silence parents and our local communities, the very people—the very people, Speaker—who know our schools best and make them strong.

So there's no evidence that this bill is going to improve student achievement by prioritizing centralization and ministerial decree. Above all, it's going to undermine local democratic accountability by diminishing the role of trustees, weakening local voices and oversights, but really diminishing the voices of communities, reducing the ability of our schools to be able to respond to diverse and local community issues and concerns and making our schools a lot more vulnerable to short-term politicization.

And I don't know what side of the bed the minister is going to wake up on. Is he going to attack folks at committee or is he going to really be interested in student achievement? I don't see where the government's evidence is that any of this is going to improve student achievement.

Now, we look at other aspects of this bill, Speaker. I think we are going back to, in some ways, the Harris days—okay, reducing honorariums to \$10,000 annually. That seems like a little bit of a backtrack there; I think the trends are there. We're seeing supervision powers expanded more and more and more. Well, it's not going to work out. We see the changes to teachers' college, and again, I think I've said publicly on that, it's not a bad

change. It's not enough for me to vote for this bill, I'll tell you that. It's not necessarily a bad change.

It clarifies the definition of education materials, such as textbooks or other learning materials. It could further the use of digital assets in the classroom. My colleague from Orléans has raised some important concerns around using digital materials entirely within classrooms, as opposed to using textbooks and written materials, because we need to learn differently. The way in which we are training our brains, and young people are training their brains, we don't know what that impact is going to be yet. In fact, there are now studies and conversations that giving a kid an iPad and leaving them there—it's a solution for low-income families; meanwhile, families that have a lot of means, you'll find for those kids, it's not happening. So I'm very seriously concerned about where we might go in terms of child development and brain development. I'm very concerned around that.

I don't know if we're going to get into the banning books situation or not. Maybe we might. We might see that at the provincial level through this bill. We might do that; I don't know. Let's see. Let's see what happens there. Let's see.

I think there are some things that do make a little sense, but it's going to require a larger conversation around how we build and finance our schools, because if you look at a lot of school boards, well, they don't have the reserves or the capital necessary anymore in order to purchase land. So I think the model in which we're going to have to build schools is going to have to change, further than what this government is suggesting because boards just don't have the resources or the money really to do that right now. You're seeing some school boards actually spend a lot of money on lines of credit, paying interest on those lines of credit in order to fund their educational development charge backlog. That's something else that we're seeing within our education system. This bill doesn't fix that, Speaker.

I'd like to see in our province a model of schools where we're building schools earlier; that we're building schools where neighbourhoods are coming in; that we're building schools that you don't then have 15 portables on the side of that; and that we think about community use, that we think about how we maximize the use of public land and our public resources to benefit the whole community, so as school populations grow it's able to take over space in that school. And as school populations decrease, we're able to use space in that school for other community needs. I think that would be a very innovative way. But we're not seeing stuff like that; we're just seeing moving pieces all over the table.

**2130**

So the bill is about control. We don't see a funding solution, we don't see a safety solution, we don't see an achievement plan; we just see centralization out of an ivory tower at Queen's Park.

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

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** I know that the member who just spoke was formerly an executive with the Durham public

board. I understand the Durham public board has a budget of approximately \$1.3 billion. This bill proposes to introduce a CEO for boards. I'm just wondering, as a former executive responsible for a large budget, would the member like to—I'm just asking an open-ended question. Would he like to comment on CEOs and their applicability to a board of \$1.3 billion, reflecting on his previous experience as an executive with the same board?

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** I thank the member from Essex for the question.

Essentially, what the bill does is it moves the finance official, really, to being the CEO. So there's not an extra staff person per se, but the person making that final decision essentially is the business, is the finance official that would have the final say over spending.

I actually have a concern with that, and I predict—hopefully not, but I think it could be likely a few years down the road—that we might see news stories then around misspending. What I found is that when you have a director of education that's an educator there making that final decision about where resources are allocated or where resources are spent, they're thinking about what happens in the classroom.

I think the risk—when we've looked at prior scandals around misspending, potential embezzlement and other things, we've seen that it's actually happened with that business official. So I am a little bit concerned about this approach.

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

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** The member from Ajax talked extensively about this power imbalance that's going to be happening right now. The ministerial control over the public communications of elected trustees is particularly alarming. Elected officials have a fundamental right and a responsibility to communicate with their constituents. Restrictions on that communication interfere with the free flow of information between public representatives and those that they represent, and this may be a concern under the charter, 2(b).

Why do you think the government is having such a strong overreach into school boards? What are they really up to in this instance?

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** I think what the government's approach is in this situation is really to limit alternative voices, to limit dissent to essentially be able to just put forward their narrative when it comes to the public education system. I think that's what the impact of that is.

I would note, though, if we do look at the Education Act right now, the spokesperson for the board is the chair of the board and very much designated as such. I think that in some ways, it does make a little bit of sense to put a box around communications, but I don't necessarily think I trust this government and this minister, frankly, in doing so.

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

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** We're all gathered here on a late Tuesday night, presumably because we all care deeply about education. I certainly do, and I wouldn't be here were it not for the incredible teachers who made it possible

for me to get here. Now, I was fortunate to grow up in a school that was well funded, had reasonable class sizes and had teachers that really cared.

I know that you have a fair amount of educational experience with the Durham school board. I wanted to ask if you might reflect a little bit on your experience, and if you had the opportunity to draft this legislation perhaps from the ground up, quite literally, what would you do? What would be your approach in doing that and delivering an education bill that Ontario's students actually deserve?

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** I got into politics because of public education, not because I worked for a school board, but because growing up, we didn't have a lot of money; I grew up in a one-bedroom apartment with my mom. I went to really great public schools. I had opportunity through our public education system that, quite frankly, not every kid gets to have.

I would start with—how do you ensure that every single kid in our province has the opportunity to succeed, no matter where you are, what postal code or region of the province you're from, income background—doesn't matter? How do you ensure that every kid in our province has the opportunity to succeed?

I think that we've got to reimagine our public education system. I think that starts with everybody around the table. But ultimately, every kid should have the opportunity to succeed.

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

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** Going back to the issue of school boards and large budgets, we observed that Durham had a budget of approximately \$1.3 billion. Toronto District School Board has a budget of over \$3 billion. Ottawa school board has a budget over a billion dollars. And it seems to me that, perhaps over financial issues, we need more financial people at the table. Because I don't think anybody is going to suggest that at a school board, we don't have enough people with an education background at the table. I think everybody would agree we have lots of people with an education background at the table. Perhaps we need more people with a financial background at the table.

Again, it's an open-ended question and I just invite the member to provide whatever observations about that he would like to provide.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** I do think we have folks with financial experience at the table. The CFO of a board is a staff member. Essentially, what the bill is proposing is moving that to be the CEO.

I think we do have folks with financial experience around the table. They actually have to be qualified to do that and get approval by the ministry in order to do that. So we already have that at our school boards.

I think what we do need to do for people who are senior administrators, principals—there's a human management element. You're managing an HR environment. Once you've come up from a principal, you're not necessarily coming up as an educator. You're not necessarily trained in managing people. I do think that, above and beyond

principal and SO qualifications, we should be looking at how you do provide more HR training.

But I do think we have the financial people around the table. They present those budgets to the school board. It already happens.

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

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I'd like to thank the member from Ajax for his presentation on Bill 101.

With Bill 101 and the powers that the government is giving itself, interestingly, the government is currently looking to seize control of all different school board properties and assets.

Now, in the municipality of Kingsville, the municipality would like to purchase from the government a no longer used high school to use for a community centre. And yet, the government is blocking that. The government is saying no to the municipality of Kingsville.

My question to the member from Ajax: Who do you suppose this government is making these changes for, if not for our treasured municipal partners? Who do you think is feeding at their trough?

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** I think we saw a lot of these changes made in the previous education bill that this government had. I am very much concerned, especially seeing the past actions and dealings of this government, with what may happen with certain properties.

Ultimately, a school that was built in a neighbourhood is public land. It's all of ours, and that should first and foremost serve public purposes to benefit the community which it's in.

Our neighbourhoods change. Our communities change. That's okay. It's how we manage that change and ensure that we are still ensuring that the public benefits from those assets, like a community centre, like the member mentioned, in Kingsville.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** A quick question from the member from Don Valley West.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** I'd like to thank my colleague from Ajax for his excellent debate on this bill, highlighting the many weaknesses and problems in it and how it will hurt our kids.

I want to just ask about the funding for after-school programs. In my riding of Don Valley West, we have some vulnerable youth in Thorncliffe Park who are always looking for opportunities to do sports and other things in their schools. And yet, we know that this government's cuts have made it harder for the TDSB to do that. Would the member care to comment?

**2140**

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** I think what you are seeing, with the burnout of staff in our schools—we look at extra-curriculars after school. The staff that are the coaches on the hockey team, the football team or whatever sport or activity, they're volunteering. They're volunteering their time because they care about the kids in that school, and when those educators are burned out, that doesn't happen.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

**Hon. Steve Clark:** I really appreciate the debate this evening, and I want to thank the members for their comments. I'm so glad that both the ministers that were involved in the introduction of Bill 101 are here today, and I think on behalf of the Legislature, I want to thank the Honourable Paul Calandra, our Minister of Education, for his vision—

*Interjections.*

**Hon. Steve Clark:** I had to go back and watch the committee hearings, and I have to say, Minister, that was one of the most masterful committee presentations and questions that I've seen in this Legislature.

And through you, Speaker, I want to thank the Honourable Nolan Quinn for the work that he's done on this bill to help get more teachers into the classroom.

Let's face it, folks: Bill 101 is all about putting students first, about supporting our teachers and about ensuring that all the dollars that are needed in the system get to the system.

I want to thank the minister for being so forceful with some of those bad-actor school boards and trustees, making sure that those students have someone like the Honourable Paul Calandra that stands up for quality education, stands up for results in the classroom. I, on behalf of everyone, just want to thank Minister Calandra and Minister Quinn for Bill 101, for their vision.

With that, Speaker, I would like to move that the question now be put.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Mr. Clark has moved that the question now be put. There have been over six hours of debate and 18 members have spoken to this motion. I am satisfied there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion that the question be now put, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion that the question be now put, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

*Vote deferred.*

## BETTER REGIONAL GOVERNANCE ACT, 2026

### LOI DE 2026 POUR UNE MEILLEURE GOUVERNANCE RÉGIONALE

Mr. Flack moved third reading of the following bill:

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

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Back to the minister to start debate.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Well, thank you, Speaker. I'm going to share my time this evening with the Minister of the

Environment, Conservation and Parks and the member from Whitby.

It's my pleasure to lead off debate on third reading of Bill 100, the Better Regional Governance Act, 2026. Today, we are meeting at a time when Ontario is facing real and pressing challenges: the global economy remains uncertain and markets continue to be volatile. The cost of building has risen and, across the province, the pace of approvals has struggled to keep up with the scale of demand.

These are not theoretical pressures that are being felt in communities, they are real challenges that need solutions in every region, in every municipality across our province. These challenges bring us a responsibility and an obligation to ensure that our governments respond to these challenges. And right now, one thing is clear—and as I have said time and time again—it takes too long and it costs too much to build housing in this province. That is the challenge before us today indeed. That is the problem we are working to solve, and that is the context in which Bill 100 must be understood.

Our government has taken significant action to address these issues. We've invested in the vital infrastructure that communities need to grow and prosper. We've introduced legislative reforms to streamline approvals and reduce duplication. We've worked to align policies across ministries so that projects can move forward more quickly and with more predictability. But through all of that work, one conclusion became undeniable: Governance matters. How decisions are made, how quickly they are made, how clearly they are aligned and how effectively they are coordinated has a direct impact on whether homes get built, whether infrastructure is delivered and whether communities can keep pace with the growth they are experiencing.

Bill 100 is about addressing that reality. It's about ensuring that regional government in Ontario is equipped to meet the demands of a growing province. It's about removing barriers, strengthening coordination and creating the conditions for faster, more predictable decision-making. And Speaker, it's about consistency. We do not have enough consistency today, and it shows in our governance. It is part of a broader, deliberate plan to change the way Ontario builds, the way Ontario plans and the way Ontario operates.

At its core, it is grounded in a simple principle: Strong communities require strong partnerships. Municipalities are at the front lines of the growth we are experiencing. They are responsible for planning, for infrastructure and for delivering the services that enable housing. The province sets the broader direction and provides the tools and resources to support that work. When those priorities are aligned and when governments are working together with clarity and purpose, we see positive actions, we see positive results. When they are not aligned, we see time-costing delays, and, as we all know, time is money.

Bill 100 is about ensuring that alignment exists and that it is supported by governance structures that are capable of delivering on expectations of the people we all serve. At a

high level, Bill 100 introduces targeted reforms to strengthen regional governance in Ontario, particularly in areas experiencing significant growth pressures. We know all those exist. The bill does three primary things:

(1) It enables the province to appoint regional chairs in a defined set of upper-tier municipalities, building on authorities that already exist and have been used successfully.

(2) It extends strong-chair powers, mirroring strong-mayor powers to these roles, providing the tools necessary to advance shared municipal priorities.

(3) It streamlines council composition in specific regions where existing structures have become inefficient and have hindered effective decision-making.

Each of these elements responds to a specific challenge that we have identified.

On the question of leadership, the current system is inconsistent. Across Ontario, there are multiple methods for selecting heads of upper-tier councils. Some are directly elected. Some are selected by council. Some are appointed by the province. No consistency—it doesn't exist. This patchwork approach creates differences in accountability, differences in alignment and differences in how effectively decisions can be made. We see it every day.

At a time when coordination is essential, those differences matter, Speaker. By enabling the appointment of regional chairs in key regions in this province, we are creating a more consistent framework, one that ensures leadership is aligned with the shared objective of delivering housing and critical infrastructure. This is not about centralization for its own sake; it's about clarity of purpose. It's about ensuring that those responsible for facilitating decision-making at the regional level are equipped to work in partnership with both local municipalities and the province to achieve common goals.

Equally important is the extension of strong-chair powers. We have already seen the impact of these tools at the municipal level. They allow leaders to prioritize key initiatives, to streamline processes and to ensure that important decisions do not stall. Again, Speaker, time is money. They help cut through red tape and keep projects moving. Extending these powers to the regional level is a logical step.

#### 2150

Regional governments play a critical role in enabling housing and growth. We all know this. They are responsible for water and waste water systems, for major transportation corridors and for long-range planning. When decisions at that level are delayed, the effects ripple right across the entire system.

Strong-chair powers are designed to address that head-on. They are targeted, they are accountable and they are focused specifically on advancing shared priorities, building homes and delivering the infrastructure that supports them. They do not replace the role of council. They do not override local voices. What they do is ensure that decisions can move forward in a timely and effective manner.

The third element of the bill is the streamlining of council composition in regions where size and structure

have become barriers to efficiency. In Niagara and Simcoe, for example, current council sizes are significantly larger than the provincial average—significantly larger. This has led to challenges in coordination, duplication of decision-making and delays in advancing key priorities. The proposed changes would bring these councils more in line with other regions in the province, while maintaining representation through locally elected mayors. This is about improving functionality, and we are ensuring that government structures support, rather than hinder, the delivery of housing and infrastructure.

These changes also build on a broader set of actions that our government has taken. We have made historic investments in municipal infrastructure, closing in on \$4 billion for housing-enabling infrastructure. Bill 100 complements those efforts, because no matter how strong the policy framework is, if the governance structures responsible for implementation are not aligned, progress will be limited. Again, Speaker, time is money. This legislation ensures that alignment exists.

I now want to take some time to speak directly to the work of the committee, because the process we have undertaken here matters. As this bill is fundamentally about process, it's important the bill itself has followed the process of the legislation.

Over the course of these hearings, members of the committee have heard from a wide range of witnesses. Municipal leaders, policy experts, stakeholders and residents have come forward to share their perspectives. Some have been supportive in the direction we've been taking; others have raised concerns or offered suggestions for improvement. The diversity of their views is not only expected, but it's also valuable. It reflects the reality that governance reform is not a simple exercise. It requires balancing competing priorities, understanding local context and making decisions that will have long-term impacts across Ontario.

But, Speaker, listening is only one part of the committee's role, as I think we all know. The other part is the work of strengthening the legislation. That means engaging seriously with the content of the bill. It means bringing forward thoughtful, constructive amendments that are grounded in evidence and that seek to improve the legislation in a meaningful way. It means respecting the rules and procedures that govern this place, so that debate can be conducted in a fair and orderly manner.

On that point, I must address what we have seen during the clause-by-clause deliberations. When the time came to move from discussion to action, when the time came to propose amendments that could refine and strengthen the bill, some opposition members of the committee chose a different path. Rather than putting forward substantive, well-considered proposals, they introduced amendments that were not going to improve the substance of the legislation at all. Amendments were ruled out of order by the Chair for making a mockery of parliamentary proceedings—that is not my characterization, that's a determination of the Chair applying the rules to committee and it is the determination that speaks to the importance of maintaining the integrity of the process.

We can and should have robust debates about policy. We can disagree on the best approach to governance reform—that is part of a healthy democracy—but those debates must be grounded in substance. They must be conducted within the framework of the rules and they must be aimed at achieving a better outcome for the people we all serve. That is the standard that Ontarians expect and it is the standard that this government will continue to fight for.

I would now like to address directly one of the most frequently raised concerns regarding this legislation: the question of democratic legitimacy, particularly in relation to the appointment of regional chairs. This is an important discussion, and it is one that deserves a clear and grounded response.

To begin, it is essential to understand the role of a regional chair within the broader system of municipal governance. Regional governments are made up of elected representatives, mayors and councillors, who bring forward the priorities and perspectives of their communities. They debate, they deliberate and they make decisions on behalf of the people they serve. That remains unchanged through this legislation.

The regional chair does not replace those voices. The chair facilitates those voices to bring reason and purpose and good policy forward. The role is best understood as one of coordination and leadership at the centre of the table. It involves setting agendas, guiding discussions and ensuring the work of council proceeds in a timely and effective manner. In complex governance environments where multiple municipalities must work together across shared systems, this kind of leadership is essential.

Second, appointed chairs are not new in Ontario. They are already a well-established feature of municipal systems. A significant portion of Ontarians currently live in regions where chairs are appointed, including some of the largest and fastest-growing areas in the province.

This is not a departure from precedent; it is an extension of an existing model that has been used successfully. In fact, for many residents, this legislation will not change how their regional chair is selected. What it does is bring greater consistency across the regions, ensuring that governance structures are aligned with the realities of today's challenges.

Third, it is important to emphasize that local democratic accountabilities remain intact. Mayors remain directly elected. Councillors remain directly elected. They continue to make the vast majority of the decisions that affect their local communities.

Regional governments do not dictate outcomes; they facilitate coordination across the municipalities they represent, across their entire region. This distinction matters, Speaker, because the effectiveness of regional governance depends on the ability to bring together multiple perspectives and move forward in a coordinated way.

The appointment of chairs supports that function. It ensures that the individual responsible for facilitating that coordination is aligned with the shared objective of

delivering results, particularly in areas such as housing and infrastructure, where timing and alignment is critical.

Fourth, appointments are not and will not be arbitrary. They will be subject to a structured and transparent process, including established vetting mechanisms that ensure candidates meet high standards of integrity, experience and accountability. This provides assurance that those appointed are qualified and capable of fulfilling the responsibilities of that important role.

Finally, I would address the broader concern about centralization. This legislation is not about concentrating power. It's about improving coordination. It's about improving consistency. The challenges we are facing—housing supply, infrastructure delivery and economic growth—do not stop at municipal boundaries. They require collaboration across all jurisdictions. Regional governments exist precisely to facilitate that coordination. Bill 100 strengthens their ability to do so.

By improving alignment, by reducing delays and by providing the tools necessary to move decisions forward, we are enabling local governments to deliver more effectively and efficiently for their residents.

And ultimately, Speaker, that is common sense. Ontarians expect these types of results. They expect infrastructure to be built, they expect homes to be built and they expect governments to work collaboratively to ensure these important priorities are delivered on time and on budget. This legislation is designed to meet those expectations.

Speaker, as I conclude my remarks, I want to return to the central purpose of this legislation: Ontario needs coordination and consistent cross-government predictability. The decisions we make today will shape the future of our communities for years to come.

We have a responsibility to ensure that our governance systems are capable of meeting the challenges we face and of supporting the growth that lies ahead.

Bill 100 is a key part of that effort. It is about strengthening regional governance so that it can deliver results. It is about aligning leadership, improving coordination and reducing the barriers that slow down decision-making. And again, Speaker, it's about ensuring that we can deliver the homes that need to be built, that Ontarians need, and deliver the infrastructure that supports them.

Infrastructure is key; without that, housing isn't going to be built. We all know this, Speaker. Looking upon the vast demand we have for infrastructure in this province—water, waste water, transportation—it's crucial to get that infrastructure in the ground so we can get on with the job of building more homes, and it's about doing so in a way that is timely, efficient and responsive to the needs of all the communities they serve.

## 2200

These changes are not about replacing local governance; again, it's quite the opposite. Through Bill 100, we are strengthening local governance—indeed, we are strengthening local governance. They're about providing the tools and structures needed to ensure municipalities are positioned to succeed. They're about creating a system that works—

one that is focused on outcomes, one that is aligned with priorities and one that is capable of delivering results.

Speaker, when we think about results, I take a look at the great housing starts that have started to take place in this province. I see the tremendous infrastructure projects being delivered throughout this province, whether it was through the Building Faster Fund, whether it's through other initiatives that we've worked closely with municipalities and regions on. And I take a look at the recent deal we did, where we've announced \$8.8 billion over 10 years, with the federal government, to make sure that municipalities can be involved in lowering their development charges while getting the critical infrastructure dollars they need to put this infrastructure in the ground, because there is an insatiable need. As I've said time and time again, we have a \$200-billion to \$250-billion need over the next 10 to 15 years for growth and aging infrastructure replacement. It's crucial that we get these dollars invested. It's why we also have talked about setting up municipal services corporations so we can fund them in a more efficient way, amortized over decades upon decades upon decades. It's crucial we get this infrastructure in the ground.

Regional governments run efficiently, run effectively, along with our municipal partners outside of regional governance areas—need this infrastructure, need this support, need this bill to make sure that we can serve all. Why? Because at the end of the day, it's all about the people we serve. I think we all would agree with that in this House. It's about families looking for a place to call home. It's about seniors wanting to downsize. It's about first-time homebuyers. It's about families who want to get their forever home. Whatever it is in the housing continuum, we need to get this infrastructure into place. We need to get housing built and built fast.

That is why we brought forth the HST rebate, which we're seeing magnificent success with thus far. In just a little bit less than a month, we've got well over a thousand new sales taking place that would not have taken place if we had not announced the HST rebate. That infrastructure that we need to get into the ground is crucial, because this is going to gain momentum as we move forward in the coming weeks and months.

It's about communities planning for growth. And it's about ensuring that Ontario remains a place where opportunity exists and where people can build their futures with confidence.

Bill 100 reflects a clear and consistent approach to achieving these goals. It's measured. It is practical. And it is necessary. It is about protecting Ontario by ensuring that we are ready not only to meet the challenges of today, but to seize the opportunities of tomorrow.

Speaker, I'll conclude by saying I believe strongly that this bill will help position us not only in the next year, four years, eight years, 12 years—it's about strengthening local governance. It's about delivering results.

Accountability matters. Growing up in a world where accountability mattered most in business, I believe we can bring that same perspective, that same focus, that same

accountability to the regions in this province, serving with our provincial priorities, their priorities together to build a better and stronger Ontario.

I'll turn it over to the Minister of the Environment.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos):** I recognize the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** I am honoured and privileged to join the debate on third reading of Bill 100, the Better Regional Governance Act, 2026. And I will say at the outset that I plan to support this bill wholeheartedly.

I want to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for his dedication, for his fine example, for his commitment to this bill and so many other initiatives of this government. His contributions to the debate this evening have confirmed the purpose of this legislation and the strategy that our Ontario Progressive Conservative government is pursuing to make it faster, more predictable and more affordable to build the Ontario of tomorrow.

When we talk about governance reform, we're not talking about theory. We're not talking about academic theorization or political science. We're talking about how and whether or not systems work in the real world, in practice.

Regional governance is important because it shapes the daily decisions that affect infrastructure delivery, housing supply, economic competitiveness and, ultimately, the quality of life of families across Ontario. So we're talking about whether or not waste water and water infrastructure can be delivered when it's necessary, whether planning and approvals are clear and predictable, and whether or not governments at every level are able to move with the urgency that Ontario's economic growth demands.

I'm happy to report this and confirm this: We're going to add six million new residents to the province of Ontario; we're over 16 million now, and by mid-century, we'll be well over 20 million. When I spoke on this bill at second reading, I spoke about how Ontario is growing rapidly. Families are choosing to live here. Businesses are choosing to invest here in Ontario. This is good news. This will help us be ahead of the curve as that population growth emerges.

Communities like mine in Durham, as well as York, Peel, Niagara, Simcoe and many others, are welcoming new residents and shouldering increasing demands for housing, roads, transit, water systems and community services.

Growth is a sign of confidence in our province, but with it comes great responsibility. Growth must be supported by infrastructure that is planned properly and built on time, and led by our provincial government. Growth must be managed through political systems that reflect today's realities and are still based on the fundamental principles of democracy. And growth must be delivered in a way that protects our environment while ensuring communities remain livable, affordable and economically strong. But achieving that balance becomes significantly more challenging when governance systems are slow, fragmented or misaligned with the scale of the challenges that are before us.

When decision-making is duplicated across too many tables, when accountability is unclear, or when council structures are too large and too unwieldy to function efficiently, the result, then, is not better outcomes; the result is delay. Delays matter—I've said this before, and I will say it again—because delays drive up construction costs. Delays defer infrastructure necessary to unlock housing. Delays strain systems that were never designed to carry today's population pressures. And delays frustrate municipalities, residents and builders alike. That's not fair to municipalities. It's not fair to taxpayers. And it's certainly not fair to families who are waiting for homes that already have planning support but remain stalled because the systems governing decisions cannot keep pace.

That is why regional governance matters so profoundly. As we have discussed at length, upper-tier municipalities are responsible for some of the most critical infrastructure systems that enable growth and keep our communities functioning, while protecting public health and our shared environment. These include drinking water and waste water systems, trunk infrastructure, regional roads, waste diversion and long-term land use coordination. These systems do not always stop at municipal boundaries. Water and sewer systems often serve multiple communities. Transportation corridors connect entire regions. And the impacts, whether they be positive or negative, are shared across municipalities. That is why regional governance exists.

In fact, it was a Progressive Conservative government in the early 1970s that created the regions we know today, including my region of Durham.

For regional governance to succeed, it must be capable of acting decisively. It must balance local perspectives while advancing regional priorities. And most importantly, it must be accountable for outcomes, not simply process. Where regional councils function well, infrastructure moves forward and housing can follow. Housing can be enabled. Where regional councils do not function well, even well-intentioned safeguards can become procedural bottlenecks, adding cost and uncertainty without improving results.

**2210**

And so Bill 100 is about ensuring that the governance framework around these essential systems is fit for purpose in a rapidly growing province facing increasingly complex infrastructure demands.

Madam Speaker, the urgency of this moment cannot be overstated. Housing supply has not kept pace with demand. Infrastructure delivery has struggled to keep up with population growth. The cost of inaction is real, measured in higher housing prices, reduced affordability and mounting pressure on systems that were designed for much smaller communities. Because it's not just enabling new housing; it's about supporting existing housing.

That is why our Ontario Progressive Conservative government is taking action on multiple fronts. We have consistently streamlined approvals and processes across government, including at the Ministry of the Environment,

Conservation and Parks; I am quite proud of that and the team. We have an excellent deputy minister and assistant and associate deputy ministers and officials and an excellent chief of staff and staff working across government for better outcomes, all while maintaining strong environmental oversight and environmental protections.

We have taken steps to modernize how water and waste water systems can be financed and delivered. This House recently passed Bill 97; that legislation advances the consolidation of Ontario's 36 conservation authorities into nine regional entities.

The conservation authorities play an important role in protecting people and property from floods and natural hazards. Our Ontario government strongly believes in that mandate, and as I have said before, it was an Ontario Progressive Conservative government that originally created our conservation authorities over 80 years ago.

But we have heard clearly that service delivery can vary significantly from one region to the next. Approval timelines differ; expectations are not always consistent and neighbouring conservation authorities approach similar issues and similar processes in very different ways. Much like the challenges that Bill 100 aims to address, this inconsistency creates uncertainty for planners, for builders and for municipalities. Uncertainty leads directly to the delay that I just spoke about.

Madam Speaker, our Ontario government has also provided the critical financial support necessary to build. Through the Ministry of Infrastructure—and I am proud to be filling in for Minister Surma as Acting Minister of Infrastructure—we have invested billions of dollars in municipal infrastructure, because we understand that roads, transit and water and sewage pipes, plants and treatment facilities are the backbone of housing growth, of housing enablement. But even the best policy reforms will fall short if the governance systems responsible for implementation are not aligned with the same level of urgency.

On that note, it is important to speak plainly about the cost of delay. Every year a major infrastructure project is delayed, costs rise. Families and communities pay the price. Delays at the planning and governance stage are often the most expensive kind because they compound long before construction begins. Inflation, interest rates, labour pressures all add up, and these costs are passed directly to municipalities and ratepayers.

Delays also place enormous strain on existing infrastructure. Systems designed for smaller populations, as I referenced, are asked to do more for longer. That just increases maintenance costs and operational risk.

Most importantly, governance-driven delay slows housing delivery. Projects that are otherwise ready to proceed remain on hold, not because requirements have not been met, but because decision-making structures are not functioning efficiently.

That is the gap that Bill 100 proposes to close by modernizing how decisions are made at the regional government level. It recognizes that municipal planning, regional infrastructure, conservation authority review and

provincial approvals are all interconnected. When one part of that system fails, the entire chain is adversely affected. That is why governance reforms, service modernization and approval streamlining across ministries—and across the whole of government—must be understood as part of a single, coherent approach.

Clear leadership enables better planning, consistent processes support predictable timelines and alignment between provincial and municipal priorities helps ensure environmental protection and housing delivery move forward together so that we serve our citizens and residents in common cause.

Now, from my experience working with municipalities across Ontario, I can say with confidence that the vast majority of local leaders want clarity, they want predictability, they want alignment with provincial priorities and they want governance systems that allow them to deliver results for their citizens and residents rather than becoming trapped in endless procedural loops. That is why strengthening leadership at the regional level is so critical.

Much of this debate has focused on the role of an appointed and empowered regional chair, and yet this bill proposes a democratic solution: An elected minister of the crown responsible to this elected House may make the appointment in eight regions, and if she or he does not do so, the legislation would provide for a local elected regional council to do so. That's democracy.

So, at its core, the role is about coordination. A strong chair helps align priorities, facilitate discussion and it keeps councils focused on outcomes—very much like the chair of a large organization or a board of directors. This role is not about overriding councils or diminishing municipal voices, it's about ensuring that decisions are made and that regional interests such as major infrastructure, housing supply and economic development are advanced coherently across regions, in accordance with provincial priorities.

We have seen similar principles apply with strong-mayor powers at the local level. These tools have helped municipalities prioritize housing and infrastructure, clarify accountability and move more decisively. Extending comparable tools to the regional level reflects the scale and the complexity of the decisions that regions are responsible for today.

Bill 100 also responds directly to identified challenges in council size and structure in places like Niagara and Simcoe county. In Niagara, as we know, a council of 32 members serves fewer than 500,000 residents—larger than the council of Canada's largest city. In Simcoe, local leaders themselves sought to streamline governance but were constrained by existing legislative requirements. So this legislation provides a proposed practical solution: It enables more focused councils while ensuring that every municipality continues to be represented. It also allows for tools like weighted voting to ensure population realities are reflected fairly in decision-making.

So this is not about reducing representation; it's about improving how representation functions in practice, ensuring decisions can be made efficiently while maintaining fairness and accountability.

Speaker, timing also matters. These changes are being brought forward in advance of this next 2026 municipal election cycle. That is deliberate and responsible. Municipal staff, candidates and voters deserve clarity about governance structures before going to the polls. Acting now provides certainty and allows for a smooth transition. These measures were announced before the May 1 registration date, and we are only days into that process as we debate third reading of this bill.

Transparency and public confidence are also central to this bill. The appointment processes will include rigorous vetting with safeguards that will ensure leadership at the regional level is credible, qualified and held to the highest ethical standards. Regional governments were largely created decades ago to meet the challenges of their time, but it is more than 50 years later. They did serve Ontario well, but the scale and complexity of today's growth demand is such that modernization is required.

#### 2220

We cannot solve today's housing and infrastructure challenges with yesterday's tools. Bill 100 reflects that reality. It builds on successful models already in place, it strengthens alignment between municipalities and the province and it ensures governance structures can deliver real results successfully.

Finally, I want to take a few minutes to speak directly about what this legislation means for the communities I represent, because Durham illustrates so clearly why modernizing regional governance matters. Durham is one of the fastest-growing regions in Ontario. Communities in my riding include Clarington, Scugog and Oshawa. Those communities are rapidly changing and growing. We are honoured to welcome new families, new employers and new investment year after year. That growth brings enormous opportunity. It also places incredible pressures on existing infrastructure. Growth must be planned regionally and delivered efficiently if our communities are going to function the way residents expect and deserve.

In Durham, issues like water and waste water capacity, regional networks of roads, waste management and long-term land use planning are not abstract policy debates; they are practical questions that affect whether new neighbourhoods can proceed, whether employment lands can be developed and whether growth happens in a way that is orderly and responsible. When regional governance works well, Durham can plan proactively, sequence infrastructure properly and give municipalities and developers the certainty they need to move forward. When that does not occur, then projects stall, costs rise and residents feel the effects through congestion, delayed housing supply and higher municipal costs. That is unacceptable.

This is an urgent requirement. Delays at the decision-making table often translate into years of delay on infrastructure projects. Communities are counting on there being no such delays because they can drive up costs, and, ultimately, taxpayers bear that burden.

Bill 100 is not about changing Durham for the sake of change; it's about ensuring our governance structures are strong enough to keep pace with the reality of growth. It is

about ensuring clear leadership is present at the regional table, improving coordination among local municipalities and ensuring that decisions that affect millions—tens of millions, hundreds of millions—of dollars in infrastructure investment can be made in a timely and accountable way.

Durham residents expect results, like all Ontarians. They expect growth to be planned responsibly. They expect infrastructure to be delivered when it's needed, not years after communities are built. They expect governments at every level to work together in common cause, rather than allowing outdated systems to slow progress. This legislation supports these expectations. It helps ensure that regional governance in Durham and across Ontario is aligned with the urgency of the housing and infrastructure challenges we face. It reinforces accountability, it reduces duplication and it strengthens the connection between provincial priorities and local delivery.

The decisions we make in this House today will shape the Ontario of tomorrow for decades to come. Governance structures created 50 years ago were designed for a very different province. Today's Ontario is larger, more complex and more interconnected than ever before. We must come together and meet that challenge for modernization. We can build on the proven models and make them better for communities like Durham and for the province as a whole.

Bill 100 moves us in the right direction, aligning governance with responsibility and strengthening partnerships between municipalities and the province. It ensures that Ontario grows properly and effectively. For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I am proud to support Bill 100 and my great colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing in this endeavour.

In fact, in just one moment, the great member for Whitby will share his thoughts on this matter and how it will positively affect our shared region of Durham.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the member from Whitby.

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** I'm pleased to rise today in support of Bill 100, the Better Regional Governance Act, 2026. As a member representing Whitby and Durham region, I want to speak not only to the broader purpose of this legislation, but also to what it means in a practical sense for the community I represent. I was a regional councillor on Durham regional council for seven years, a local councillor for six years prior to that and I've represented Whitby for 10 years.

This bill is about ensuring that our systems of regional governance are structured in a way that allows municipalities to function effectively, coordinate properly and deliver results for hard-working families.

We're debating this legislation at a time when Ontario is facing real and pressing challenges. The global economy remains uncertain, markets continue to shift, the cost of building has risen and, across the province, the pace of approvals has struggled to keep up with the scale of demand. These are not theoretical pressures. They are

being felt in communities across Ontario, including Durham region.

At the same time, our province continues to grow. People are choosing Ontario to live, to work and to raise their families. That growth is a sign of strength and a reflection of the opportunities that exist here, but it also brings with it a responsibility to ensure that our systems are able to respond. And right now, one thing is clear: If we want to build the housing and infrastructure Ontario needs, we need governance structures that can support timely, coordinated decision-making. That is the context in which Bill 100 must be understood.

Speaker, Ontario continues to experience significant growth. With that growth comes opportunity, as well as a greater level of responsibility for all governments, including regional governments.

Municipalities are responsible for planning, infrastructure, service delivery and ensuring that communities are able to grow in a way that is sustainable and responsive to local needs. But these responsibilities depend on governance structures that are capable of supporting them. Where those structures create delays, duplication or unnecessary complexity, it becomes more difficult to deliver the outcomes people expect.

The government's announcement of this legislation made it clear that the intent is to support faster decision-making, reduce inefficiencies and help accelerate housing and infrastructure delivery. That is a practical objective, and one that reflects the realities facing communities like Whitby across this province.

Our government has taken significant action to address these challenges. We've invested in the infrastructure that communities need to grow. We've introduced legislative reforms to streamline approvals and reduce duplication. We have worked to align policies so that projects can move forward more quickly and, yes, more predictably.

But through that work, one conclusion has become increasingly clear: Governance matters. Leadership matters. How decisions are made, how quickly they're made, how clearly they are aligned and how effectively they are coordinated has a direct impact on whether homes get built, whether infrastructure is delivered and whether communities can keep pace with growth. When governance systems are fragmented, when responsibilities are unclear or when decision-making becomes bogged down in process, the result is delay, and delay has consequences. It drives up costs, it limits supply and it makes it harder for hard-working families to find a place to call home.

Bill 100 is about addressing that reality. It's about ensuring that regional governance in Ontario is equipped to meet the demands of a growing province. It's about removing barriers, strengthening coordination and creating the conditions for faster, more predictable decision-making.

It's important to recognize that many of Ontario's regional governance systems were designed decades ago. They were created in a different context at a time when population growth was more gradual and the scale of infrastructure coordination was more limited. Today,

regions like Durham are managing far more complex demands. Durham is no longer a collection of eight communities growing slowly on the edge of the greater Toronto area. It's a fast-growing region with urban, suburban and rural municipalities, each with distinct needs but many shared pressures.

### 2230

Communities across Durham are dealing with growth, housing demand, transportation needs, employment lands, servicing capacity and the infrastructure required to support new development. Decisions made at the regional level affect whether roads are expanded, whether water and waste water systems can support new homes and whether communities can plan confidently for the future.

They are coordinating across multiple municipalities, delivering large-scale infrastructure and supporting a rapidly growing population. And that requires governance structures that are able to operate efficiently and effectively. It also requires leadership structures that allow for coordination and alignment across the region.

As this debate has unfolded, there have been concerns raised, particularly with respect to the changes affecting Durham region. I think it's important to address those concerns directly, and to do so in a clear and measured way.

First, with respect to the current term of council, nothing in this legislation changes the mandate of those who have been elected. Every individual who has been elected will continue to serve for the duration of their term. There is no mechanism within this bill to remove a sitting regional chair, nor is there any provision that alters the current composition of council during this term.

These changes being proposed would take effect at the beginning of the next municipal term. This ensures continuity in the current term, while providing for a structured transition into the next term.

Speaker, what the bill does propose is a change to how the regional chair is selected going forward. To be clear, this legislation does not remove any currently serving official from their position. In Durham, this would align the region with models already in place in Peel and York regions. These are systems that are functioning today and they represent a significant portion of the population living in regions affected by this legislation.

This approach brings greater consistency with models already operating in other parts of the province. That consistency matters because regional governance is not just a local administrative question. It's connected to housing, infrastructure, transportation and economic growth across the province.

It's helpful to take a step back and look at the history of regional government in Ontario, and in Durham specifically. Regional governments were established in the 1970s with a clear purpose: to coordinate infrastructure services and planning across multiple municipalities. Regional government was not designed to replace local municipalities; it was designed to support them. It was created to bring municipalities together, align priorities and deliver services that extend beyond local boundaries.

At the time regional governments were created, regional chairs were not directly elected. The model of appointment was the norm for many years. In Durham region, the transition to a directly elected chair is relatively recent in historical terms. The first directly elected chair in Durham was in 2014.

Prior to that, the chair had served in an appointed capacity for many years, providing continuity, coordination and leadership at the regional level. To add more information and clarity regarding Durham region, the late Roger Anderson became elected chair for the first time in 2014. I remember; I was sitting on that regional council, where I served for seven years.

But this wasn't his first time as chair, Speaker. He had been an appointed chair for over 21 years before then. This is an important reminder that the approach proposed in Bill 100 is not new or untested. It's a model that has worked in the past and continues to function in other regions today.

The purpose of these changes is not to alter the role of municipalities, nor is it to diminish local decision-making. It's to strengthen the ability of regional governments to coordinate effectively. The role of the regional chair is to facilitate that coordination, support the work of local leaders and help ensure that decisions can be made in a timely and effective manner. This is about improving how the system functions, not changing who the system serves.

Regional governments bring together elected representatives from local municipalities—in my case, in the region of Durham, that's eight, including Whitby—who continue to bring forward the priorities and perspectives of their communities. They debate, deliberate and make decisions on behalf of the people they serve. That remains unchanged. The regional chair does not replace those voices; the chair helps facilitate them. Now, in complex governance environments where multiple municipalities must work together across shared systems, that kind of coordination is absolutely essential.

Another element of this legislation is the extension of strong-chair powers at the regional level. These authorities are intended to support clearer leadership and more effective coordination across municipalities, particularly when advancing shared priorities such as housing and infrastructure. Regional governments play a critical role in enabling housing and growth. They are responsible for major infrastructure and long-range planning, and when decisions at that level are delayed, the effects can ripple across the entire system. You'll know, Speaker, from your experience yourself as a mayor for a good period of time what the effect can be.

We've already seen how similar tools can help municipalities move projects forward more efficiently. Applying a similar approach at the regional level, I believe, helps ensure that decisions are not delayed by fragmentation and, yes, unnecessary process. Importantly, these powers operate within the existing council framework. They support decision-making, but they do not replace it. They do not override local voices. They are intended to ensure that decisions can move forward in a timely and effective manner.

Speaker, I also want to address the question of representation. It's important to be clear that this legislation does not remove representation from communities. Every municipality continues to have a voice at the regional table. Local mayors and councillors remain directly elected, and they continue to bring forward the needs and priorities of the communities they serve.

What changes is not who is represented but how effectively decisions can be made. A more focused and coordinated structure allows those voices to translate directly into action. It strengthens accountability and ensures that decision-making keeps pace with the needs of growing communities. That is especially important in areas like housing, infrastructure and economic development, where delays at the regional level can affect multiple municipalities at once.

**2240**

Speaker, ultimately, this legislation is about ensuring that regional governance works as intended. The real challenge facing municipalities is not structure in the abstract, but what happens when that structure slows down decision-making.

When decisions are delayed, infrastructure projects are delayed. When infrastructure is delayed, communities wait for roads, for water services and for the housing that depends on that infrastructure. These delays have real consequences. They affect how quickly communities can grow, how services are delivered and how costs evolve over time.

The challenges we're facing, Speaker—housing supply, infrastructure delivery and economic growth—do not stop at municipal boundaries. They require collaboration across jurisdictions. Regional governments exist precisely to facilitate that collaboration, and Bill 100 strengthens their ability to do so.

By improving alignment, reducing delays and providing the tools necessary to move decisions forward, we are enabling local governments to deliver more effectively for their residents. This legislation reflects a broader effort to ensure that our institutions are aligned with the needs of today's Ontario. It recognizes that growth requires coordination, that coordination requires effective governance and that effective governance requires structures that are clear, efficient and accountable.

Bill 100 is a step in that direction. It supports municipalities in delivering on their responsibilities, strengthens regional coordination and helps ensure that decisions can be made in a timely, effective manner. These changes are not about replacing local governance. They are about supporting it. They are about providing the tools and structures needed to ensure that municipalities are positioned to succeed.

And I'd like to, as I get towards the end of my remarks, share some quotes with you. One of them is from the Honorable Jill Dunlop, representing Simcoe North: "Local governments are essential partners in delivering on the priorities that matter most to Ontarians and in ensuring our province remains strong in the face of economic uncertainty. This" proposed "act would help strengthen

alignment between municipal and provincial priorities and will support more coordinated decision-making, clearer accountability and the ability to advance key initiatives that benefit our communities."

This legislation, I believe, Speaker, supports municipalities—particularly in the region of Durham—in delivering on those responsibilities, strengthening regional coordination and helps to ensure that decisions can be made in a timely, effective manner.

These changes are not about replacing governance because, at the end of the day, this is about people. It's about families looking for a place to call home. It's about communities planning for growth. And it's about ensuring that Ontario remains a place where people can build their futures with confidence.

For those reasons, Speaker, I'm pleased to stand in my place and support this legislation. My congratulations to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for his leadership and direction on this very critical bill.

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

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Yesterday, the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus was here at Queen's Park. Many of us had meetings with them. They have raised concerns about Bill 100 and the shift that it represents away from locally determined governance.

I want to quote the chair of the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus, Marcus Ryan, who says, "Municipal governments work best when they remain local, accountable and responsive to the communities they serve." He says, "Counties are already delivering on housing, infrastructure and economic growth. Governance changes must build on that success—not undermine it."

So my question is, when there has been no evidence that giving mayors strong-mayor powers has done anything to increase housing supply in Ontario, why does this minister believe that appointing regional chairs and giving them strong-chair powers will help address the housing problem?

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Thank you for the question. I as well met with the warden and members of the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus, an astute group of people. I would first of all point out, number one, that not one municipality in WOWC is affected by the changes. No warden is being appointed in the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus that I'm aware of, so I'm not sure what the concern would be.

With respect to other regional chair appointments, I think we've just debated it finely over the last hour, explaining the reasoning. I'm happy to go over it again: It's about consistency, it's about priorities, it's about aligning those priorities municipally.

At the end of the day, I appreciate Warden Ryan's comments but, again, WOWC has no change to their leadership governance at all.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further questions?

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** It's been an interesting debate again tonight. We got a bit of a history lesson from some of the members on the government side. In 2010,

voters in Durham did vote, indeed, to elect the regional chair. In 2014, they elected that chair and have been doing so ever since. I don't think they've been calling for an appointed chair again—not to my knowledge.

An elected chair is accountable to the voters. If they do a bad job, presumably they won't get elected; they'll get voted out. This was the norm, as one of the members commented on. They wanted the right to vote for their chair, and they got it.

So my question to the Minister of the Environment: I'm wondering what he will tell his constituents from Durham who wanted to elect—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Thank you to the member for Don Valley West—through you, Mr. Speaker. As I already indicated in my remarks, this bill and the proposals are very much about democracy. Mayors and regional councillors will still be elected by their local municipalities to serve on regional councils, and the chair of eight regions may be appointed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, responsible to this House, an elected member of this House. At the same time, if she or he does not exercise that discretion, the chair shall be appointed in those eight regions by the locally elected regional councillors.

This is very much about democracy and accountability, but it balances—so much of what governments preside over is about balance.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further questions?

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Through you, Speaker, to the minister: I know the minister has been very, very clear from the outset that it takes too long and costs too much to build here in Ontario. That's really what's driving a lack of supply coming forward. Getting shovels in the ground faster is absolutely critical to supporting growing communities and keeping our economy moving forward. In my past life as a municipal councillor, I had many, many delays in my ward for about three years for building permits.

We know we have economic uncertainty, rising demand for housing. We know that delays at any level of government really get in the way of providing housing that's necessary. I'm hoping the minister can explain in greater detail how strengthening regional governance reduces barriers—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Thank you, Speaker, to the member opposite from Windsor–Tecumseh. We've talked about it many times, and we've said it takes too long and costs too much. But we have had an explosion of population in the last number of years—I think as everybody knows—an increase of two million people, and, frankly, this province has not been able to digest that growth effectively, especially when it comes to housing and infrastructure.

Again, as the Minister of the Environment stated, effectively, local democracy is in place and is working, and we are appointing chairs, we are making sure our regions are stronger to accommodate the priorities we share to-

gether to get that infrastructure in the ground. We need \$250 billion invested in the next 10 to 15 years. If we're not aligned, if we're not coordinated, if we're not consistent, it won't get done. We're changing it.

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**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further questions?

**MPP Catherine McKenney:** My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. You mentioned the HST being responsible for spurring some sales at least. But we've learned that developers have not been passing along the existing HST new housing rebate of \$24,000. They were simply factoring those savings into their price.

I just wonder, given that, how this government will guarantee that the savings from this expanded HST rebate, especially given that it is still not law, will be passed along to the buyers?

**Hon. Rob Flack:** I'm not aware that builders have been keeping the \$24,000, so if there's evidence to prove it, let me take a look and we'll follow it up right away. We've got the Attorney General right in front of us, and we'll make sure the laws of the land are being followed explicitly.

That being said, there are a lot of builders in this province that have elected, even before the legislation that was tabled today, to reduce the price of a house because they want to help new home buyers, people that want to upsize, downsize—whatever it may be—on a new build to get that credit, to apply and qualify for a mortgage and to get the price down of the house. This is exactly what's happening.

We're seeing the growth. We're seeing new sales. I would hope that the member would be excited about the great news of the growth in housing construction and housing builds across this province.

If you want me to look into the \$24,000, I will. Enjoy the success.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further questions?

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Under this government, we've seen a successive decline in the number of homes that are built year after year after year. There have been successive introductions of legislation, and every piece of legislation has successively caused the number of homes to go down.

The answer of this government has then been to undermine democracy. For example, this debate tonight was called with no notice to any of the members on the opposition side. Yet there were two ministers and a parliamentary assistant who had their notes nicely printed out. They're trying to bring this through under the cloak of darkness.

Now, the latest attack on democracy: The Minister of the Environment is now proposing to overrule his own constituents who have voted for their regional chair, and the only solution that these guys have is to take their democratic voice away.

Why is their only solution to attack democracy?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** If I pick up where I left off, it's about balance. Of course, we have local voices. Of course, we have local democracy that continues on regional councils, including the eight where we are propos-

ing appointed chairs. But that chair is to be well qualified. That chair is to be vigorously vetted. All eight of those chairs are to be—it's like a chairman of the board or a chairperson of the board. It provides direction. It has what's proved to be very successful for mayors. It's a position that will have strong-chair powers. We need that—

*Interjections.*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Order, please.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** But, again, this is proposed by a democratically elected government, with a minister responsible to this House, with local councils working with those appointed chairs. That's the right balance that we propose, and we urge you to support this exercise in balance and getting it done.

*Interjections.*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Before I move to further debate, I will remind this House that, yes, it is very late, but we still need to keep order and decorum.

Further debate, please?

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I'll be sharing my time with the member from Ottawa Centre. I'll apologize in advance: I'm losing my voice. Unfortunately, there's enough to still do my debate, so don't cheer too loud over there.

But I want to start from what was just said. I found out I was going to do the debate about an hour ago—about an hour ago. I don't think that's fair. I don't think it's right. I think it's absolutely disgraceful that we're doing that when we're supposed to be a democracy. I'm very shocked at that.

I look at the time: It's five to 11.

**Interjection:** Hear, hear.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Look, I can work all night, buddy. I worked steady midnights for 20 years. That's not my issue.

My issue is that I want people in my riding to watch the debate to see if they agree with what I'm saying, see if they agree with what the government's saying. They're not up at 11 o'clock. They've got to go to work in the morning.

**Mr. Will Bouma:** You don't have to work in the morning?

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I'll be back here at 9 o'clock in the morning. That's not my point.

Minister, I've talked to you on this bill many times. It makes sense that you allow the residents that we're talking about, whether it's in Durham—I know the member from Durham is here—whether it's in Kitchener, Waterloo, wherever it is, we want to make sure they hear the debate. Because you know what happened: The bill was rushed through. I found out on Monday night, the day before we're coming to committee, who was actually coming to the committee. I didn't have a chance to call them; I didn't have a chance to talk to them, see what they think about the bill. What are you guys doing?

Just last week, I thought you would have learned your lesson with the FOIs—

*Interjection.*

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I'm going through the Speaker, buddy. I know you're going to tell me that anyway.

With the FOIs last week, you did the same thing—in the dark of night, pushed it through. I want to say to all those members over there, I put two posts up on the FOIs last week, on the dark of night, saying how bad it was, the freedom of information, trying to protect your leader's cell phone. Do you know what happened that night? My phone—where the hell is it? Sorry.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Language.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Right here, my phone, it didn't stop going ding, ding, ding for two days—four million people. You can take a look at my phone: four million people.

So I want to say, there is no way that the residents in my riding of Niagara Falls, Fort Erie and Niagara-on-the-Lake should be treated like this—not on something that's important and, quite frankly, not on something that was driven by Niagara through our mayors, through our councillors.

This wasn't something that just happened. In Niagara, we've been fighting about this for four years, and I can say that. The mayor of my own riding, the mayor of Jennie Stevens's riding from St. Catharines, Jeff Burch's—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I will remind the member to address members by their riding.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Okay. I appreciate that.

All three of those mayors supported Conservative candidates in our riding, and do you know what happened? The residents didn't like it. Our vote totals went up. So I'll say to all those mayors, continue to support Conservatives because I'm going to keep getting elected.

But here tonight, this is wrong. This is wrong that I'm doing this debate at 11 o'clock at night. It's wrong, not for Wayne Gates; it's wrong for the citizens of Niagara. It's wrong for the citizens of Waterloo. It's wrong for the citizens of Durham. It's wrong that we're doing this tonight.

And it's not that I don't want to work. Listen, that's all I do. And I don't mind staying up all night; I don't sleep anyway. But it's wrong what you guys are doing.

What's the bill about? It's about power. It's about control. I'm looking right at you, buddy. It's about power, make no mistake about it.

When somebody says, "Well, what do you know about councils? What do you know of what they do?" I was elected—first time I got elected, I was a city councillor, in 2010. Before that—and I don't mind saying this—I ran seven times and I lost seven times. But I accepted the fact that I wasn't elected, and I said, "I've got to go out and work harder. I've got to get the message out harder." And I ran again and again and again because I had the passion to represent people. But the key word is I accepted the fact that I live in a democracy, that I'm proud to be a Canadian, I'm proud to live in Ontario and I have to fight hard to get elected.

What we're doing in this bill—you're going to appoint people. You're going to appoint someone to the highest position in Niagara, the highest position in Waterloo, the highest position in Durham. That's what this bill's doing—appointed. Yet, for seven times, I accepted the fact that the people in Niagara Falls didn't want me at that point in

time. But since that time, Speaker—because I know you’re looking right at me and you’re listening intently. I think some of the people over there aren’t listening.

**2300**

In 2014, you know what happened? I ran to be an MPP, and I won. That was two times I won in a row. That’s not bad, right? Well, guess what? I won in 2018, I won in 2022, I won in 2025, and I’m going to win again in 2028 or 2029—whenever the hell you call the election. That’s what I’m going to do, but it’s going to be elected. That’s the issue here. Niagara does not want an appointed chair—

*Interjection.*

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I won’t say it again. I apologize, Speaker.

I’m going to tell you, nobody in Niagara wants an appointed chair, and in particular somebody with strong-chair powers. So I thought what I’d do—because I’ve got lots of things here; I’ve got lots of papers here. But it’s probably better, rather than coming from me, it comes from a mayor, what I’m going to say.

I’m going to read a little bit about what the mayor from Fort Erie said. And he’s not an ordinary mayor, by the way. He’s been elected for 20 years. He’s a very smart man. I have nothing but respect for Wayne Redekop from Fort Erie. He’s a lawyer. He’s a good dad, a good grandpa. But I’ll tell you what he has: He cares passionately about his city, his town. He’s fighting with me to try to get that urgent care centre opened in Fort Erie, that these guys won’t keep open 365 days a year, 24/7, because our population is up to 39,000, and one third of them are seniors.

He’s a good mayor, so I’m going to read a little bit about what he said. I know I’m not supposed to do this, but I’m going to just show him. This is Wayne Redekop.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I’ll warn the member about props.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I know; I put it down quickly. But I wanted to get his picture on TV.

I’m going to read a little bit. I know the minister is here. I respect the fact that he’s here at 11 o’clock at night as well. I talk to him quite regularly on these issues.

This was to the Honourable Rob Flack, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: “On behalf of the town of Fort Erie”—and I don’t like reading, as you guys know, but I’m going to read this because I want to get it right, because I think it’s fair and reasonable I do that. If I get an odd word wrong, I apologize in advance:

“On behalf of the town of Fort Erie council, this letter is submitted to outline council’s position on Bill 100, the Better Regional Governance Act, 2026, consistent with a council resolution passed on April 13, 2026, regarding the province’s proposed changes to regional governance. Bill 100 would authorize the minister to appoint the head of council for Niagara region following the 2026 regular election, permit the minister to make regulations governing voting at upper-tier councils and establish a new Niagara regional council composition consisting of the duly elected mayors of the 12 local municipalities.”

I’ll move on to the next paragraph, but I want to say on that: When this was announced in Niagara—and again, the

way it works in Niagara, you’ve got 12 mayors that sit on the council, and then you have 19 other regional councillors. They didn’t get the courtesy of a phone call, to say, “This is what we’re doing.” They found out on 610 CKTB. That’s how they found out what was going on. These guys are saying that’s wrong. And it was breaking news. You can go to CKTB today and you can see it: breaking news. It was broken by CKTB—not to the mayors, but to the other councillors. I thought that was wrong. It showed total disrespect for the years that they’ve given.

“Fort Erie council recognizes the province’s stated objective of improving efficiency, aligning provincial and municipal priorities and accelerating decision-making. However, council believes that this can be achieved through democratic, majority voting and, therefore, does not support provisions that would concentrate extraordinary powers to an unelected”—unelected, that’s the key word here—“appointed regional chair, particularly where those powers could override decisions made by a majority of popularly elected representatives.”

Think about that: He needs one third. That means two thirds can say no and he can override them. That’s wrong. Listen, I didn’t say it; this doesn’t come from me. This is coming from a mayor that has given most of his adult life to his community, to the region. I want you to listen, because it’s fair and it’s reasonable. He’s doing this letter because he cares, just like I care. I want to get it right. I love Niagara. I love my riding, and so does he.

“Council’s position is grounded in a straightforward democratic principle: Residents should be able to elect the leaders who exercise significant authority over regional governance and decisions of regional councils should continue to be determined by the majority of duly elected members.” I think that’s fair. I think that’s reasonable.

Put your hand up here—who has been appointed? Put your hand up. Anybody been appointed here? None of us. We all earned the right to get elected. And you did a good job; you’re here. There are only 124 of us, in a population of about 15 million people. That’s pretty good.

*Interjections.*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Order, please.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I want the minister to hear this. Like I said, I’ve talked to the minister a number of times. I’ve been open and up front with him.

“Accordingly, Fort Erie requests that the province amend Bill 100 to remove any provision that grants an appointed regional chair extraordinary or ‘strong chair’ powers, including the power to veto decisions made by the majority of elected members of the council.” I think that’s a fair request, quite frankly. And that’s how Niagara feels. And I’ll get into the three other mayors who have a different position.

“Council further requests that the province reconsider the appointment model for regional chairs in favour of either direct election by residents or selection by a majority vote of the elected mayors on council.

“Fort Erie also asks that any weighted voting framework for Niagara regional council respect fair representation while preserving a meaningful voice for every local municipality.”

For those who don't know it who are here tonight—thanks for staying late—in Niagara, we have lots of smaller communities. We have Wainfleet, Fort Erie, Niagara-on-the-Lake. And we've got the three big ones: St. Catharines, Niagara Falls and Welland.

“Finally, council urges the province to undertake meaningful consultation”—which wasn't done on this bill, wasn't done in Niagara, and I don't believe it was done in Waterloo. My colleague from Waterloo could answer that. I'm talking about where I'm representing.

“Finally, council urges the province to undertake meaningful consultation with Niagara's local municipalities before finalizing any weighted voting structure or implementing strong-chair powers at the regional level. Changes of this magnitude should be supported by evidence, financial analysis, sound policy justification and public consultation so that confidence in local democratic institutions is maintained.

“Fort Erie remains committed to constructive engagement with the province on governance reform that is transparent, evidence-based and democratically accountable. The town respectfully asks that the concerns set out in council's April 13, 2026, resolution (a copy of which is attached)”—I'm going to do the resolution, as well—“be fully considered as Bill 100 proceeds through the legislative process.”

This, again, was sent to Minister Flack and to Premier Ford from Fort Erie council.

“Response to provincial proposal on regional governance

“The municipal council of the town of Fort Erie at its regular council meeting of April 13, 2026, passed the following resolution:”—you can go on the computer, look it up and get it as well.

“Whereas Canada is one of the oldest and most stable democracies in the world”—something I think we're all proud of. I certainly am and I believe my colleagues are.

**2310**

“Whereas Ontario is the most populous province in Canada; and

“Whereas one of the hallmarks of democracy is the right to elect its leaders by popular vote”—I can answer that because I can give you examples where I didn't get the popular vote and I didn't get elected—“and

“Whereas another hallmark of democracy is rule by majority as exercised through elected representatives; and

“Whereas the province of Ontario has introduced legislation, the Better Regional Governance Act, 2026, that will alter governance in the regions of Durham, Halton, Muskoka, Niagara, Peel, Waterloo and York and Simcoe county; and

“Whereas the Better Regional Governance Act, 2026, proposes the appointment by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing of the chairs of those regional councils and the warden of Simcoe county;”—again, this is to the Honourable Doug Ford and the Honourable Rob Flack—“and

“Whereas those unelected”—and this is where the big issue is—unelected—“appointed regional chairs and county warden will also be given the power to veto decisions made by the popularly elected members of those councils”—and

I ask anybody, does that make any sense, that you can actually have one person that doesn't answer to the council? As a matter of fact, I think—and the minister can correct me—it was asked, who is he actually held accountable to? Is it the Premier? Is it the minister? I'm not really sure during the committee process how that was answered. I'm still not sure. If you'd like to ask me a question on that later, that's fine—“which represents a significant departure from established democratic practices and undermines both the right of the residents”—who vote for us—“to elect their leaders and the principle of majority rule; and

“Whereas significant changes in local governance should be informed by evidence, financial analysis, sound justification and public consultation,”—I'm pretty sure there was no consultation in Niagara Falls, my riding, which includes Fort Erie and Niagara-on-the-Lake that I know a lot of you guys know because I see you down there a lot; you enjoy it down there—“none of which has been the basis for the Better Regional Governance Act, 2026.”

There's just a little more, but I think it's important to get it on the record. I think it's well written, it's well done and he's right on the money. I think this is how the majority of people in the province of Ontario feel as well—not the ones who want to get extra power, by the way. There are a few mayors who want more power, but that's a whole other story.

“Now therefore be it resolved,”—and, Minister, I want you to listen to this, because I think this is really fair. He did a good job on this—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Address the Speaker, please.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** “That the Premier and Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing remove from the pending legislation any provision that grants to an appointed regional chair and county warden extraordinary (‘strong’) powers, including the power”—this is bizarre to me—“to veto decisions made by the majority of the popularly elected mayors or members of those regional or county councils; and

“That the Premier and Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing ensure that any weighted voting process imposed on the Niagara regional council respect fair representation by population and ensures that every local municipality has a meaningful voice reflecting the geographic diversity of the region and the needs of both urban and rural communities;”—I know the minister has been down to Niagara; he knows the difference—“and

“That the Premier and Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing reconsider appointing regional chairs and the Simcoe county warden in favour of direct election by the residents or election by a majority of the members of the council which they represent; and

“That the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing consult the local municipalities in Niagara before establishing any weighted voting system in Niagara or proceeding with strong-chair powers for the appointed chair in Niagara; and

“That the mayor and the town staff provide comments to the provincial government during the commenting period for the proposed Better Regional Governance Act, 2026”—

and I will say to the minister: They didn't get enough notice to come to committee, but they did send in written documentation to the minister.

"That this resolution be circulated to the Honourable Premier Doug Ford, the Honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Rob Flack, Niagara's four MPPs"—I don't know if the one PC MPP got them, but I know the three NDP MPPs did get them—"all local area municipalities in Niagara, the regions of Durham, Halton, Muskoka, Peel, Waterloo and York and Simcoe county, Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the Rural Ontario Municipal Association for support."

And it closes up, "Thank you for your attention to this very important matter. Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me." And there's a list of people that were copied in it.

I think it was important to read that into the record. I think it's well written. It's how the people in Niagara are feeling.

And I want to say, I listened to—I think he's from Durham. I'm not sure if he's from Durham. I'm not sure—him talk about democracy. It's a big deal in Niagara. And this whole thing, I believe—and the minister can correct me when he stands up. I think this all started in Niagara. I was shocked when I saw all the other municipalities included in the bill. I didn't see that coming. I'm being very honest. I was following it very closely and I was talking to the minister about it and the fact that they didn't know what hit them, that they were surprised.

But in Niagara, it started about four years ago. About four years ago, when—I believe the first one to talk—well, there's three; I might as well say the three of them. When Mayor Diodati, Mayor Siscoe and Mayor Campion were saying that we need to go down to four cities, from 12 to four, that started the debate and then it went on from there.

And then the election came, as you're aware of, and at that time, I think it was Premier Ford that said, "No, we need to go to one city." One city, Niagara—one city.

We had that debate. I believe one of the reasons—and I'm not positive on this, but I think one of the reasons those three mayors decided to support the Conservatives is I think they were told that it's going to go to at least four. The reason why I believe that, to be honest and open here, is that, on the last day before Christmas, when everybody was looking at my grandson's Christmas card—you guys all remember that? He does a great job on the Christmas card—really does, yes—

#### *Interjections.*

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I'll tell you what: You don't know what that little bit of applause means to my grandson. He takes great pride in doing it and, like all of our kids that are probably teenagers go through tough times.

Anyway, I'll get back to the story at Christmas. So I was leaving, and you know at Christmas, we're all the best of friends in here. Let's be honest. We're shaking hands—"Have a good holiday. Hope your kids are good," all that kind of stuff. It doesn't usually happen inside this chamber, a lot more outside. But that day, that's what we do, the last day. And the Premier came over to me, right here. And he said, "Gatesy, you've got too many elected officials in

Niagara, and you're going to four cities or you're going to one."

And that's how I knew, right then and there, that that was where it was all coming from with the three mayors, that, obviously, there will be an election in a few months. They may get re-elected and they're going to push for four cities or—probably four cities; I don't think they want one. That's exactly how it came down and that's why I think there were some promises made around four cities in Niagara that didn't materialize.

And you know why it didn't materialize? Anybody know? Shout it out. Does the minister know? You know why.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Address the Chair, please.

**2320**

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Because the residents said no. The residents wanted to be consulted. They weren't consulted.

There are pressures. There are front-page stories. That thing that I held up—I'll hold it up this way. There's nothing on the back; just holding it on the back. There's no picture. It's a front-page story in all the dailies: the Review, the Standard, the Welland Tribune. It was a big issue in Niagara, and the minister knows it was. All the radio talk shows, it's all they're talking about. I did the radio. The minister did the radio in Niagara. I don't know who else did, but I know there are others. The mayors were doing the radio. It was a big issue.

We wanted to make sure that we were going to get an election. We do not want strong-mayor powers or strong-chair powers accountable to nobody in Niagara. Maybe some people that are here tonight—maybe even you, Speaker; I don't know how much you know about Niagara. That person who's going to get appointed will have the most power in all of Niagara, unelected, in a democratic society. It makes no sense to me—none. And I'm sure, if they do it between the mayors, there will be somebody there who can do the job that's from Niagara, lives in Niagara, knows what he's doing.

I don't agree with appointments and I'll tell you why. How much time have I got? Oh, I've got lots of time. Here's what happens with appointments. I just gave you a little bit of my history. I didn't give it all. It'd take a lot longer than 32 minutes to tell my history. Some of it's good, some of it's not so good, some of it I'm not happy about, but I don't have enough time to tell it all.

What happened is, when I won in 2014, for the first time—well, second time, because I was city councillor for four years, but first time in this chamber. I beat a guy named Bart Maves. And he's come to council—I've got to give him credit. When he tried to get appointed to some places, he'd come to the government agencies, unlike a lot of the ones that don't come and get appointed. He did come. But they appointed him to a job. I ran against Bart twice. I beat him in 2022, and I beat him again in 2022, because I had an election in February and an election four months later. I was either going to win that election or I was going to be like my height, the shortest MPP ever, because it was four months later.

But they're both appointed.

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** Are you sure about that, shortest MPP ever?

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Yes, I'm sure.

*Interjections.*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Order, please.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** It's pretty bad when the short guys are attacking you, that's all I know.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Through the Speaker.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Through the Speaker: But what happened is—because this is important to the minister—I ran again. I ran against Bob Gale in 2022, and I beat him by quite a bit. I'm not bragging—I beat him by a lot. But right after the election, he gets appointed as a chair of the parks. Remember that? He got appointed. Chuck McShane, who ran against me the time before, he got appointed to the bridge commission. Everybody that ran against me the five times that I've been elected, they all got appointed—not elected. It drives me crazy. I believe you should earn your spot on election and that's what this is about.

I'm going to start my notes now, is that okay? Let's see if I can come up with some.

We talked about the fact that I believe that you should be elected, but here's a part that I don't think came out clear enough in the letter. I want my colleagues to hear this part of it. You appoint a chair permanently. You give them strong-chair powers, including over the budget—he's in charge of the budget, with strong-chair powers—hiring and firing of staff, veto powers and the power to pass bylaws with only one third of the council's support. Is that something that makes sense to anybody here?

I know right now that one third of the people that sit on council are Conservatives because the Conservatives have done a really good job—I'll give them a compliment—on loading up municipalities with people that are Conservatives and get elected because that's where a lot of the decisions are made, at the municipality level. They've done a good job.

That's really not a good thing. It eliminated 19 regional councillors and leaves the mayors on regional council. I want to say something about those councillors because that was what—I think it was the minister; I might be wrong. It was certainly from that side of the House. They were saying, "You have too many elected reps."

These people that are on these councils are part-time; they're not full-time. They don't make a lot of money, but you know why they run? Because they have the heart and the passion to make their communities better. That's why they're there; they're not doing it for money.

They said, "Well, we've got to get rid of some." You don't have to do it in a bill. Let's be honest here. I mean, how many people have been in regional council on your side? Anybody over here been in regional council or—

**Mr. Tyler Allsopp:** Municipal?

**MPP Wayne Gates:** A councillor? You were a councillor?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Through the Speaker, please.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** So you know, as a councillor, you don't need a bill to reduce the council—you don't need a bill to do that. You can do that within your own municipality.

The reason why I know that—I have another good story for you. You guys got time? Going anywhere? No, you guys aren't going anywhere; you can't. I guess you can leave.

In Niagara Falls, we used to be elected by a ward system, and the council decided to go to at-large. We know why they go to at-large. It's really for the wealthy. They get more money, more donations. It's harder to get elected. In the ward system, you could get elected. You go knock on all the doors in your ward. You tell them why you're the best; they check your name off.

But that year—this is one of the times when I was still running before I got elected as councillor—they changed it from 12 councillors down to eight. I don't know if the minister knows this story—from 12 to eight—they got rid of four councillors overnight. You know why I remember that story so well, Minister—or Chair?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Speaker.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Speaker, sorry. You look like a Chair.

*Interjection.*

**MPP Wayne Gates:** No, I meant like a Chair of committee.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Address the Speaker. Continue your speech.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I'm sorry. Listen, I'll chalk that one up to it being late.

*Interjection.*

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I am standing, buddy. That's an old joke, though.

Where was I? You guys got me all over the thing here. Where was I?

**Interjection:** Cutting council.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Oh, cutting council.

You know how I remember that story so well? There were 12; eight got elected. Do you know where I finished? Number nine, so that's how I remembered.

I think it's in front of the minister now, where I think Thorold, Niagara-on-the-Lake and—I think there's one other one; maybe West Lincoln or one of the other ones—are now saying, "We don't need a bill to reduce council. We'll do it. We just need the permission." There are some things that they didn't do right; we know that. But they want to reduce their council. They don't need a bill to do it, so it can be done by the municipality. But the key there: It will be elected. I think that's important.

Let me see here. I just got a note to keep track of my time.

**MPP Catherine McKenney:** No rush, no rush.

*Interjection.*

**MPP Wayne Gates:** It's all good.

I want to say this again because 19 people are going to lose their job on—October 21, I think, is when the date is. A lot of them have been doing that job for five, 10, 12 years, and through no fault of their own—they didn't do anything wrong—they're going to lose their jobs. I think it's fair and reasonable for all of us to maybe give them a

round of applause for serving their community for all these years. I don't think that's asking too much.

*Applause.*

**MPP Wayne Gates:** It's our small way of saying thank you.

I'm going to go back to Wayne again. This is from Wayne Redekop—remember the name—and this was at a meeting of regional council. He said that the appointed chairs won't answer to the residents or council—that's true. They will answer to the minister or the Premier. And I can't stand up here after sitting in committee and say who that chair with superpowers answers to. Is it the Premier? Is it the minister? Does he lose his job if he doesn't follow his orders? I don't know that.

**2330**

The bill doesn't explain strong-chair powers, leaving all authority to the minister through regulations. The bill consolidates power over Niagara in the hands of the province. And we are very clear in Niagara: We want a Niagara solution. We want the residents to participate, want to have the consultation. They want a Niagara solution. We do not need the hands—being told to us what to do from the province, at all. Niagara has done quite well over the years with the elected reps.

Redekop asks the province to consult Niagara first, which is what Doug Ford promised. That was his promise. He came to—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I will remind the member to address members of this House by their titles.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I apologize—Premier Ford. I was just reading a note, what the note said.

But Premier Doug Ford promised. He came into Niagara the week before Christmas, I believe it was, and he made the announcement that we're going to have 47 casinos, a big Ferris wheel and all that. But part of that announcement after the press conference—they asked him directly and he said that the solution will be done by Niagara. That's not happening in this bill and that was a promise done by Premier Ford.

Pass a resolution at regional council to ask the province to remove strong-chair powers. That particular resolution was passed 18-9. That was pretty good.

I'm going to go on to the next part: the rushed process with no consultation. The province rushed through this bill as quickly as possible, so they didn't have to face the public. We're seeing that tonight; none of you guys can deny that. It's 11:30 at night. Not a lot of people are up at 11:30 watching this channel. The government gave community members 24 hours to register to speak to this bill at committee. We got the agenda at 5 p.m. on the evening before the committee was taking place. It's very similar to what happened tonight. I was told an hour and a half ago that we were going to get an hour lead.

This is interesting; I'm sure you would be interested in this one. When we talk about vetting people for the job—and I have talked to the minister about this—Bob Gale's appointment and resignation three months later was not enough of a disaster for them to back off. I'm not going to get into what caused him to leave. He ended up resigning.

The big concern that we have in Niagara is we feel you don't have to listen to Niagara. You're going to do whatever you're going to do. If you went out into my riding, you wouldn't find anyone who wants to be dictated to by the province. We need a solution for Niagara, by Niagara. That's not just Fort Erie and Niagara-on-the-Lake, that's all of them: Wainfleet, Pelham, Welland, St. Catharines, Thorold. It's not democratic to appoint a top-ranking official in eight regions—and I'm talking about the other ones.

I wish this government worked as hard at making life more affordable as they do when they're punishing municipalities. And we all know; we can't all deny it.

I will tell a quick story. I've been going through an issue with rent. I won't tell you who it is. The rents in Niagara: \$2,400, \$2,500 to \$2,700. But here's what they're doing with rents. You go and fill out an application, and then the landlord will call back and say—usually, it's the first month and the last. They are now asking for four months' rent. Some are asking for a year. People can't afford it. I don't know anybody—I think even some people in Europe probably have trouble getting together \$10,000 for four months of rent to try to get a place to live. It's unaffordable and it should be stopped. It's something that should never happen in the province of Ontario.

Residents in Niagara are saying clearly that they want reform. I want the minister to hear this: We are not opposed to reforming, taking a look at how many councillors we have, but it should be done by the municipality. It shouldn't come from Toronto; it should come from Niagara. I want to be clear on that. I've said that all along. We want to make decisions about our future. Niagara doesn't want to be governed from the Premier's palace.

Does the other side of the House remember what happened when they tried to pave over the greenbelt? Do you remember that? People stood up. They disagreed with it. And we're saying the same thing: We disagree with what you're doing in Niagara.

I'm not going to talk for the other municipalities; I'll let them talk for them. But I'm pretty sure their residents feel the same way.

I've got hundreds of calls and emails from residents in Niagara-on-the-Lake on this issue. When the regional chair starts building condos on flood plains, the Premier can say he had nothing to do with it—"Not mine; it's the regional chair." That's why he should be elected.

I've said it before: Sometimes local government can be slow. Sometimes decisions take time. But I think it's important to get the decision right. We saw that last week with the FOIs, with the jet—\$30 million could have gone to a lot better places.

I'm going to close with this: These eight regions deserve a chance to provide feedback and come up with their own ideas about how they want to govern. Even though the amalgamation plan was a disaster—and it was; led by an appointed chair, by the way, and I think if you ask the minister off the record, he'll tell you it was a disaster—at least Niagara had some warning that the province was planning to make top-down changes to our local government. These regions are being broadsided by rushed changes that they have not been consulted on at all.

This House has a responsibility to all municipalities to hear them out, hear from their residents and respect that they have unique identities. There is no one-size-fits-all approach for every municipality.

I'm going to read this out; I think it's important. Then I'll pass it on to my colleague: "That all levels of government recognize the infrastructure and service demands associated with 14 million annual visitors to Niagara, generating close to \$3 billion in activity with tourism...."

I'm asking the government to respond to these requests and speak with Niagara leaders.

I'll finish up because I don't want to tie up all the time for my colleague. Thanks for listening. I appreciate it. Have a good night.

Oh, I'll finish by saying—a lot of Leafs fans here. We got the first pick in the draft today—yes. It's a positive thing again, yes. It wasn't elected, but it was done by a process, just for the record.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the member from Ottawa Centre.

**MPP Catherine McKenney:** Here we are, just 22 minutes before midnight. I've got, what, 15 minutes? Yes, 15:53.

There is actually nothing better about governance—where the people most affected by decisions, like my colleague was saying here in Niagara, have no say in who makes them.

There's nothing better about replacing someone you can vote out with someone who only answers to the minister, aka the Premier.

I was a city councillor in the city of Ottawa. We had 23 councillors and a mayor. And it didn't matter what the issue was, it didn't matter what the motion was, we had 20 people—19 plus the mayor—who always voted the same way, always. We actually called them the Watson club because they just did what they were told. And it was frustrating because sometimes you wanted to make change. You wanted to make things better.

2340

You might have heard, in Ottawa, we've got a very dismal transit system, dismal light rail run by the same people, by the way, who run Metrolinx here—awful. We wanted to do things to make it better; that's an example. But it didn't matter what we tried, even when we asked for an inquiry time and time again—I actually brought three motions asking for an inquiry into that LRT, and every time it got voted down by the Watson club. So it was really, really very frustrating.

But they were all elected. Every one of them was duly elected. And they went back out to their constituents every four years, and if they got re-elected, then I had to accept the outcome of votes. I had to accept that we continued to underfund transit, for example. I had to accept that in the city of Ottawa, we didn't spend the money we needed to on housing and on recreation because the Watson club, as frustrating as they were, was elected.

This bill is just another attack, and we know it. It's an attack on local democracy by this government.

I know it's late; we're all tired, but I'm just trying to wrap my mind around how we think an appointed chair overseeing a council, with the power to overrule that

council, to weight the votes of the council, to set budgets, to make decisions with strong-chair powers—like, if this really was democratic in any way, these regional chairs wouldn't need strong-chair powers, but they are being given those. It is quite unbelievable.

As my colleague here said, it's why we're here in the middle of the night debating this—because nobody's watching. We can all barely listen to each other as it is, let alone somebody turning on their TV with insomnia and having to bear listening to even what I'm saying. Unless, of course, it's Jim Watson. He'd probably be a little upset that I just outed his Watson club. But I'm sure he's not watching. I'm sure nobody is watching this. Why would you watch this?

**MPP Wayne Gates:** It's what the government's hoping.

**MPP Catherine McKenney:** Yes. I can barely stand to hear myself speak, honestly, but here we are.

We've not been provided any evidence that these changes will lower any of the costs of government. We're being told that we're doing this to get housing built, to make housing more affordable, and yet there's nothing here.

We just learned that on the existing HST, the new housing rebate of \$24,000 was not even being passed on. It was not even being passed on. It's unbelievable. I can't believe you guys didn't know that. You should read the—anyway, I'm not going to tell you which paper I read.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** They need a new bill.

**MPP Catherine McKenney:** I think we probably need a new bill, yes. Maybe I'll bring a bill.

We can't even guarantee that the savings in the new HST are going to be passed on. And I'm going to give you another little nugget about the HST. I want to pass this along, too, just while I'm providing some of the nuggets I learned about the HST. I noted that in the budget, on page 226, the government is actually proposing to eliminate the HST new housing rebate and the new residential rental property rebate. It says right there, on page 226, that it's being eliminated—the existing HST. That's the one that was never passed along anyway. I'm not sure why you're eliminating it. Now, we've got a new one, but it's still not law, but we have no guarantee—none—that it's going to get passed along. I don't know. It is late, but I couldn't figure this out at 10 a.m. this morning when I uncovered it either. I'm completely flummoxed.

So I was looking at the Ombudsman report from 2019. It was pretty scathing. It's called Inside Job. If you read it, what the Ombudsman said was that the changes that are being made in this bill are the exact opposite lessons from this report, Inside Job. I was curious about this report. I had never read it.

No offence to my colleague from Niagara Falls, but I didn't think about Niagara Falls a whole lot before I got here. I mean, I went to visit. I enjoyed it. But I didn't think about your government or your governance much.

Anyway, so I picked up this report and I thought to myself, "I'm going to look"—because it's relevant to what we're talking about here—"and see what they had to say." I'll be honest—this is hilarious; again, I know it's late—I didn't even get past the table of contents. If I get unelected

at any point or leave here, I'm actually going to start a TV program about this report. This is the best.

I'm just going to quickly go through the table of contents because it really is relevant here. Here we go, after the executive summary:

—“Complaints,” and then it’s;

—“Help wanted: hiring a new CAO”;

—“Pre-posting unrest, rumours and schemes”—that’s the second episode; the third episode is going to be:

—“Recruitment plans—and leaks—begin”;

*Interjections.*

**MPP Catherine McKenney:** I’m not kidding; this is the table of contents.

—“Position posting and preparation for interviews”;

—“The ‘five identified candidates’ memo”;

—“The ‘messaging’ document”;

—“The interview questions”;

—“From first interviews to last candidate standing”;

—“You’re hired: crafting a contract and checking references.”

This was an absolute and utter mess: “Investigation into Matters Relating to the Regional Municipality of Niagara’s Hiring of Its Chief Administrative Officer and Its Administration of His Contract.” It reads like a soap opera.

Yet we believe, or we don’t believe—none of us believe; let’s be clear. But we’re trying to be convinced, or this government’s trying to convince someone—the public—that even after this, even after what happened—

*Interjections.*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** The member will cease to use props.

**MPP Catherine McKenney:** Yes, no prop; sorry.

Even with what happened in Niagara region, with that appointment of the guy who liked to read Hitler stuff—it’s a mess. This was a mess. Now, we’re being told, “Don’t worry, we’re going to appoint better people. There will be no more inside jobs.” Nobody believes this.

That’s why we’re here, in the middle of the night, debating this. There’s no media; there’s nobody listening. I’m not even listening to myself; I’ll be honest with you. I won’t be able to repeat what I said five minutes after I walk out of here; I’m not even sure. Bill 100—I’ll remember that.

**2350**

Honestly, we went through this in Ottawa, too, where we had a government that was working. It was a regional government and actually had an elected chair. It had an appointed chair at one point, but we did elect our chair, and it was working well. And the Harris government came along and de-amalgamated the place. Nobody has been happy since—nobody. I believe that you could probably run for mayor in the city of Ottawa today and if you promised—although you probably can’t do it—to de-amalgamate, you would just win. If I had to do it over again, that would be my promise: de-amalgamate. It doesn’t matter where you are from. Because the city is very large—it’s got a large rural area. And our colleague from Carleton is here, the MPP from Carleton. Large rural population—it’s got rural councillors; it’s got suburban communities; it’s got urban communities. It is a great city, but it just doesn’t work. And

there is not one part of it that is happy with amalgamation—not one. I have never met a person that said, “You know what I like most about Ottawa here? That we have all been smooched together and none of us function well.”

We’ve tried to justify Bill 100 by, again, citing the need for faster housing delivery. And I really do need to address that because it is the argument here that gets repeated most often. Ontario has the worst housing starts per capita in the country right now. We might say, “You know what? They’re on their way up”—but from almost nothing, right? That’s like calling me tall because I’m standing beside the MPP from Niagara Falls or something.

Every bill that has been passed here was supposed to unlock housing, supposed to streamline approvals, clear the way for development. It has resulted in the numbers all going in the wrong direction. Our Financial Accountability Officer confirmed it: The promise of 1.5 million homes that the Premier ran on isn’t mentioned in his own budget. It’s not even mentioned in the last budget anymore because there is absolutely no credible path to getting there.

Chair, strong-mayor powers were supposed to fix housing. We heard that in the 2022 election, Ottawa and Toronto. I don’t think the Premier knew I was running, or he probably never would have given me strong-mayor powers, but that’s another story. Anyway, they didn’t fix housing.

Stripping regional planning authority was supposed to fix housing. You know Waterloo region? Took the water out of Waterloo—it’s now in a situation where they can’t even build because they don’t have the water infrastructure. What is that about? How can you not invest in the infrastructure that you need—water? It’s a direct result of having planning that was taken away before the supporting systems were in place. That is what happens.

So this government’s response to all of this is to give themselves more control, to give the Premier full control over these regions and to insulate that control from the people of this province. But, Chair—Speaker, Speaker sitting in a chair. I was looking at the chair; I meant to say Speaker, actually.

**Interjection:** It’s a great chair.

**MPP Catherine McKenney:** It is a great chair, actually. Better than these chairs; these chairs are 100 years old, 200 years old.

So it was never that elected officials had too much say; the problem is that this government’s approach to housing has been wrong. And there is absolutely no amount of consolidating power in unelected chairs that is going to fix that flawed strategy. It hasn’t worked. In 2018 it didn’t work. It hasn’t worked—2022, still not working. We’ve got to ensure that we’ve got good, strong local democracies, and we’ve got to start building the housing that people can afford.

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

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** I want to thank the members from Niagara Falls and Ottawa Centre for their engaging remarks tonight.

I want to ask my question to the member from Niagara Falls because I know he has a lot of knowledge about his region and about what’s going on there. We know at

committee recently, we had people come to the committee who actually might put their name forward. They were talking in favour of these changes and then happened to admit that, oh, yes, they actually might put their name forward for chair.

We've got a government who appoints friends to become the chair of the OPP, and then they have to take that back. We've got a government who appoints their friends to multiple boards. And so, I want to know what you think about this government's history with appointing people and why this will be bad for your region.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I appreciate the question. I think I was pretty clear in my presentation that I don't believe in people being appointed. I think you should earn your spot.

But what was interesting about the committee—I don't think the minister was there at the time. I did ask the mayor from Welland if he was going to put his name in to be the chair and he said yes. I was surprised at that. I probably would have advised him not to say that openly in a committee, but he did. He said, "Yes, I'm interested in taking the job."

We had another person from Grimsby who got asked the same question and also said they're interested. As they come to committee—because nobody knew about the committee, let's be honest. They found out a day before. They come to committee to support the government because they want the job. And I'm a firm believer that you should get elected.

Now, people can argue with me all they want, but I believe everybody here got elected—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further questions?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** I heard the member from Niagara Falls several times speak glowingly about the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing—and anybody would, if they were paying attention, because you're doing such a great job.

Now, we know the member from Niagara Falls is the critic for long-term care, home care and retirement homes, and we know that the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London is the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. So I would like to ask the member from Niagara Falls if he thinks either of them lack legitimacy in their positions because they were both appointed?

**Interjection:** That's a good question.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Only if you're a Conservative.

The part I'll answer is that I think it's my job and my responsibility. I got elected here to work with people—

**Mr. Will Bouma:** You were appointed—

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Let me finish. Whether I'm a Liberal, a Conservative, or a Green, my job is to work with everybody. And the fact that I have respect for people on the other side of the House—I think that's a good thing.

Because if you want to get things done, you've got to work together. We can disagree all we want once in a while, but how you end up fixing it and make sure that our kids, our grandkids are going to live in a better world, a better province—you've got to get along with people, whether you're a Conservative, a Liberal, or an NDP. That's how I feel about it.

So to say he's not a bad guy—he's not a bad guy. And congratulations on becoming a grandfather with your twins. Good stuff.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further questions?

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** It's so late. I usually go to sleep at 9:37. That's how I maintain my cheery demeanour in this place.

I just want to say that the member from Ottawa Centre also has a sense of humour and made a very good point around maintaining a strong democracy.

Now, Leah Levac, who's a professor at the University of Guelph, is a Canadian research chair on critical community engagement. She said that the move to appoint these chairs is part of "a number of moves" that the government has done to "erode local democracy.... It calls for people who agree with the province and that is not, as far as I'm concerned, a good foundation for questions around representation and accountability and legitimacy in local government."

What does the member from Ottawa Centre have to say about this measured approach to what the government is doing?

**MPP Catherine McKenney:** Thank you to my colleague from Waterloo for that question.

We can't always guarantee good governance—we can't. People are flawed; processes can be flawed. Democracy is not perfect. We know that. But the way to move forward is not to pull away from the decision-making powers of people that we represent.

We represent people. When I come here, when I stand here—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Response, please?

**MPP Catherine McKenney:** The clock? I'm done?

**Interjection:** Response.

**MPP Catherine McKenney:** Oh, response? I thought you said it was over.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** It is now.

**MPP Catherine McKenney:** Okay. Is it?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** It is.

*Third reading debate deemed adjourned.*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** The time is now 12 o'clock. This House is adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow morning.

*The House adjourned at 0000.*







**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO**  
**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO**

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Edith Dumont, OOnt  
Speaker / Présidente de l'Assemblée législative: Hon. / L'hon. Donna Skelly  
Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day  
Deputy Clerk / Sous-Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim  
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Julia Douglas, Meghan Stenson,  
Christopher Tyrell, Wai Lam (William) Wong  
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Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Allsopp, Tyler (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	
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Babikian, Aris (PC)	Scarborough—Agincourt	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia—Lambton	
Bell, Jessica (NDP)	University—Rosedale	
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Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Bowman, Stephanie (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de parti reconnu
Brady, Bobbi Ann (IND)	Haldimand—Norfolk	
<b>Bresee, Ric (PC)</b>	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
<b>Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)</b>	Markham—Stouffville	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Cerjanec, Rob (LIB)	Ajax	
<b>Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC)</b>	Scarborough North / Scarborough-Nord	Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité
<b>Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)</b>	Willowdale	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Gaming / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et des Jeux
Ciriello, Monica (PC)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Clancy, Aislinn (GRN)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Clark, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby	
Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Cooper, Michelle (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
<b>Crawford, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)</b>	Oakville	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises et de l'Approvisionnement
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Darouze, George (PC)	Carleton	
Denault, Billy (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Dixon, Jess (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Dowie, Andrew (PC)	Windsor—Tecumseh	
<b>Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)</b>	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
<b>Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)</b>	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Response / Ministre de la Protection civile et de l'Intervention en cas d'urgence
Fairclough, Lee (LIB)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
<b>Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)</b>	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce

<b>Member and Party / Député(e) et parti</b>	<b>Constituency / Circonscription</b>	<b>Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités</b>
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	
Firin, Mohamed (PC)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
<b>Flack, Hon. / L'hon. Rob (PC)</b>	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
<b>Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)</b>	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Premier / Premier ministre Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Leader, Third Party / Chef du troisième parti
<b>French, Jennifer K. (NDP)</b>	Oshawa	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gilmour, Alexa (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Gualtieri, Silvia (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
<b>Hamid, Hon. / L'hon. Zee (PC)</b>	Milton	Associate Solicitor General for Auto Theft and Bail Reform / Solliciteur général associé responsable de la Lutte contre le vol d'automobiles et de la Réforme relative aux mises en liberté sous caution
Hardeman, Hon. / L'hon. Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
<b>Harris, Hon. / L'hon. Mike (PC)</b>	Kitchener—Conestoga	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
<b>Hazell, Andrea (LIB)</b>	Scarborough—Guildwood	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
<b>Holland, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin (PC)</b>	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	Associate Minister of Forestry and Forest Products / Ministre associé des Forêts et des Produits forestiers
Hsu, Ted (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
<b>Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)</b>	Dufferin—Caledon	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
<b>Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Trevor (PC)</b>	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et de l'Agroentreprise
Jordan, John (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
<b>Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC)</b>	York Centre / York-Centre	Solicitor General / Solliciteur général
<b>Khanjin, Hon. / L'hon. Andrea (PC)</b>	Barrie—Innisfil	Minister of Red Tape Reduction / Ministre de la Réduction des formalités administratives
<b>Kusendova-Bashta, Hon. / L'hon. Natalia (PC)</b>	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Leardi, Anthony (PC)	Essex	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
<b>Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)</b>	King—Vaughan	Minister of Energy and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie et des Mines
Lennox, Robin (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	
<b>Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)</b>	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Sport / Ministre du Sport
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
<b>McCarthy, Hon. / L'hon. Todd J. (PC)</b>	Durham	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
McCrimmon, Karen (LIB)	Kanata—Carleton	
<b>McGregor, Hon. / L'hon. Graham (PC)</b>	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiques et du Multiculturalisme
McKenney, Catherine (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York	

<b>Member and Party / Député(e) et parti</b>	<b>Constituency / Circonscription</b>	<b>Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités</b>
<b>Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)</b>	York—Simcoe	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones
<b>Oosterhoff, Hon. / L'hon. Sam (PC)</b>	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries / Ministre associé des Industries à forte consommation d'énergie
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
<b>Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)</b>	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	Deputy House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
<b>Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)</b>	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pinsonneault, Steve (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
<b>Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)</b>	Timmins	Minister of Northern Economic Development and Growth / Ministre du Développement et de la croissance économique du Nord
<b>Quinn, Hon. / L'hon. Nolan (PC)</b>	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	
<b>Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)</b>	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	
<b>Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)</b>	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	
<b>Skelly, Hon. / L'hon. Donna (PC)</b>	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Speaker / Présidente de l'Assemblée législative
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
<b>Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)</b>	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
<b>Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)</b>	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
<b>Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)</b>	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée des Petites Entreprises
<b>Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon. Vijay (PC)</b>	Scarborough—Rouge Park	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué à la Santé mentale et à la Lutte contre les dépendances
<b>Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)</b>	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales

<b>Member and Party / Député(e) et parti</b>	<b>Constituency / Circonscription</b>	<b>Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités</b>
<b>Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)</b>	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Attorney General / Procureur général associé
<b>Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)</b>	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	
<b>Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)</b>	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Vacant	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough- Sud-Ouest	