

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

No. 70B

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

N° 70B

1st Session
44th Parliament

Wednesday
6 May 2026

1^{re} session
44^e législature

Mercredi
6 mai 2026

Speaker: Honourable Donna Skelly
Clerk: Trevor Day

Présidente : L'honorable Donna Skelly
Greffier : Trevor Day

Hansard on the Internet

Hansard and other documents of the Legislative Assembly can be on your personal computer within hours after each sitting. The address is:

<https://www.ola.org/>

Index inquiries

Reference to a cumulative index of previous issues may be obtained by calling the Hansard Reporting Service indexing staff at 416-325-7400.

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

L'adresse pour faire paraître sur votre ordinateur personnel le Journal et d'autres documents de l'Assemblée législative en quelques heures seulement après la séance est :

Renseignements sur l'index

Adressez vos questions portant sur des numéros précédents du Journal des débats au personnel de l'index, qui vous fourniront des références aux pages dans l'index cumulatif, en composant le 416-325-7400.

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

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

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Wednesday 6 May 2026 / Mercredi 6 mai 2026

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS / AFFAIRES D'INTÉRÊT PUBLIC ÉMANANT DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

Tenant protection

Ms. Jessica Bell.....	4355
Mr. Adil Shamji	4356
Ms. Laura Smith.....	4358
MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam	4360
MPP Lise Vaugeois.....	4360
Ms. Jessica Bell.....	4361
Vote deferred.....	4362

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Better Regional Governance Act, 2026, Bill 100, Mr. Flack / Loi de 2026 pour une meilleure gouvernance régionale, projet de loi 100, M. Flack

Mr. Stephen Blais.....	4362
Mr. Matthew Rae	4364
MPP Jamie West	4364
Hon. Steve Clark	4364
MPP Jamie West	4364
Mr. Joseph Racinsky	4364
Mme Lucille Collard.....	4365
Hon. Graydon Smith	4365
Mr. Guy Bourgouin.....	4367
Mr. Stephen Blais.....	4368
Ms. Laura Smith.....	4368
Mr. John Vanthof.....	4368

Mr. Stephen Blais.....	4369
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	4369
Mr. Stephen Blais.....	4372
Ms. Laura Smith.....	4372
MPP Alexa Gilmour.....	4372
Mr. Stephen Blais.....	4372
Mr. Lorne Coe.....	4373
Mr. Chris Glover	4373
MPP Tyler Watt	4373
Mr. Lorne Coe.....	4376
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	4376
Mr. Ted Hsu	4377
Mr. Andrew Dowie	4377
Mr. Sol Mamakwa.....	4377
Mr. Stephen Blais.....	4377
M. Guy Bourgouin	4378
MPP Jamie West	4380
M. Andrew Dowie	4380
MPP Jamie West	4380
Mme Lucille Collard	4381
L'hon. Sam Oosterhoff.....	4381
Mr. Ted Hsu	4381
Mr. Andrew Dowie	4384
MPP Alexa Gilmour.....	4384
Mr. Stephen Blais.....	4384
Hon. Sam Oosterhoff.....	4385
Mr. John Vanthof	4385
Hon. Steve Clark	4385
Hon. Steve Clark	4385
Vote deferred.....	4388

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 6 May 2026

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 6 mai 2026

Report continued from volume A.

1800

PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Jessica Bell: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should freeze rent for 2027 and 2028 on all rent-controlled homes.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): MPP Bell has moved private members' notice of motion number 70. Pursuant to standing order 100, the member has 12 minutes for their presentation.

Ms. Jessica Bell: I'm here today calling for the government to support this motion to provide real affordability relief for renters by bringing in a two-year rent freeze on all purpose-built homes and all homes that were built before 2018. There are a lot of reasons why, and I'm going to go through a few of them.

The first one is that, in Ontario, we're in tough times. For the first time in my entire eight years as an MPP, I am regularly hearing from people who tell me they cannot find a job. We have very high unemployment—the highest we've seen since 2014, give or take COVID, and we've got extremely high youth unemployment. People are losing their jobs. They cannot find a job at a time when our expenses have never been higher: rent, mortgage costs, transport, bills, electricity, medical expenses, dental expenses. The costs keep going up.

For the 1.7 million households in Ontario, the end of the month is very stressful because that is when rent is due. We surveyed renters in advance of this motion and what we heard was alarming. I want to summarize some of the things we heard—a state of affairs for renters today in Ontario.

We heard that renters are cutting back on groceries or skipping meals in order to afford the rent. We're hearing about renters who are skipping medical, dental and mental health care costs because they need to afford the rent. They're no longer saving for emergencies or retirement because they need to pay the rent, and many are staying in housing that is too run down, too small or not safe enough because they cannot afford to move and they're trapped. At the same time, we're hearing from renters that many are worried they'll be forced to move because they cannot afford to stay.

These are some of the statements we heard from renters:

"Making rent is all I ever think about."

"I carry a huge line of credit that I cannot climb out of" to pay the rent.

"The thought of how I would pay these costs after retirement is terrifying."

"A constant fear."

We did a press conference this morning where we had an individual, Ounagh Michaud, and I want to share her concerns and comments as well. She is a renter, and she talked about how a two-year rent freeze, which is what we're calling for here, will bring her some relief because it will give her a chance to breathe. She talked about how rent keeps going up, but how paycheques aren't, and we know that's true. She talked about how she was having to make tough choices that no one should ever have to make, like, "Do I pay rent or do I buy enough groceries? Do I cover a bill, or do I make sure my kids have what they need?"

She talked about how, in 2024, she lost her job and had to rely on the support of the Toronto Rent Bank, which is a city-run program, not a provincial-run program. She said, "That experience showed me how quickly things can fall apart, even when you've been doing everything right." And I think that experience of people doing everything right, of having a job, of raising a family and then being in a situation—maybe it's because of a divorce, or a health issue, or because they've been laid off—where they can't afford the rent. It's happening in your ridings as well. I know it because it's happening in ours.

What we ought to do is help future generations to be able to afford housing. We need relief and we need it now.

Thank you very much for attending our press conference on this issue.

Housing is everything, and housing is very expensive. I took a look at some statistics to get a better understanding of how expensive the housing market is for renters, and this is what I found: No one working full-time on a minimum wage can afford rental housing anywhere in Ontario. It doesn't matter what city you live in; if you're working full-time on minimum wage, you cannot afford the rent.

And average rent in Ontario over the last 10 years has gone up by over 50%. That is much faster than inflation—much faster than inflation.

Now, we don't expect miracles. We understand we have a Trump tariff crisis. We have a war in Iran. We have a lot of global conflict. We have a lot of economic uncertainty. In these tough times, however, I think every Ontarian can expect that the Ontario government, this government, should be using every legal tool, every regu-

latory tool to make life more affordable, and that starts with housing.

You love to blame the former Liberal government, but this is your third term. This government has been in power for eight years and this government has failed on all fronts to make housing more affordable. Housing starts are down. Rent is up. First-time homebuyers—they're not buying homes; they're renting for longer and longer and longer. And homelessness? Some 85,000 people in Ontario are homeless, sleeping on couches, sleeping in tents, sleeping in ravines, sleeping in shelters. That's this government's legacy. That is this government's legacy.

We are giving you the opportunity tonight to do something right—very practical. What we are debating tonight is a call to bring in a two-year rent freeze on rental homes in Ontario for 2027 and 2028. It's a simple, practical regulatory tool that this government can introduce and pass very quickly, and it will provide immediate stability and cost savings to about 1.5 million renter households in Ontario. I cannot think of a single thing that you could do in the next six weeks that would bring a better affordability measure than this; I really can't.

The reason why this is important is because a rent freeze will save renters about \$600 a year—these 1.5 million renter households—and about \$1,200 over two years. That is not chump change.

The second reason why it is important to call for a rent freeze now is because now is about the time that the Ontario government announces the amount rent can be raised on rent-controlled homes. Typically, it happens in June. And what we have found is that the Conservative government has unfortunately permitted landlords to raise the rent on rent-controlled homes every single year since this government got into power, except for 2021 during COVID.

So on the one hand, this is very unfortunate because you're making Ontario even more expensive. But then, on the other hand, this is also an opportunity for you to remind yourselves that you have done it before and so you can do it again.

I often hear this argument: "Well, if we move forward with a rent freeze, then it's going to hurt housing construction." There are a few things I want to say to that. We can build new housing and keep renting affordable for Ontarians at the same time. It's not a matter of choosing one or the other; we can and we must do both. They are two different issues, and they can be solved in two different ways.

Now, the building industry loves to say, "But if we bring in rent control, it will stop us from building homes," but the data tells a very different story. Quite frankly, it is false. Comprehensive economic studies using over 50 years of data. So you can talk all you want about how—"No, no, it won't." Well, the data tells a very different story. We can build the housing we need and protect renter affordability at the same time.

1810

A rent freeze is just one part of the Ontario NDP's affordability plan, because when housing is more affordable and stable, life is more affordable and stable.

This complements our recent motion to bring in a ban on predatory pricing so that big corporate supermarket chains like Loblaws are no longer able to gather data and spy on their customers in order to give different prices for the same product in order to maximize their profits.

Groceries should be cheaper. Rent should be cheaper. And the Ontario government should be doing everything it can to make that happen. It's really that simple.

The Ontario NDP's housing plan also includes bringing in strong rent control on all homes, including homes built after 2018; strengthening rental protection laws; banning above-guideline rent increases—because, my goodness, why are you making renters pay twice for the same maintenance issue? That is just one massive loophole that needs to be closed real fast—and building 30,000 affordable homes a year as part of our Homes Ontario plan. Our Homes Ontario plan—the purpose of that is to partner with municipalities and developers and non-profits to build non-profit and non-market housing on public land.

When we're talking about what we can do to build housing that will actually meet the need—we need to get government back into the business of building housing and affordable housing. When we do that, we create permanently affordable homes, we create jobs in the construction industry, and we make Ontario affordable again—not just for baby boomers and for people who bought a home 30 years ago, but for young people, for seniors, for people who are stuck in the rental housing market.

That's all I'm going to say for now.

We are very curious to hear what the Ontario government, the Conservative government, is going to do. You've been presented with a very practical, simple measure that you can take, this government can take, to make housing affordable. The time is now for you to make a decision. The announcement is coming up. Make the right announcement. Bring in a rent freeze for 2027 and 2028.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Further debate? I recognize the member for Don Valley East.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me and allowing me the opportunity to address one of the biggest issues confronting Ontarians across this great province, and that is, of course, the challenge of housing—dignified housing and, specifically, affordable housing.

Under this failed Conservative government, we have seen housing become more dire than ever before.

We have an epidemic of homelessness, with tens of thousands of people sleeping on the streets every night, on any given night. We have encampments across the province.

We have flailing housing starts—a government that promised 1.5 million homes by 2031, that committed to a track record that would have been 150,000 homes a year. As they fell behind, they upgraded that annual target to

175,000 homes. As they've fallen further and further behind, they've adopted a series of bewildering strategies, like eliminating environmental standards, as though that would accelerate home building. But even as they have done that, they have seen home building fall further and further behind.

We've seen the wait-list for justice at the Landlord and Tenant Board grow exponentially. The amount of time to get a case seen before the tribunal increased significantly.

And of course, we've seen rent go up quite substantially. We also saw this government, very shortly after they formed, after 2018, eliminate rent control for all buildings that are constructed after 2018.

As result of this province's declining housing affordability, and specifically rental affordability, the number of people who are spending more than 30% of all of their household income to achieve dignified housing has gone up, resulting in people being forced to resort to things like food banks.

So I sincerely welcome the intention and effort to address this crisis that seems to only be getting worse.

Before us this evening, we have a motion that has been introduced by the member for University–Rosedale that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should freeze rent for 2027 and 2028 on all rent-controlled homes.

I have great respect for the member for University–Rosedale. I believe her to be an honourable member, well-intentioned, and I accept, certainly, at face value that she is committed to improving housing and rental affordability. I share all of those things with her.

I do want to address a number of things. The motion is very short, and because of that I think introduces substantial ambiguity. So I want to highlight a few of the things that aren't necessarily clear in this motion, recognizing we share the same ambition to improve housing and rental affordability.

There are a few things I wanted to highlight here that leave rather significant ambiguity. Perhaps you will take an opportunity to explain those in your final two minutes, but it is one of the reasons that I wish this motion was a little bit more substantial and perhaps was introduced as a bill so that it could address some of the—I don't know whether to call it “shortcomings,” but things that I am left somewhat curious about. So I do wish with that it was more substantial but, nonetheless, allow me to elaborate on a few things.

What strikes me as unusual, for example, is the provision that rent should be frozen for 2027 and 2028 on all rent-controlled homes. The first concern I have about that is we've actually seen rent go up the most on homes and rental apartments that have been built after 2018. This motion therefore only impacts those people who are struggling with rental affordability if they are in rent-controlled units prior to 2018, despite the fact that the highest increases actually come in the homes that are after 2018.

So I worry that this bill, which I take at face value as intended to help as many renters as possible, leaves out a

substantial chunk of those individuals and, in fact, the ones who may be struggling the most.

The other thing I'm concerned about is that we have seen very recently the rental vacancy in Ontario go up and, consequently, rent prices actually come down. Now, that may not be across the board entirely, but we are certainly observing this phenomenon in many places across the province.

I don't think that the member for University–Rosedale would actually intend for this; however, you can always count on this government to find the worst possible way to implement something. If someone was in a unit where their rent would have otherwise gone down, this motion says that the rent should be frozen. Can you trust this government to allow that rent to actually come down, or, as worded, would they insist that the rent actually stays frozen at the higher rate? This is a very real concern, given the fact that we have seen rental vacancy rise to the highest amount in recent memory and we are consequently seeing rent prices go down.

I believe the member for University–Rosedale did begin to address this, although I would invite her to elaborate further if she has time during her two minutes.

But one of the concerns is if motions such as this are too onerous, landlords may find other ways to recoup their funds. We've seen no shortage of above-guideline increases recently. We've seen the phenomenon on renovations and demovictions. Of course, there are many good-faith landlords who wouldn't do this, but just as there are bad-faith tenants, there are certainly bad-faith landlords as well who, in some cases, have weaponized things like AGIs, renovations, demovictions, that kind of thing.

This motion offers no protections, even though it does increase the risk of many of these people that this well-intentioned bill hopes to help who will now be at risk of exactly those kinds of problems. So that's another concern that I have with this motion as it is written.

This government recently passed Bill 60, in which they watered down protections for tenants and made it easier for them to be evicted. As we see a policy such as this get implemented, if passed, what protections are there that evictions will not be weaponized in order to recruit additional funds? I don't see any of those protections here as well. It is a concern that I think any renter could legitimately be worried about.

1820

Finally, a point I would like to make—I do feel compelled to address the government, lest they feel I gave them a compliment around the increase in rental units, the increase in vacancy and the decline in rental prices.

It's very clear to me and to those of us who are actually studying the industry that the number of rental units, the rental starts have increased in Ontario, and that has happened by accident. That is because builders and developers, who thought they were building condos, can no longer make the projects pencil. The economics no longer work. And so, what was intended to be a building full of condos that would be sold to people who desperate-

ly would like to purchase them, like first-time homebuyers, instead gets turned into a rental unit so that the developer can call that an asset and see that appreciate with time. That is happening by accident, not by design.

Because the number of rental units is going up, the vacancy rate is increasing as well and, to some degree, that may be contributing to a decline in the cost of rent. The vacancy rate and the decline in rent is also in large part because of declining immigration across the country. And so, before the members on the Conservative side begin thumping their chests and patting themselves on the shoulders, I would warn them that, in fact, they have no reason to do so, and all of this is really circumstantial and by coincidence.

Finally, I want to end by saying that, of course, I am convinced that those of us on this side of the House are committed to fighting for housing affordability and rental affordability. That's why our previous Liberal government, prior to 2018, implemented a fair form of rent control. It's why in the last election, we campaigned on introducing a fair form of rent control, one that has been emulated in many jurisdictions around the world—including in California, including in Manitoba—and which offers a balance between tenant protection while still allowing a stimulation of the building sector and specifically ensuring that we are continuing to accelerate the pace at which we are building rental units.

This is not something that the government is interested in pursuing. It's not something that the government is interested in taking a concern about. But I will tell you that we will not stop fighting to ensure that tenants have the protection that they need in terms of fair rent prices, justice at the Landlord and Tenant Board, and protection against things like unfair above-guideline increases, renovations and demovictions. We will be relentless of that, and we will caution that public policy is complicated.

While we appreciate the premise of this motion and support the premise of increased housing affordability, we would just caution that it may be over-simplistic in its execution and potentially actually increase the risk to tenants, even though it was intended to support them.

Nonetheless, I am grateful to the member of University-Rosedale for highlighting this important issue and for allowing us this opportunity to continue to fight for safer, more dignified and more affordable conditions for tenants across the province of Ontario.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to say that I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to motion 70. As the parliamentary assistant to the municipal affairs and housing minister, I can say with confidence that our government is committed to cut the time, the cost and the red tape associated with all types of housing, including purpose-built rentals. That is how rents go down and affordability increases.

I want to begin by acknowledging the intent behind the motion. I understand why this motion may sound appealing at first. Families are facing real pressures, renters are

facing real pressures, and our province is feeling real pressures from global uncertainty—inflation pressures, high interest rates and uncertainty from our neighbours to the south.

These are real challenges being felt across Ontario. They are being felt by young people trying to find their first apartment, by families trying to find more space, by seniors on fixed incomes, and by workers who want to live near their jobs and their communities.

But our job in this House is to not only respond and react to pressure; it's to choose policies that are proactive and that actually work over the long term.

Speaker, before I continue, I want to emphasize that through 2025 and into 2026, rents have actually been coming down in Ontario; notably in the GTA. That did not happen by accident. It happened because this government has taken action to increase supply, reduce costs, and make it easier to build the homes people need. And I will touch on that more, later in my remarks.

A two-year rent freeze may sound like a simple solution, but simple doesn't always mean effective. The question before us is not whether renters need relief—they do. The question is whether this motion would create more homes, improve affordability, and strengthen the rental market for the long term. Respectfully, Speaker, I do not believe that it would.

This motion is not dealing with an unregulated system. Rent-controlled homes in Ontario already have annual limits for rent increases. The province already has a framework that balances tenant protection with the need to build more rental housing. For 2026, Ontario held the rent increase guideline at 2.1%, one of the lowest rates in Canada, ensuring that the majority of rental units continue to see low annual rent increases. That balance truly matters.

Speaker, I believe the long-term answer to high rents is not fewer homes; it's more homes—more purpose-built rentals, more attainable housing, more supply in communities where people want to live, more homes near transit, more homes near jobs, more homes near schools and near family supports.

Any policy that risks slowing rental construction has to be treated very carefully. We must think about the young person looking for their first apartment. We must think about the family who needs another bedroom. We must think about the worker moving to a new community for a job. And we must think about the senior who wants to downsize but stay close to their neighbourhood, their friends and their relatives. They need available homes. They need more choice. They need a rental market that is growing, not shrinking.

That's why our government has been focused on getting more homes built faster and smarter.

To increase rental supply, we removed the provincial portion of the HST on qualifying new purpose-built rental housing in 2023. That is a major step to lower the cost of building new rental homes and make more projects viable. And we're seeing immense progress. Since the purpose-built rental rebate was announced in 2023, Ontario rental

starts have continuously increased year after year, reaching a record of more than 25,000 in 2025. That is real progress in a very difficult market. And that matters, because purpose-built rental housing is exactly the kind of housing Ontario needs more of. It creates long-term rental supply. It gives renters more options. It supports communities where people may not be ready to buy, may not want to buy, or may simply need a good rental home that fits their life.

Our government is also supporting the development of purpose-built rentals, affordable housing, and non-profit housing by providing discounts and exemptions on municipal development charges. That is part of the same approach: Lower the cost of building, reduce unnecessary barriers, and make it easier to get homes out of planning and into construction.

Speaker, this is the difference between a short-term political answer and a long-term housing plan. A rent freeze may sound attractive in the moment. But it does not build a single new home. It does not speed up approvals. It does not reduce construction costs. It does not help a project get financing. It does not get shovels in the ground. It does not support long-term housing affordability. And it does not help the next family waiting for a home that has not been built.

That's why our government has taken action through Bill 17, Bill 60 and Bill 98. These bills are not isolated measures. They are part of a larger plan to tackle the same problems from multiple angles. The cost of building is too high, the approval process takes too long, and too many projects are delayed before a single shovel goes into the ground.

1830

Bill 17, the Protect Ontario by Building Faster and Smarter Act, was about making the housing system work better. It focused on reducing red tape, addressing municipal requirements that can slow down or impede housing development, increasing accountability and supporting innovation in the building process. That matters because every unnecessary delay has a cost. Every duplicative requirement has a cost. Every extra month a project sits in the approval process has a cost. And at the end of the day, those costs do not disappear; they are passed along to the people who are trying to buy or rent a home.

Bill 60, the Fighting Delays, Building Faster Act, continued that work by targeting delays across housing, infrastructure and development-related legislation. It recognized that building homes is not about zoning or planning; it's about whether a comprehensive system of roads, water, waste water, transit and community infrastructure can move forward alongside new housing. That's important, because homes do not exist in isolation. Families need complete communities. They need homes that are connected to jobs, schools, services and transportation. Cutting red tape in housing while also addressing infrastructure delays is how we build faster and smarter.

Bill 98, the proposed Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act, builds on that same foundation. It's about supporting housing, economic

growth and infrastructure development while advancing transportation and transit priorities. That is exactly the kind of approach Ontario needs because, if we want more homes to be built, we have to make it easier and less costly to build them. If we want rents to come down, we need more rental homes coming online. And if we want families to find homes they can afford, governments have to remove the unnecessary barriers that are making housing more expensive in the first place.

Taken together, Bill 17, Bill 60 and Bill 98 are about cutting costs, cutting red tape, reducing delays and helping all types of homes get built faster and smarter, including purpose-built rentals. That is the path Ontario needs, because we cannot solve a housing shortage by making it harder to build housing. We cannot create affordability by discouraging the very rental supply that renters need. We cannot solve the long-term challenges with short-term fixes. And we cannot help tomorrow's renters if we only focus on units that already exist today.

Speaker, I also want to be clear: Opposing this motion does not mean ignoring renters. It does not mean dismissing the very real affordability challenges people are facing. It means being honest about what it will actually help. Renters need protection, and Ontario has some of the strongest tenant protections in the country. But renters also need supply, because increased competition gives people more choice and helps bring down rental prices. We have seen exactly that over the last year.

Renters need more units coming online. They need more options that meet their needs. They need more purpose-built rental homes. They need a government to reduce delays, lower costs, streamline approvals, and make it possible to build the homes people want and need. That's what our government is focused on. We're protecting Ontario tenants by implementing reforms so that more people can have a place to call home. We are lowering the cost of purpose-built rental housing, and we are supporting affordable, not-for-profit housing through development-charge discounts and exemptions. We are cutting red tape through Bill 17, Bill 60 and Bill 98. And we are working to build a strong housing system that serves today's tenants and tomorrow's tenants.

Speaker, a better path—the better path—is to protect tenants, support more rental construction, reduce delays, cut unnecessary costs and get more homes built. That's how we give renters more options. That's how we create long-term affordability. And that's how we will help not only the tenant who has a home today, but the young person, the family, the senior and the worker still looking for one.

For that reason, while I respect the idea behind motion 70, I cannot support a policy that may sound helpful in the short term, but risks making Ontario's rental challenges worse in the long term. Renters deserve more than a temporary freeze; they deserve a serious plan to build more homes, expand choice and create lasting affordability. That is the plan our government is pursuing, and that is why I will not be supporting this motion. Thank you, Speaker.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: It's always an honour to rise in this House to speak on behalf of the people in Toronto Centre. I rise to speak in support of this motion. The motion reads, for all in the House, "That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should freeze rent in 2027 and 2028 on all rent-controlled homes."

The Premier and his government hate renters. It's become evidently clear in all their policies. Even as I listened to the members speak about how they want to help renters but offer no solutions, here we are again.

The Premier failed Ontario renters when he removed rent control protections for many new units, first occupied after November 2018, exposing millions of renters to unlimited rent hikes. The Premier failed renters when he allowed the Landlord and Tenant Board to be mired in delays, leaving tenants waiting for justice while uncertainty and abuse continued. He failed renters by refusing to build deeply affordable and non-market housing. The Premier has failed renters by tolerating renovictions, demovictions and bad-faith evictions that uproot families and destabilize neighbourhoods. He fails renters by prioritizing speculation and developer interest over the very basic needs of those who are looking to secure housing.

The government's housing crisis is breaking Ontarians. Seniors on fixed incomes are rationing medication to cover rent. Young people are postponing their futures because they cannot save for an education, a business or even a first home. Newcomers who come here seeking opportunity are finding doors closed by impossible rents. Workers who keep our cities alive—nurses, teachers, transit operators, restaurant staff, construction workers, retail workers, personal support workers, health care workers—are being driven out of our cities and further and further away from the communities that they want to serve.

This is not simply a housing crisis, Speaker. This is a cost-of-living crisis. It's a public health crisis. It's an economic productivity crisis. It's being made worse generationally, and it's a crisis that's being made worse because of political choices.

Housing is a human right. It's the foundation of stability, health, safety and opportunity. High rents impact members of every community in every riding. My office is hearing daily from single moms, seniors, students and working people and families that they are having to choose between the basic necessities, such as groceries, and rent.

This government froze rents during COVID-19, during the pandemic. That was the right thing to do. They rose to meet the moment, and I applaud you for that. I applauded you when I was there at city council and heard the news. People were struggling and out of work then and they were unable to pay, and you recognized that.

Now we are in another very difficult economic situation. The moment has appeared once again. People are out of work in Ontario. Layoffs are taking place in the thousands. Groceries are sky-high. The last thing renters

should be worrying about is trying to keep up with rising housing costs, especially when you know that that housing rise in cost is coming in June.

This is the only instrument, the only tool right now before the House where you can actually start a rent freeze. Rents in Ontario have risen 54.5% over a 10-year period. This government has been in power for eight of those years, and it is higher now than ever, even if you only kept up with the rate of inflation. It is time, Speaker, for a rent freeze.

Some 1.7 million households in Ontario rent their homes. That means millions of people are directly exposed when rents grow faster than their wages. Every guideline increase, every loophole, every exemption and every above-guideline pressure is felt at the kitchen table. According to CMHC, in the GTA, the average worker spends about 42% of their after-tax income to rent a one-bedroom apartment—42%.

This is not just a statistic, Speaker. When I'm talking about this motion, I'm talking about how this would impact my constituents.

1840

I think of Martina, a single mom who came to my office, absolutely broken down, in tears because her Landlord and Tenant Board eviction hearing was the very next day. She worked full-time as a cleaner while caring for her young son. Between daycare payments, food, clothes for her child and transit to the job, she had fallen behind on rent. She worked so hard, followed the rules and she couldn't keep up. She had to go to the rent bank to get a bailout.

People like Martina need their rent frozen and they need it frozen now. They need an opportunity to get back on their feet. This rent freeze would mean the world to her and the world to your renters in your communities as well.

I urge every member in this chamber to think about the hard-working renters in your riding who would benefit from a two-year rent freeze. Please, grow a heart and support this motion.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I recognize the member for Thunder Bay–Superior North.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I rise to support the motion by the member from University–Rosedale. I will repeat the motion: "That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should freeze rent for 2027 and 2028 on all rent-controlled homes."

Under this Conservative government, far too many Ontarians are paying far too much rent. And with rent this expensive, families and households are having difficulty paying their basic bills, buying groceries. It's become next to impossible to save up money for a home—but not just for a home; many people cannot afford to have any roof over their head.

Apparently, rents have gone down a tiny bit. And it's as if that small reduction in rent suddenly made rental spaces affordable, but that's not the case. We know that they've had to bring the cost of rent down a little bit, partly because they built a whole ton of these teeny, tiny condominiums that people who have the money, who could afford a

condominium, don't want to live in. And of course, everybody else who can't afford a place to live can't possibly afford one of these condominiums, no matter how small they are. We also know that the decline in international students and immigration has also led to some downward pressure.

Nevertheless, over the past 10 years, average rents in Ontario have increased by over 50%. I mean, that's unbelievable. Political parties, such as this Conservative government that is closely aligned with the interests of the real estate industry, have ignored evidence, dismantled controls and sat idly by as rents skyrocketed.

We know this government is intimately tied with the real estate industry. We know, for example, the former Premier fixed things so that it was easier to privatize long-term care and then made over \$10 million in the deal after he was no longer Premier. That's pretty questionable, I must say—abuse of government authority and not working for the people.

So ultimately, rent regulation is not a technical question; it is a political one. And it's been done before in a time of crisis. We are in a time of crisis, of economic crisis, that so many ordinary people are struggling with. A rent freeze is doable, possible and, frankly, quite easy to do.

Now I want to say, the government has created homelessness with a vengeance, through what I'm going to call their vindictive policies. First, they eliminated rent control on units newer than 2018. They have allowed vacancy decontrol, which frankly is a compelling incentive for corporate landlords to push out tenants, either by making life miserable or by using above-guideline rent increases so that those tenants simply can't afford to stay there anymore. So as a result, vacancy decontrol puts upward pressure on rents, as a large share of all units are seeing high increases every year.

And then there was Bill 60 that makes it easier to evict people who miss a payment. It's just seven days now, isn't it, from Bill 60? It's very little time. So I want to know, has anybody on the government side ever missed a payment for anything? It happens, right? Sometimes you miss a bill. But for people in this House, you probably have a healthy line of credit. But guess what? People living with disabilities, living on ODSP, OW, seniors, they may not have that line of credit.

With Bill 60, the government made it even easier to kick people out, to make people homeless. We have 85,000 people who are homeless at this time in this province because of government policies. It's been eight years. How many "faster, faster, build it faster" bills have we had—eight, 10? Everyone always promises, "We're going to get all these homes built and the market will take care of itself," but it's a fallacy because we have the lowest rates of building in the country.

Frankly, this government is also terrified of the notion of building co-op housing, not-for-profit housing. They are so fearful. "It's a communist plot," they say. "We can't possibly have co-op housing," although we have wonderful co-op housing in Thunder Bay—very successful. I wish that they were a bit more afraid of supporting the

removal of freedom of information rather than these silly comments about, "Oh, my goodness, it's terrifying to even think about building co-op housing."

But I want to come back to the importance of the motion before us. I must say, while the Premier is preoccupied with his luxury jet and ruining all the businesses and public spaces on the waterfront, too many people in Ontario cannot afford to keep a roof over their heads. Bad Conservative policies have led to this homelessness and affordability crisis. Freezing rent for two years is the least the government can do and would be an important gesture to show that they actually care about anyone other than their wealthy donors.

I fully support this motion. It can be done. People need relief now, not at some future fantasy deadline when, all of a sudden—well, it's not all of a sudden, right? We've been told, "Just wait. Just wait a bit longer. Wait another year or two and it will sort itself out." It's not sorting itself out. People are struggling to keep a roof over their head.

I fully support this motion and thank the member from University–Rosedale for bringing it forward.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): The member has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Jessica Bell: I want to thank the MPP for Thunder Bay–Superior North, the MPP for Toronto Centre, the MPP for Thornhill and the MPP for Don Valley East for speaking to this motion today. I'm going to spend a little bit of time addressing some of the concerns and then conclude.

First off, as I've made clear, strong rent control, based on 50 years of CMHC data, does not affect housing construction. So merging the two and saying we can either have one or the other is simply not true. The building industry says that it is, but it is simply not true, and that's what the evidence suggests.

To the member for Don Valley East: Yes, every single renter, including renters living in new homes, deserves protection, which is why we are calling for strong vacancy control on all homes, something that your party has not yet made the commitment on; stronger protections, especially in instances where a renter is facing an illegal eviction; and a ban on above-guideline rent increases.

The reason why we are bringing this now is because, come June, the Ontario government, through a simple regulatory move, decides how much is the maximum amount landlords can raise the rent on about 1.5 million homes in Ontario. Every year, it's been 2.5%. This year, it's 2.1%. There was one year where it was zero, but every year other than that, it's been 2.5%. It should be zero. We are in a crisis—zero for 2027 and zero for 2028.

This rent freeze does not stop landlords from choosing to lower the rent. That is not how a rent freeze works. Rent is at record highs. It is very expensive.

I have introduced this motion tonight to give this government and the parties a simple choice: If you care about affordability and you care about making cost savings for—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

MPP Bell has moved private member's notice of motion number 70. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carries? I heard a no.

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

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

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

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): All matters relating to private members' public business have been completed, and I will now call for orders of the day.

1850

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BETTER REGIONAL GOVERNANCE ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 POUR UNE MEILLEURE GOUVERNANCE RÉGIONALE

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 6, 2026, on the motion for 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 (MPP Andrea Hazell): I recognize the member for Orléans.

Mr. Stephen Blais: It's great to be back. I appreciate the hour-long pause to catch my breath.

Madam Speaker, let's not forget elections matter too. Democracy is supposed to require politicians to go back to the people to justify their decisions, but this bill moves in the opposite direction. It moves towards politically appointed power. It moves towards insulation. It moves towards government by insider class. That means less accountability, it means fewer mandates from the people, and it means more centralized power.

After listening to committee testimony, I believe the government's witnesses actually accidentally revealed exactly why this government likes that model so much, because taxpayers in Niagara deserve better than politicians who vote for years of tax increases locally and then arrive and come to Queen's Park pretending that they were powerless observers along the way.

There is another issue here that deserves some attention: weighted voting. This bill gives the minister enormous regulatory authority over voting structures in upper-tier municipalities, and that matters a great deal for smaller communities. Once weighted voting structures are altered, smaller municipalities can rapidly lose meaningful influence around a regional table. We've seen some controversies around weighted voting already in Simcoe. We've seen councillors walk out over governance disputes.

We've seen concerns from smaller municipalities about losing their voice to large urban centres.

As a former councillor in Ottawa, we did not have weighted voting, and we still saw this where the former rural municipalities felt like they were being dictated to by the big bad city. That was addressed by ensuring that those rural communities had actually greater representation around the council table, a greater ratio of representation than their urban neighbours and cousins. But now, Madam Speaker, this government wants broad regulatory discretion over those structures as well. Again, it's more centralized power with cabinet, more local authority shifted upward, more democratic structures controlled through regulation rather than legislation.

There is another reason why this appointment issue matters as well, and it matters a lot. An appointed chair with strong powers and provincial backing changes the balance of local governance fundamentally. Who does the chair ultimately answer to? Does the chair answer to local taxpayers, or does the chair answer to the provincial cabinet who appointed them? Maybe the chair answers to the Premier, the big man himself.

Councillor Rory Nisan from Burlington warned committee that, under this model, an appointed regional chair derives their mandate not from residents, but from the provincial government. That observation, that truth goes directly to the heart of the debate: democratic legitimacy matters, mandates matter, elections matter. We've heard from this government, we've heard from this Premier recently that the only poll that matters is on election day. Well, if elections matter, then let's elect people to lead us. Let's not accept political hacks as appointments. Regional government exists to represent communities, not merely to implement the dictates from Queen's Park.

Madam Speaker, committee witnesses also repeatedly warned members about trust. Mayor Roy said that these changes come, and I quote, "at a time when trust in public institutions is already fragile." We need to listen to those elected officials who are on the ground in neighbourhoods, talking to people every day—people who drive to work, people who take the train, people who fly private and don't have the luxury of private jets or chartered business class expenses.

People already believe that insiders receive special treatment from this government. People already feel that decisions are made behind closed doors. Because everything this current Conservative government does reinforces that sentiment. From luxury private jets to carving up the greenbelt for their friends, from envelopes at family weddings to extravagant Muskoka cottages and luxury living in south Florida, everything this government does shows people they're in it for their friends, their donors and their insiders. And this bill reinforces every one of those fears.

What average Ontarian genuinely believes they will have more influence over an appointed regional chair—a political hack, a party fundraiser, a friend of the Premier? Or would they have more influence over an elected one—a guy or a gal from the neighbourhood; someone you see

at the grocery store, at the local arena; someone your kids know? Nobody believes they will have more influence with an appointed political hack.

That is ultimately the central problem with Bill 100: It weakens democratic legitimacy at the exact moment public trust is already fragile.

We already see that municipal elections have the weakest and lowest voter turnout. In Niagara, it was less than 30%; not even one in three voters bothered to show up to vote. Why do we think that would get better when they know their vote won't matter, because an appointed strong chair being dictated to from Toronto will only need one third of council support to do basically anything and everything?

Madam Speaker, democracy can be messy. It can be slow. It involves disagreement. That is not a flaw; that is the design. As Winston Churchill said, "Democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." Democracy is supposed to force consensus. It's supposed to require persuasion. It's supposed to make governments justify themselves to the public.

And yes, sometimes that process is frustrating. Sometimes, it takes longer. Sometimes, people disagree. But the answer can't simply be to appoint more insiders. It can't be to override more local decisions. It can't be to centralize more authority. Once government begins treating democratic accountability as an inconvenience, the damage spreads quickly. And I fear that's exactly what we are seeing here with this bill.

Madam Speaker, local government is not supposed to become a branch of the Premier's office. He has ballooned the staff in his office by too much already. Regional governments are not supposed to be governed through a partisan appointment system.

Taxpayers deserve better than legislation that concentrates more and more authority into fewer and fewer hands. Ontarians deserve local governments led by people chosen by the public, not selected insiders, not rewarded through appointments and patronage and certainly not handed extraordinary powers without a democratic mandate. Power in a democracy is supposed to be earned from the people, not granted by insiders behind closed doors.

1900

With the time I have left, Madam Speaker, I know there are members of the New Democratic Party who are also uncomfortable with this bill. Frankly, they should be, because if there is one political party in Ontario that should understand the danger of centralized power, unchecked executive authority and governments losing touch with working people, it should be the Ontario NDP. Too often in this chamber, New Democrats talk tough, talk tough about every problem in society, that they can solve it by simply spending more money, creating more bureaucracy and concentrating more authority in government hands.

Well, Madam Speaker, Ontarians have seen that experiment before and they remember how it ended. Ontarians remember the 1990s. They remember exploding deficits, they remember spiralling debt, they remember 1.3 million

Ontarians on welfare and they remember unemployment soaring during a recession. They remember businesses fleeing Ontario. They remember investment drying up and, perhaps more importantly for this debate, Madam Speaker, they remember what happened when a government that claimed to stand for workers suddenly decided that democratic rights and collective bargaining had become inconvenient: the social contract, Rae days, unpaid leave imposed on workers, collective agreements overwritten by government decree.

Madam Speaker, let's remember what that was—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I recognize the member for Sudbury on a point of order.

MPP Jamie West: The member is not speaking to the bill.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I sure am.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): The member can continue his debate.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm speaking to the challenge of centralized power, centralized decision-making, which is at the heart of this bill and was at the heart of the last NDP government: unpaid leave imposed on workers, collective agreements overridden by government decree.

Let us remember how difficult those times were, Madam Speaker. The NDP government of the day looked at difficult fiscal circumstances and decided that democratic negotiation, local decision-making and freely bargained collective agreements were obstacles to be overridden in the name of efficiency and expediency, and that's the same principle that this Conservative government is applying in the bill before us tonight.

Principles are easy when times are good, Madam Speaker. The true test of your principles comes when times are difficult, and when the pressure arrived in the 1990s, the NDP abandoned many of their principles they claimed to defend. They overrode agreements. They centralized authority. They imposed solutions from above and—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Can I ask the members to come to order? You can take your conversations outside. Thank you.

Mr. Stephen Blais: That centralized government, that overriding of decisions: That's the same solution this Conservative government is suggesting they impose on municipalities in Ontario today.

Madam Speaker, I know the NDP are upset that I raised their troubled history, the only time they ever formed government in Ontario, a time so long ago that many Ontarians can't remember or were never born, but I raise it because Bill 100 reflects the same temptation that that NDP government faced: the temptation to believe that democracy is too slow, the temptation to believe that democracy is too frustrating, the temptation to believe that it's too inefficient, the temptation to believe that consultation is an inconvenience and the temptation to believe that local voices are obstacles, that fewer decision-makers and

more centralized authority will somehow solve complex problems.

History teaches us differently, Madam Speaker. We are here to practise democracy. I encourage everyone to vote for democracy this evening.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague from Orléans for his remarks this evening on a very important piece of legislation to ensure that we are improving efficiency in regional governance and working with our municipal partners to get more homes built and really get decisions made in a timely manner.

I know the opposition members, throughout this debate, have talked about how it's, in their opinion, undemocratic to have the appointment of these chairs. I was wondering if the member of the opposition thinks it's undemocratic that I couldn't vote for the current warden of Perth county.

Mr. Stephen Blais: The lack of democracy, the undemocratic nature of their bill, is to give strong powers to override the majority of council—to solely dictate budgets and staffing and hiring and all sorts of decisions—to an unelected official. That is where the lack of democracy comes from.

If my friend is truly that upset about not being able to vote for the warden of—

Mr. Matthew Rae: Perth county.

Mr. Stephen Blais:—Perth county, he should propose an amendment to this bill in legislation at committee to allow that to happen. And then, he can champion democracy just as strong as I am tonight. His conservative principles should tell him he should.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

MPP Jamie West: The member from Orléans talked about governments of the past. I wondered if he wanted to expand on the Liberal government that collapsed and lost party status because they forgot to listen to workers when they legislated workers with Bill 115, the education workers, which was the blueprint for Bill 124 of the Conservative government; or when they sold off Hydro One and, when the people of Ontario said, “Don't do that,” they sold off more of Hydro One, raising it to the incredibly expensive electricity rates that we're facing and trying to handle today; or maybe, when time after time after time, they legislated workers back to work without consulting those workers. Or maybe, they want to talk about the fact that they promised to bring an anti-scab legislation when they defeated the Harris government but then couldn't get it done in 15 years with a majority government.

Would the member like to comment on that?

Mr. Stephen Blais: The NDP time in government was so bad that the last time they formed government, the last time they were elected, I was in elementary school. Moreover—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Can I bring this House to order, please? The member has the floor.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Moreover, not only did they bankrupt the government when they were in power, they bankrupted Ontarians: 12% of the Ontario population was on welfare when you were in government. That's how bad the economy was: 12% of the population on welfare.

In today's numbers, that would be like 1.7 million Ontarians on welfare. Think about that for a second.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Hon. Steve Clark: Thanks, Speaker. It's great to see you in the chair this evening.

Through you, Speaker, I just want to ask the member for Orléans—he spent a significant amount of time railing against the concept of having an appointed regional chair. I want to ask him a very sincere question: When I was Minister of Municipal Affairs, I appointed the Honourable Jim Bradley as regional chair in Niagara. Do you think Jim Bradley was a Conservative yes-man?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Jim Bradley had been elected regional chair by the people of Niagara and he was not given executive strong powers to override the will of the majority of council.

That's where the democratic challenge really lies. If you are going to appoint someone and then tell them that they have basically exclusive executive authority over budgeting, over hiring and firing, over where roads can be built, over where subdivisions can be built, that is the lack of democratic principle.

Conservatives used to believe that the lower levels of government were more important, that decision-making should be rested to governments that are closest to the people. Now they believe power should be concentrated in the Premier's office.

1910

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

MPP Jamie West: I believe the member from Orléans served in city council in Ottawa before coming to the chamber. He talked about what this means to have weighted votes and to lose that voice of a city councillor. I wonder if you want to expand on what that means from first-hand experience of working in municipal affairs.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Regional governments by their nature are very large. They tend to have one, two or three large municipalities and a great number of smaller municipalities. If you give the majority of the weighting to the vote of the large—let's call them—urban centres in the regions, then the voice, the perspective and the will of the people in the smaller communities can quickly be drowned out.

That is the challenge with weighted voting. If we want to ensure that the view of small-town Ontario is protected, we need to ensure that their percentage of vote in the representation on the county council is protected.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: The member just mentioned, in his previous answer, smaller municipalities. I represent Halton Hills, a smaller municipality in the region of

Halton. The members of council are proportionate, so Halton Hills has three members of regional council where Oakville has a bigger—nine—and Burlington has seven. Often the larger municipalities outvote the smaller municipalities when it comes to the growth that's needed for our smaller northern municipalities in Halton region.

A regional chair that has this kind of power to make sure that the voices of smaller municipalities are heard even though they don't have the population voice I think is really critical. That's why I'm very supportive of this legislation. I wanted to ask the member to comment on that.

Mr. Stephen Blais: If there were something in this legislation that would actually require the appointed political hack chair of the county to actually take into consideration the voices of the smaller municipalities, that might actually be a good thing. But there is nothing in the legislation that requires that to happen. The only aspect of accountability in this legislation is that the political hack who is appointed chair of these regions will be accountable to the minister and to the Premier. Power and decision-making will flow down as opposed to decisions coming from the people up above.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: We've seen a trend. I think almost every bill that this government is putting forward is a power grab in so many ways. I see analogies with Bill 101, that just passed, about centralizing powers at Queen's Park. It started way back with the MZO power that gives the government the ability to do whatever they want, bypassing whatever the municipality wants. The health care is also being restructured to give more power to the minister to decide what's best for everyone. All the omnibus bills give the government broad power to make regulations to actually concentrate even more and dictate what's going to be applied without the scrutiny that allows us to do the same—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Local voices matter and especially an elected voice. I would like the member to explain why that is, why that elected voice matters.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I hope I get the Latin right: "Vox populi, vox Dei." The voice of the people is the voice of God. We need to listen to people in our communities. They know what's going on in their neighbourhoods; they know what's important to them and their families.

Conservatives used to believe in local decision-making and that local government was in fact the most important and closest form of government to the people. They continue to centralize power in the Premier's office. Given how much power they're grabbing here in downtown Toronto, I then have to question why the Premier needed a luxury business jet to travel across the province, because all the power is here in downtown Toronto. He doesn't need a business jet to travel anywhere because he's got all the power here in downtown Toronto.

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

Hon. Graydon Smith: Good evening to all. I must say, it's a refreshing change to watch the opposition and the third party have exchanges. We don't get to see that very often in here and it's like changing the channel on the TV a little bit. It's just a new program to watch—not a good program, but just a new program to watch.

Again, I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 100, the proposed Better Regional Governance Act. As has been discussed, at its core, this legislation is about making sure regional government works better for the people it serves. That's not in theory but on paper, in practice, where decisions affect real communities, real infrastructure, real housing outcomes.

As a member of a regional council for a number of years, as a deputy district chair for a number of years, I know that there are many things that work well on councils and things that can work better and reflect back that regional councils have existed for a very, very long time in Ontario with very little change to their structure and how they operate. I think we would agree there has been a significant amount of change in the decades that have gone by since the 1970s when regional governments were created and that taking a look at things and saying how can we do it better is not only timely in the geopolitical and economic situation that we find ourselves in these days but required to make sure that the relationships between all levels of government are working effectively.

But, Speaker, I've got to say, I've enjoyed listening to the debate. I always enjoy listening to the member from Orléans. In his remarks this evening, he is conflicted inside about, I think, how municipal politicians perform in Ontario. He had many good things to say about the politicians that spoke poorly of this bill and many bad things to say about politicians that spoke in favour of this bill at committee. I find that really sad honestly, because the member, of course, is a former municipal politician himself in the city of Ottawa. I commend him for his time on council and the work that was done there with his colleagues.

Of course, I have a great abiding and unyielding respect for all municipal politicians in Ontario. Some of them have been elected. Some of them, especially in regional governments, have been appointed. Some of them have been appointed by their councils. It is a mishmash of how someone comes to find themselves in the chair's position.

But at the end of the day, one of the prime functions of a regional government is to be able to not only carry the voices of the component municipalities that sit around the table and are represented, but also to be a very critical interface with the province. Because when we look at regional government and what they do, they exist to do the big things, but as they have told us and as we know, they can't do it alone.

They need assistance. They need support from the provincial government, which we have provided time and time again with any number of programs that we have seen to support those governments, to build the infrastructure

that's required to make the good things happen in their regions and the communities in those regions that are important.

So that relationship between both the provincial government and regional government and municipalities is paramount. We need to have a strong relationship that sets out clear objectives to make sure that communities can continue to grow and that decisions can be made in a timely fashion.

But again, when I look back on my own time—and again, I'll reflect on the member from Orléans's comments about municipalities and his conflict on which municipal politicians are good ones and which ones maybe aren't so good these days. It's hard not to look back on the 15 years when the party that he represents was in power and fundamentally did very little to help municipalities. I can say that as somebody that was in an executive position with a number of municipal groups. I can say that as a municipal leader.

So let's go through some of the disappointments that we saw in the provincial-regional-municipal relationship when what's now the third party was in power in Ontario.

1920

The first one I would reflect back on is their cancellation of the Northlander train service that served not only northern Ontario but also down through central Ontario. It was a core pipeline to allow people to travel from distant communities to the city that we're in today and home again, to travel not only for personal reasons but medical reasons—to get to appointments, to use that service to ensure that the things they needed to get done in their lives, the health of them and their family members, could be looked after.

Regional governments and municipalities spoke up and told the Liberal government of the day, "You can't cancel the service. It's too important," but they didn't listen. They cancelled that service despite the pleas of mayors from Kapuskasing to North Bay to myself and my colleagues in Huntsville. All up and down the line, they cancelled the service.

However, our government has listened. We're bringing that service back because we fundamentally respect the people of northern Ontario. We fundamentally want to work with regional governments, municipal governments, not casting aspersions at them for not buying into the doctrine of the day, like the member from across the aisle, but making sure that we're being a good partner in providing the things that communities need to thrive and survive. But, of course, as we know, they thought the north was a no man's land, so maybe that wasn't surprising.

They want to talk about the sanctity of elected municipal officials. Yet during their time in power, again, they ignored regional governments, ignored municipal governments, ignored county governments, bringing in some of the most damaging and, frankly, ridiculous legislation that wholly excluded municipalities from any decision-making whatsoever called the Green Energy Act. What a disaster that was from day one, not only driving up the cost of electricity for Ontarians—probably one of the things that

got them unelected—but also sowing division in communities, pitting municipal politicians against the provincial government, pitting regional politicians against the regional government.

My goodness, there's a bit of a trend developing here. I think there may be a fundamental disrespect of the power and importance of regional and municipal governance by the party across the way. Of course, let's not forget—because I don't want to leave our friends on the opposition out—you all were propping them up for a while.

They closed schools despite the pleas of regional and municipal governments, despite those elected officials who they say they hold in the highest of regard. They didn't listen to them. They didn't have a fundamental relationship built with regional and municipal governments across this province, like our government has built, to make sure that those concerns were heard and get addressed. So schools closed; communities were negatively impacted; people were upset—again, just chaos, all because they didn't actually want to listen to municipalities and the leaders of the day. They didn't want to work with municipalities, regional governments and the leaders of the day.

So I find the level of outrage here to be a little disingenuous and reaching new heights of hypocrisy. If the member wishes to dunk on municipal leaders—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Withdraw.

Hon. Graydon Smith: Withdraw.

If the member wishes to dunk on municipal leaders in Niagara or others in Niagara region for their budgets, maybe we should go back in time and take a look at the budgets of the city of Ottawa and see how many years they lowered taxes, made life more affordable for people in Ottawa or maybe even delivered a transit system that actually worked on time.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Can the member for Orléans come to order?

Hon. Graydon Smith: Speaker, I cannot tell you, as a municipal leader—again, at both the regional and municipal level—how many times I sat in front of different ministers from the previous Liberal government and asked for help, and how many times that help never came. Repeatedly, through different ministers, we asked for assistance.

But here's the amount of respect that we got from the previous government. When it came time to develop economic development zones and regions throughout Ontario, they very conveniently took a map, put some communities from southwest Ontario in, put some communities from eastern Ontario in and dealt with northern Ontario. They left my region out. They left the entire region of Muskoka out of economic development zones and opportunities in Ontario. We were a hole in a doughnut. Why? Because there was no fundamental relationship that they built with our regional government. They were not listening. There was not that linkage that put together

the ability for the province and the region and the component municipalities of that region to work together.

So what did we do? Luckily, we were able to pick up the phone, rally support from neighbours, made a bunch of calls to ministers of the day to try and get things made right. Begrudgingly, we ended up in an economic development zone that wasn't really appropriate for where we were geographically located. But they had better things to do than listen to regional government and municipalities, so they just decided to mollify and placate.

I say all of this because of the importance of Bill 100 and the relationship between the province, regional governments and municipalities, which this has the opportunity to strengthen and allow us to get those big things that I referenced earlier done. Water and sewer projects that are in the hundreds of millions of dollars, that enable homes to be built, that allow communities to grow—those projects don't have time to wait. Those projects need to move smartly so we can meet the moment.

It's a challenging moment. We all know why—because of what is going on geopolitically—so we are taking steps to improve the way we all do business together. That improvement leads to the improvement of the lives of the citizens within that region and within the municipalities in that region. More homes get built. More community centres get built. More arenas get built and those amenities and facilities that allow places to thrive and survive, that allow places to grow in a way where somebody says, "I want to live in that place."

Again, when I was mayor, I tried to do that in the community that I represented and struck out swinging time and time again with the previous government that didn't want to listen. But then there was an opportunity to get things done. I spoke with this government and the answer was, "How can I help? How can we help? How can we make your community better?"

At the core of this bill, that's what this is all about. Opposition, third party, anyone else wants to talk in hyperbolic language about democracy; at its core, democracy thrives and survives. The councillors around the table continue to make decisions and guide what their communities look like today and into tomorrow—with a chair that has the ability to not only provide input and guidance in those conversations and ensure that those conversations are happening in a way that recognizes the needs of the moment—but also has a linkage to the province to ensure that we fully understand what that moment looks like in those regions and what we can do to help.

1930

Speaker, time and time again, as I have demonstrated in some of my anecdotes tonight, municipal leaders pick up the phone and have conversations with members of this government, with our Premier, and the question we all ask is, "How can we help?" We respect that fundamental relationship and that opportunity to work together to make good things happen. It is our role; it is their role.

As we work towards the passage of this bill, I think what is clear is that if we create a consistency in how that relationship is formed—again, not varying how chairs are

selected from one region to another—and solidify a relationship right off the hop between councils, the chair and the province, really the first question out of everybody's mouth is, how do we get going? We're going to have a lot of excited councillors. The municipal sign-up period has begun as of May 1. There are people ready and willing to go, putting their name on a ballot, and I thank them for that. When they arrive at the council table, at the regional council table, should this bill pass, they are going to be greeted with a chair that is ready to meet that moment.

We can't succeed if we are not working more closely together. We can't succeed if we are not taking the time to make sure that infrastructure planning, growth coordination—all the things we need to do together to ensure that, again, the needs are being met not only today, but for tomorrow—are well-thought-out and well-planned-out. We're not looking at short time horizons where it's the project of the day that needs funding, and the question is, "How we get this done right now?" There's an opportunity to work together, again with our chairs and our councils, to plan for the future, to look forward five, 10, 15, or 20 years and say, "How is this region going to grow? How are we going to accommodate that growth? Look at the exciting opportunities before us."

Again, Speaker, I don't think we can rest on our laurels and assume that every model of government at the moment that it was created was perfection. It may have been perfect in that moment, but it always needs a critical eye and an opportunity for review. We have heard from leaders around Ontario that the need for that review and the time for that review is now.

We have, again, listened to municipal leaders and regional leaders, like I've demonstrated that we have done time and time again. There will be clear roles. There will be collaboration. There will be an opportunity to build better and stronger communities in the regions and communities across Ontario. We can streamline decision-making. We can take those moments that get stuck around the council table—and my goodness, I was part of getting stuck on more than one occasion and wished we could get unstuck, because the importance of the decisions that we were trying to make—whether it was around development charges, whether it was around capital planning or whether it was around the deployment of the dollars that we collect from our citizens in the most effective way—those decisions couldn't wait. But they had to wait, despite the fact that everyone had the best of intentions.

Let's take the opportunity to pass this bill, to provide tools for regional governments that will serve them well, that will allow them to thrive and prosper, that will allow councils and chairs of the province to work together for the betterment of their communities and the betterment of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: I was listening to the honourable associate minister of municipal. We don't have regional governance in the north, but for somebody looking in, I've

got to say it doesn't look very good, to be real honest with you.

We looked at how this government restricted access to information and now they're attacking—I'm not sure if it's the right word, "attacking," but they're removing the democracy of elected chairs, Speaker. To me, looking in—we're all elected here. All of us are elected democratically by our people that we represent. So I would like to hear him explain that. For somebody looking in that doesn't understand this, it doesn't look very good, because it's not very democratic.

Hon. Graydon Smith: I appreciate the question from my colleague across the aisle.

Listen, I think what we suffer from in Ontario today, when we look at how regional chairs end up in that position, is that it is extremely inconsistent. The member used the term "elected chairs," which occurs in some regions, not all regions. We've seen appointed chairs be successful in multiple regions, whether that's in York or in Peel—the aforementioned Chair Bradley in Niagara.

So I think if you take the wider view on what the member is asking about, you'll see a system that is inconsistent in its application and therefore potentially inconsistent in its results as well.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Stephen Blais: The member has just finished explaining to us how there are inconsistencies in how regional and county, I think he was getting at, governments are formed in Ontario and how the chair or the warden is chosen. Of course, there is inconsistency. A government could have leaned into the democratic side of the inconsistency, which is to elect the chairs and leaders of council. That would be the most democratic thing to do.

So my question to my friend from Muskoka is very simple: Does he believe that elections and the voice of the people is the most important part of a democracy?

Hon. Graydon Smith: I appreciate the member's question, and I do want to appreciate his time in municipal service to his constituents.

Again, we have an opportunity here to seize a moment and bring together a number of levels of government to create great outcomes for communities.

The councillors that sit around the table, whose voices will be strong and heard—because, my goodness, I've never been part of a council that didn't want to make sure their voice was strong and heard. A chair that is very much keyed in on what those issues are in that community—what his council or her council is telling them and making sure that they're fully up to speed and ready to go with that challenge that will inevitably involve assistance from the province.

We've got this great continuum of being able to make decisions and have conversations up and down the line and I think that will prove very, very beneficial for communities should this bill be passed.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I recognize the member for Thornhill.

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Speaker, thank you so much for the minister's remarks. I truly respect his experience, not only in this House, but also as an elected municipal leader, as a mayor.

I'm wondering if he could reflect and talk about—he understands how residents expect their local government to be efficient, focused and able to deliver results. I'm just wondering if he would provide a little more comment on how some regions', however, large and unwieldy councils have made it difficult to make timely decisions and add his perspective on getting progress and how a significant reduced size of regional council would make a difference for specific parts of Ontario.

Hon. Graydon Smith: Thank you very much to the member from Thornhill for the question. I appreciate the work that she does for her constituents every single day.

1940

I think people are most interested in results. I've been on a number of either councils, regional councils or boards that have supported municipal work and advocacy, and some of those boards get very, very large. The larger they get, the harder it is for all the voices to be heard and for decisions to be made and reached in a timely fashion that, again, meets the moment. So the opportunity that we can take to reduce some of the numbers of council and streamline that decision-making is also very important.

I think people are looking for the results. They're less concerned with how many people are around the table and how the results that those people make are playing out in real life.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. John Vanthof: I listened very closely to the remarks from the member for Parry Sound, or Muskoka-Parry Sound, and they were—

Hon. Graydon Smith: Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'll get it right eventually.

Anyway, they were very thoughtful. I know—I've worked with him for years—he has been a very great advocate for his community.

I disagree with the basic premise, though. We don't have two-tier government, but if we did have two-tier government in Timiskaming and the district chair was appointed by the province and had strong-mayor powers over those who were actually elected, I don't think it would go over very well.

I understand that the member wants things to move faster, but if a regional chair is appointed that the member doesn't agree with and he or she has strong-mayor power, would you as pro to this idea?

Hon. Graydon Smith: Thanks very much to the member across the aisle. We have had a number of great meetings over the years. I always enjoyed going in, seeing members from his caucus and having conversations about what was important to our municipality and those people that I represented.

I think, again, we need to look at what the moment needs, and the moment needs a very strong relationship—I don't use that word in a punny way; I mean that in a

serious way—between councils and chairs in the province. The one thing I know about councillors is, if they're not happy about something, they pick up the phone and make a call. I don't think that will be any different going forward.

But I know that through the process that we can bring to bear to pick chairs, we are going to find people that are eminently qualified for the job, ready for the task at hand and ready to help communities and the councillors that sit around that table make the decision.

We can always have more conversations about governance models for northern Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Stephen Blais: My friend from Bracebridge talked about how this will lead to more efficient governments, quicker decision-making etc. He failed to admit that the most important part of democracy is elections and the voice of people. That was a little bit stunning, Madam Speaker, because, of course, the general who storms the palace and installs his junta can also make decisions very quickly and achieve results with high efficiency.

But I would hope that he would not be supportive of that particular form of government, so I will give him one more opportunity to express his view on if elections and the will and voice of the people is the most important principle in a democratic society.

Hon. Graydon Smith: You know what? I think elections are exciting, fantastic and absolutely an important part of democracy. Reaching decisions that benefit communities is the ultimate expression of that, and there are a lot of ways that we can get to that point to reach a decision.

But the other thing that is very, very important in a democracy, around a council table and everywhere else is the building of strong relationships, the understanding of the task and the matter at hand and being able to move smartly and forward together. There's nothing in Bill 100 that is going to do anything other than encourage people to work together, make sure that the regions thrive and survive with leadership that is clear and consistent and with councils that, again, are very seized of a matter of representing their communities—

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to start by reading—I received a card in my office underneath my door today. I think other members may have received it as well. It was a thank-you card, and I want to read that. What it says is, MPP Armstrong, “It was so nice of you! Thank you for working so hard for the constituents of this province that are fighting for democracy! It is appreciated.” It's from C. Stewart. I want to thank C. Stewart for actually participating in a democratic process. Part of democracy is hearing from people wanting us to fight legislation that doesn't quite pass the test of real authenticity when it comes to what people are looking for, because in the committee process, if you recall, Speaker, there wasn't a lot of time given for the voices of our citizens to participate in a democratic process when it comes to this bill.

The other one I want to read is from Jalynn and Rebecca. I'm not sure if everyone got this email, but I received it. It says:

“Dear Ontario Legislator,

“I am writing you today to express my concerns for the new Bill 100 that is in discussion. While reading into Bill 100 I could not ignore the underlying displacement of power from the people. By removing the option for communities to vote on who they want as a regional chair is undemocratic, unacceptable, and a borderline fascist act. You are trying to take away the people's voice, take away our power, and if the bill passes you would have removed a foundation of democracy. It is one of our constitutional rights to have a say and opinion on who will represent us, especially if we already had the power to vote on that position.

“I ask of you to oppose this bill. We do not need someone just given to us. Picked from the interest of” the Premier “with no regards for the people. Philosopher of law Kent Roach, in his article *Dialogic Judicial Review and Its Critics*, praises Canada for its dialogic system of government. Because this bill has the ability to create stacked courts, you take away not only the people's voice, but you take away this dialogue, because we know the officials that” the Premier “will put into office will agree with him on his ideas. For the sake of democracy and to prevent fascism, oppose this bill.

“Thank you for reading. Please do what's right and what's in the best interest of your citizens/residents.

“Jalynn and Rebecca”

I think when they meant this bill about the judges—I mean, the government also wants to have the power to select judges, which is a very dangerous, dangerous thing to do, to start controlling courts, start controlling municipalities and get that power in a way that benefits you. We've seen this not just once but many, many times, Speaker.

I have to say, if this bill is what this government calls better governance, I'd hate to see what they think bad governance looks like, because Bill 100 is not about improving municipalities. It's not about efficiency, and it's certainly not about respecting local communities. This bill is about power: who has it, who loses it and who this government thinks deserves it—and spoiler alert, it's not the people.

Let's strip this down to its core. Under Bill 100, the government is taking away the right of Ontarians to elect regional chairs in communities like Niagara, Durham and Waterloo and replacing them with hand-picked appointees, appointees who will control budgets worth billions of dollars, appointees who can override elected councils, appointees who answer not to taxpayers, but to the Premier.

Speaker, this is not democracy. This is control from Queen's Park. The government wants us to believe that this is about clarity and efficiency. Efficiency for who? Because it's certainly not for the people paying the bills.

1950

What this creates is taxation without representation—property taxes set by someone you didn't elect, you can't question and you can't vote out. That should concern every single Ontarian. If it doesn't, it should, because we've already seen what happens when this government operates without transparency.

There are so many examples of that. We saw it with the greenbelt scandal. We saw originally that there was a recording that he was going to carve up the greenbelt. Then he came out and said he wasn't going to carve up the greenbelt. Then we saw a video that he was going to carve up the greenbelt. Then he came out and said he wasn't going to carve up greenbelt. Then they put legislation forward to do so.

This is about where insiders seem to get the very help and the heads-up about government decisions when it comes to the greenbelt, Speaker. Land changed hands, millions were made and the public was left in the dark.

Now imagine that same lack of transparency with centralized control over municipal budgets. Think about what that would look like.

Just by coincidence, this government has also made sure that ministers and the Premier's office are shielded from the freedom-of-information requests. This is about the government not wanting to release their phone records, but it's also a broader implication when they pass these freedom-of-information changes when it comes to things like the bill that we're talking about, 100. We're not going to have access to these records.

Unfortunately, the government's track record is questionable as to how they wheel and deal when they want to build homes, build infrastructure, or put up Ontario Place or Therme spa or Billy Bishop airport. It goes on.

They want more control over billions of taxpayer dollars and less ability for the public to find out how those decisions are made. Speaker, if that doesn't raise red flags, I don't know what will.

Let's talk about the appointments, because this government keeps asking us to trust their judgment. In Niagara—and we mentioned this before; I'm going to have to repeat it because I want my people of London–Fanshawe to know—they appointed a regional chair who was a Conservative candidate, Bob Gale. In the last election, the public chose not to elect a Conservative candidate, so he lost that election.

Then the Premier decided he should get appointed to the position of regional chair, despite the people making it clear they didn't want him and turning him down during that election. That's a very clear message. This is the type of appointee this government chooses to represent entire regions: somebody that the public rejects to represent them. How insulting, quite honestly.

The Premier's hand-picked, appointed chair starts up a controversial issue about amalgamation. He gets everybody worked up and then he resigns abruptly in March because of calls from the community over more controversy. And the Premier has the gall to call elected officials in Niagara "turkeys"—so uncalled for, so wrong.

So forgive us when we're a little skeptical when you say, "Trust us. We'll appoint the right people," because the track record speaks for itself. This is not about finding the best candidates; it's about rewarding insiders, failed candidates and political allies—people who didn't earn the job through the ballot box.

That brings me to something that we've heard in this House recently. The minister accused the leader of the official opposition of engaging in US-style politics. Speaker, that's a bold accusation from a government that's literally taking power away from voters and concentrating it in the hands of a few.

Because if we are going to talk about US-style politics, let's talk about the hallmarks: undermining democratic institutions, sidelining elected representatives and governing without accountability. That sounds a lot more like Bill 100 than anything we've ever heard from this side of the House.

You can't claim to defend democracy while actively dismantling it and you cannot accuse others of authoritarian tendencies while giving yourself the power to appoint leaders, override councils and control local budgets. That contradiction is impossible to ignore.

Speaker, people across the province are noticing a pattern. This is the same government that cut Toronto city council in half in the middle of an election, the same government that took away ranked ballots in London, Ontario. That was a decision of the city, and you overturned that and said, "No more ranked ballots." They also had legislation to dissolve regional Peel and Mississauga and Brampton and Caledon, but then subsequently you reversed it. This is the pattern of this government: continually interfering with municipalities.

When you make decisions that you have to reverse, it doesn't instill confidence in the public; it instills questions as to how can we, as elected officials, sitting in this wonderful place here, can decide that—and this is a majority government. We raised flags about the Peel region amalgamation. We raised flags about it, and it's always dismissed: "You're overreacting. It's not really what you're saying it is"—it truly was. And then what happens? They don't consult. It's the same thing with this Bill 100 in the Niagara area: They're not consulting.

It's the same government who imposes strong-mayor powers, allowing minority rule, the same government that's repeatedly had its legislations challenged in court and found to be unconstitutional—there have been many examples of that. Time and time again, they push the limits of what they can get away with, and now, Bill 100 goes even further. It doesn't just weaken local democracy; it replaces it.

Let's not pretend municipalities asked for this. At committee, we heard loud and clear, from municipalities, advocacy groups, organizations like the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. They said, "Don't do this." That is a quote. They said decisions about governance should be made locally. They said weighted voting should not be imposed from above. They said that strong-mayor powers, especially for unelected appointees, would make the

democratic deficit even worse. And what did this government do? They ignored them—ignored consultations, ignored the evidence, ignored the people. Because it's never about listening; it was about control. This is about taking over municipalities across Ontario, deciding who leads them, how they operate and how they spend their money, not as a partner, but as a boss. But municipalities are not subsidiaries of the provincial government. They are democratically elected governments in their own right, and they deserve respect, not micromanagement.

Speaker, this bill does not solve the problem the government claims it will. It doesn't build homes, it doesn't lower costs, it doesn't improve services. What it does is concentrate power, reduce accountability and create the perfect condition for decisions to be made behind closed doors.

And we know what happened with the greenbelt scandal. Those decisions are now being investigated by the RCMP, and in order to sideline the evidence that can come forward, the government presents freedom-of-information laws that the public can't access. And many of the issues that have come through is because journalists have dug into those issues.

So when we combine that with a government already under investigation for how it handles insider information, when you combine that with a pattern of secrecy, when you combine that with the willingness to override democratic norms, you don't get better governance; you get a system that people have every reason to distrust.

Speaker, democracy is not an inconvenience to be managed. It is the foundation of how we govern. Once you start taking it apart piece by piece, it is very difficult to put back together.

Bill 100 takes us in the wrong direction. It takes power away from people who pay their taxes and live in the communities—and they deserve a voice—and it hands that power to a government that has not shown it can be trusted. That's why we will oppose this bill, and that's why the people of Ontario deserve better.

I'm going to just quickly finish with my five minutes, a little bit about—I was an insurance broker before I became an elected official, for 25 years. In our office, we had what's called risk management. You had to deal with your customers in a way that you minimized any kind of loss, that way you wouldn't actually cost the company money. You had to make sure that you had the right coverage and document your files if they refused it.

2000

When I look at this government and their behaviour, if they were working for a company and they mismanaged the risk assessment—let's pretend that's the legislation. You're supposed to provide some risk management around your legislation—how it's going to affect people, what's the probability of a lawsuit, what's the outcome of losing, how much is it going to cost.

If we didn't add, let's say sewer backup on a property and the person didn't decline that sewer backup and they had a loss where there was a sewer backup, and the insurance company could not find documentation to say,

“Hey, you were offered that coverage, you declined it, therefore, you're not covered.” But when that documentation is not found, guess who's on the hook to pay for that loss? It's the broker, it's the insurance company because the employee didn't do their job.

When this government creates legislation, like Bill 124, and it's deemed unconstitutional and there's huge money attached to that, that is mismanagement of funds. If we were working in an insurance company and we had a loss that created that kind of payout, I would be fired because you don't do that. You don't sell a policy without the proper coverage because you're exposing the company to a liability that they have to pay for.

When we create legislation that you expose the government and the people that you're supposed to protect with bad legislation and you have to pay for it—like Bill 124 because it was unconstitutional—that is just bad governance. That's why we can't really trust this government's judgment. They don't consult; they don't put out plans ahead of time. It's like they think about an idea and then they hope it works. There's a pattern, also, of behaviour when it comes to their writing legislation, they must have a template.

When I was in insurance, we had a worksheet and we would check every coverage when we spoke to someone to ensure they had that coverage so they had full insurance. These guys must have a private members' bill worksheet or a government bill worksheet—check, make sure we ensure that we have no liability and we can't be sued for liability. Make sure that we check for that; check that we make sure we take the power away from people. They must have a template. Every time they write legislation, that's how it comes across. They waive any lawsuits against the crown or the people they appoint. They concentrate their control into their own government and don't allow municipalities to govern themselves.

I say to this government: We are here tonight, and I am happy to work any hours that we are supposed to in order to make sure we serve the people that we were elected to serve—that is not a question in any way. I look in this room and there's not as many people that I used to work with a few years ago. One of them is the House leader, one of them is the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane and I think that's it. Those are the three.

The member, when he was in the official opposition, remembers—I'm sure he remembers—

Hon. Steve Clark: I don't know; my memory's fading.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I can remind you.

The thing is, we don't want history repeating itself. People who have that intellectual experience about how to create good legislation and how to hold governments accountable—because when we were in this Legislature, one of the scandals that we held the Liberals accountable for was Ornge ambulance. That was a total mess. Oh, my gosh, it was incredible.

This is what we're doing now, and this government needs to pay attention. The new members may not realize how this is actually going to roll out and affect people's lives, but people who have been here before, we're

sounding the bells. Don't put this through. Elect the regional chair, that's what the public deserves.

I thank the members for listening.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you very much for your presentation and using almost the entirety of the 20 minutes. I appreciate that at 8 o'clock at night.

One of the things that you mentioned was about the concentration of power. You also mentioned the government's frequency to exclude the ability to sue them. We've seen a Premier who wants a luxury business jet to travel around like a monarch. So we've got travelling like a monarch, we've got changing the nature of elections—that's kind of like a monarch—we've got the doctrine of sovereign immunity—you can't be sued, kind of like a monarch. I'm wondering if, as time goes by, you can express your thoughts on how this government continues to move further and further away from our democratic traditions.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I really think we've hit it on the head. When we look across the border at how power can be abused and concentrated in one person, I feel there are very many similarities to what's happening here. When this government decides to use the "notwithstanding" clause, not just once, but a few times—wielding power. The more we go down this road, the more watered down that people are going to understand that they have a voice in democracy and they can make change.

And there have been times, like the plane—this government decided that we wanted a \$30-million plane—where there was enough pressure that he reversed that decision. But there's got to be some conscience when it comes to legislation that just keeps moving forward like a sausage factory here, and it's got to stop.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for their remarks. I also want to talk about consistency, which is something that's so important, especially in government. Consistency, reliability and accountability matter, and this legislation will provide just that. It's about structure, particularly in high-growth areas like Simcoe and Niagara, where it's very outdated and the systems have created massive inefficiency in decision-making, and regional government, to be quite honest with you, is quite bloated.

This legislation ensures that regions are better aligned with provincial norms, and they improve clarity. If the member opposite believes that inconsistency across regional government systems is preferable, can they explain what their approach would be for a faster housing approval, better infrastructure coordination and more predictable outcomes for taxpayers?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I really appreciate the question, but I think the consistency as opposed to the inconsistency is this government's failure to manage legislation and failure to manage funds. Because consistently, when you look at the COVID business grant—there was an

Auditor General report—they gave 14,500 businesses grants that weren't even eligible for, and that cost taxpayers \$210 million. They waived that with a stroke of a pen. They didn't go after that. Then, the Skills Development Fund: There was another consistent mismanage of funds.

There's consistency where this government puts legislation: They have to reverse it. If you want consistency and to correct inconsistency, follow the process, get people on side, get partnerships, build partnerships with the people that you're affecting with legislation and get it done correctly. Then you're going to have consistency in inconsistency.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I want to thank my colleague for the debate there, and I want to ask her about Bill 100. It doesn't just change how regional councils are structured; it allows provincial ministers to appoint, empower and remove the heads of regional governments, which effectively replaces the will of local voters, with the judgment of a single cabinet minister.

This is at a time where democratic institutions are under pressure not just here in Ontario but across North America. I wanted to ask my colleague about what the NDP would see as the biggest challenges in this piece of legislation, in the other pieces of legislation where we've seen an erosion of democracy and what we would oppose and want to reverse.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I think and I observe that if we give one person the type of power and they don't know how to use it, that becomes a problem—as I look over the border. As a Premier or even a Prime Minister, whoever is the leader—a mayor—you should have checks and balances to check you and your power and your laws and your changes to how you're going to run a democratic process and not just have power for one person. It's intimidation. It doesn't bring people together. And it's not about efficiency. It's about control, and it's about the government of the day getting what they want in a roundabout way, and that's not correct.

2010

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Stephen Blais: We've talked about, and you touched on this quite a bit during your presentation, how the government is breaking tradition, they're breaking democratic norms—I think they may have just broken a desk over here in the background, but that's something for them to deal with with the Clerk, maybe, later tonight. They like to break things here in Ontario.

I'm wondering, from your point of view, what the government should do to try to start to fix things instead of breaking them all the time.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm going to give you examples of where I think the government went in the wrong direction. For an example, the Beer Store contract. He broke that contract, right? Do you know how much that cost us? It was \$225 million. Then he challenged the

federal carbon tax and he lost that case. That cost approximately \$30 million. Even in that vein, if you recall when he tried to put stickers on the gas tanks to fine gas businesses if they charged the carbon tax—those stickers slipped off.

So there are many things this government doesn't know how to fix and continually breaks: trust, contracts and the bank when it comes to taxpayers' dollars.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Lorne Coe: In debating Bill 100, Better Regional Governance Act, 2026, you can't help but talk about regional coordination, and I talked a little bit about that last night. Because the reality is that growth doesn't stop at municipal borders, does it? And fragmented governance often leads to duplication, delays and missed opportunities for building critical infrastructure. This legislation is intended to improve that coordination so that regional governments like mine, the region of Durham, can act as effective facilitators between local councils and provincial priorities.

So I would like the member from London–Fanshawe, please, to talk a little bit about what specific governance model does the member opposite suggest that could ensure faster, more consistent and more reliable decision-making across entire regions.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I think there are people who build relationships and then people who tear down relationships, and legislation can do both of those things. If this government wants to build homes, they need to build relationships with the municipalities and the people who build homes and the people who need homes to make sure that you actually have a plan that is thought out. There are too many examples under this government where they've been rushing and you're not doing what you say you're going to do.

Building relationships with municipalities, building laws that actually work with the people who are supposed to be building what you want them to build—forcing them to do something, it's generally going to hurt a relationship, and this Premier hurts and doesn't build relationships. If you're not on his side, he's against you. That's not how you build things. That's not how you make a healthy democracy and build a province that—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I recognize the member from Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: The government member over there said that this bill will bring predictability. Judging by the record of this Conservative government here, they're going to be appointing puppets to run regional councils. So do you not think—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Is that a question or a point of order?

Mr. Chris Glover: This is a question.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Questions is over.

Point of order?

Mr. Chris Glover: I'd like to welcome to the Legislature, Deirdre Parkin, who is the legislative assistant of our member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay.

I'd also like to welcome to the Legislature my son, Jordan Sahay, and his partner.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Point of order?

MPP Jamie West: I'd just like to correct my record. This morning, when I was talking about OLIP interns in my office, I accidentally said Lindsey instead of Meaghan. They were both there at the same time and I confused their names while rhyming them off. So I would just like to correct that for Hansard.

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

MPP Tyler Watt: Good evening, everyone. It's great to be here at 8:15 at night. You get the pleasure of listening to my voice over the next 20 minutes.

Better Regional Governance Act: I think a more appropriate title is "power without accountability act." This is a power bill. It cancels the right of more than 5.5 million Ontarians to elect their own regional leadership, hands their councils to provincial appointees with executive powers and shrinks the very councils meant to hold them in check—all without meaningful local consultation. This is the strong-mayor experiment expanded.

This bill empowers the minister to appoint and remove the heads of council in eight regions, and authorizes the minister to make regulations prescribing the powers and duties of these appointed chairs.

The government has confirmed they intend to grant strong-chair powers mirroring the strong-mayor powers—we should call them "super mayors"—including the ability to pass certain bylaws with the support of just one third of council.

Niagara regional council is cut from 32 members to 13, eliminating 19 directly elected regional councillors. Simcoe county will be cut from 32 to 17—and a section that was added in committee expands ministerial control to the lower-tier councils of Thorold, Port Colborne and Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Let's look at the numbers here: We have eight regional county heads of council that the minister can appoint; 5.5 million Ontarians losing the right to vote for their regional chair; one third council support needed for certain bylaws under these strong-chair powers; 48% of strong mayors who had used the powers as of March 31, 2025—I'll get into that later—and zero other Western democracies that allow bylaws to pass—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Let's keep the conversations down. The member has the floor, and I need to hear him. Thank you.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you—with minority council support. So Ontario is really leading the way in democracy there.

Through this bill, the minister will have the power to appoint the regional heads of council in Durham, Halton, Muskoka, Niagara, Peel, Waterloo, York and the warden

of Simcoe county. Rather than letting the citizens of those regions decide their own representatives—what we call democracy—this minister has decided he knows what and who is best for them.

This cannot have come at a worse time. The 2026 municipal elections are under way as of this week. Section 10.1 of the Municipal Elections Act, as re-enacted by this bill, voids the nominations of every candidate who has filed to run for these head-of-council positions on the day the act receives royal assent.

It's got me thinking, too: This reminds me of something. Remember, back in 2018 one of the very first things that the Ford government did was that they gutted Toronto city council by half. These people were already mid—

Interjections.

MPP Tyler Watt: You shouldn't be clapping for that because it ended up costing us millions and millions of dollars.

The whole rationale behind this cut, besides the Premier's probable revenge on the city, was that it was supposed to help save money. But it ended up costing millions more of dollars with less local representation. This is very similar to me. By a stroke of the minister's pen, candidates who have campaigned, raised funds and engaged voters are simply removed from the ballot.

I didn't think this government could get any less democratic, but here we are, weakening freedom-of-information laws, spending \$29 million of taxpayer money on a private jet and taking over school boards, just to name a few of the anti-democratic moves that this government continues to make. So when I hear about consistency, yes, they are consistently undemocratic, and this is just another example.

2020

We spend more time here putting through these bills that centralize power to the chosen minister of the day. I thought that Conservatives were supposed to be about small government—that we leave local democracies and municipalities alone—but this government has done nothing but meddle in municipalities since they were elected in 2018. Why are they saying that they know best? That we can rule from Queen's Park and that these regions, the municipalities, just have to accept it? They're the ones who live there—they're the ones who are voting, who should be representatives—but this is going to throw everything off.

And Bill 100 does not exist in isolation. It is just the latest entry in a clear pattern by this government to dismantle independent democratic institutions and centralized control at Queen's Park. I can think of Bill 33, for example, and how much power is being centralized to the minister of post-secondary. And what was just passed today with Bill 101: again, everything going to the education minister, able to dictate what school boards say, what books are going to be allowed in classes—who knows what else they're going to do with this power?

This entire session, we have just been arguing bills that are centralizing power to the ministers. I don't know what the end game is here, because now you've centralized

power in education and post-secondary, and now this. So what's the endgame here? What are we going to see after this? I certainly don't trust this government to operate with this much power. No one should have this much power.

Let's look at the centralization pattern: Eight school boards covering roughly 1,600 schools are now under provincial supervision, following the passage of Bill 33. This government has weakened the FOI laws, restructured the judicial selection process and amalgamated conservation authorities. Bill 100 now extends that centralization to municipal governance in eight regions, covering more than 5.5 million Ontarians.

Here's a quote for you from the mayor of Fort Erie: "This result is, with the appointment of the eight regional chairs, a consolidation of power. And that seems to be an overriding theme through much of what's going on."

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario, which represents all 444 Ontarian municipalities, delivered remarks to the standing committee—a rare treat when bills go to committee, by the way; it's always fun when we get to go in there—calling the combination of provincially appointed heads of council with strong chair powers "fundamentally undemocratic."

They are not alone. The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus, representing 15 upper-tier and single-tier counties across western Ontario has formally opposed the bill. Caledon council passed a motion on April 21 calling on the province to amend it. Durham region launched its own public consultation survey from May 4 to May 18, because the province ran none. The mayor of Fort Erie has called it a "consolidation of power."

It's funny; I was in clause-by-clause this past week, and whenever I brought up these things, I was basically told by the government side, "No, everyone wants this. Everyone has told us, 'We want this.'" So they just shut their ears to when people say that they oppose this or that they want things changed.

The Ontario Liberals put forward amendments that would improve this bill, and every single one of them was voted down. So the bill is going through as-is, and this is a pattern we see constantly with this government: Again, it rarely goes to committee, and when it does, it's almost like it's just for show, so they can say, "Oh, we consulted. Yes, we had key stakeholders there who told us what they want, and then we'll reference the ones that actually agree with us, but we will ignore everything else." Isn't the point of committee and clause-by-clause to put amendments forward? These were serious amendments that actually would improve this bill, but alas, all were ignored.

If municipalities are partners with the province, as every government, why are the partners only finding out about a bill that strips them of their elected leadership when it shows up in the Legislature?

It is important to note exactly how the strong-chair powers, or super mayors, will be enacted. The bill itself authorizes the minister to make regulations prescribing the powers and duties of the appointed head of council. The government has publicly confirmed these regulations will mirror strong-mayor powers, hence the term "super mayors."

That means the appointed chair will be able to control the budget, veto bylaws, hire and fire senior staff, set the agenda and pass certain bylaws with the support of only one third of council. It's like we're just putting in our chosen people to enact the agenda of the provincial government.

In what other democratic system do unelected officials given executive powers override elected representatives and pass laws with only the support of a third of their Legislature? Seriously, think about that. The answer is none. No other established western democracy permits laws to be passed with only minority legislative approval. This is a mechanism Ontario invented in 2022. Bill 100 exports it to the regional level, but with one critical difference: The chair wielding it has not been elected by anyone.

I'm going to go through some of the government's claims in my last 10 minutes here. The minister said, "The legislation does not replace local voices; in fact, it supports them." Well, here's the reality: The bill removes the rights of more than 5.5 million Ontarians to elect their regional chair, voids existing 2026 nominations and lets that unelected chair pass certain bylaws with one-third council support. It seems to me that that's actually the opposite.

Government claim: Strong-chair powers will speed up housing. Well, government data shows that 27 of the 50 largest Ontario municipalities missed their 2024 housing targets, despite those strong-mayor powers put in place. Ontario civil service tracking shows only 48% of strong mayors had used those powers as of March 31, 2025.

Government claim: Extending these powers to the regional level is the logical next step. Here's the reality: Niagara region was already stripped of its planning powers by this government over a year ago. The region cannot block or delay housing approvals it no longer has authority over.

Another government claim: Smaller councils mean lower costs for taxpayers. This is what I brought up earlier when you started clapping at this. The mayor of Fort Erie has noted that eliminating 19 directly elected Niagara regional councillors saves roughly \$1 million, less than one quarter of 1% of the region's budget, and says it's not about money. But we know that when the city of Toronto council was cut it ended up costing the city millions and millions more dollars because of the absolute chaos that it created.

Government claim: Ontario has the right number of councillors. The reality: AMO has confirmed Ontario has nearly 4,000 residents per councillor, which is the second-highest ratio in Canada after BC, and triple the national average. Reducing further weakens, not improves, representation.

Again, we can't govern municipalities and local areas from Queen's Park. That is what the purpose of local and municipal government is.

Since these chairs will receive mayor-level executive powers but will never be chosen or voted on by the public, Ontarians would expect at the absolute minimum that they be non-partisan, that they have senior administrative ex-

perience and that they have no ties to this government. We all know that's not going to happen. During committee hearings my colleague from Ajax had the opportunity to question one of the individuals being floated as a future regional chair in Niagara. When asked if he had ties to the Premier and this government, he confirmed that he is a PC Party executive.

Niagara regional council is being cut from 32 members to 13. Those 19 directly elected ones, some of whom have been serving their communities for decades, will be eliminated. The new council will consist of only 12 lower-tier mayors and the chair appointed by the minister.

Simcoe county council is being cut from 32 members to 17. Both reductions were imposed against the explicit votes of the very councils that they affect. The result: fewer councillors covering far larger populations. Each councillor will be responsible for more residents and more communities.

2030

Both Niagara regional council and Simcoe county council voted against these reductions. Councillors who know their regions, who were elected by their residents, said no. This bill ignores them and does it anyway. Yet all I heard in committee was, "No, everyone wants us to do it." If this government truly believed in a collaborative government, if it truly viewed municipalities as partners, as it claims, it would not legislate council size against the expressed vote of the very councils affected.

Now, I want to talk about the housing argument for this. The minister likes to say, "Well, Bill 100 will help get homes built." He will tell us that regional governments are standing in the way and that strong chair powers are needed to cut red tape. Every one of those claims is contradicted by this government's own evidence. Strong mayor powers were rolled out in 216 municipalities, and, according to internal Ontario public service tracking, only 48% of the 46 mayors who hold those powers used them by March 31, 2025. Of Ontario's 50 largest municipalities, 27 missed their 2024 housing targets despite having strong mayor powers.

A StrategyCorp survey of the 32 municipal chief administrative officers found that the power had "little to no impact" on housing construction, while creating serious risks of partisan interference in professional municipal administration. Niagara region had its planning powers removed by this government over a year ago, as I mentioned. This region can't delay housing approvals as it no longer has the authority.

So what exactly is this bill speeding up, apart from getting your own chosen people into positions of power that they were not elected to be in, to help push this government's partisan agenda on the local municipal level? That is not democratic, and I'm not buying the reasons that they're trying to sell that this bill is for. There are so many other things that we should be focusing on right now. What sector isn't in crisis? Our health care system is in crisis; our education system is in crisis; cost-of-living crisis; we have a mental health crisis. And here we are tonight debating how we're going to make local municipalities

less representative, with more power coming from Queen's Park.

So if this isn't about housing, what is it about? Strip away the housing rhetoric and the picture becomes clear. This bill does not change a single zoning rule. It does not improve a single permit. It does not break ground on a single home. What it does do is it gives one minister in one office the power to install eight people of his choosing into the leadership of regions covering more than 5.5 million Ontarians. It gives those eight people executive control over budgets and staff, and it lets them do it with the agreement of only a third of the people that the public actually elected. That is taking away power from the people.

This is a power bill at its core. This is municipal Ontario across party lines, regions and political tradition—traditions—it's getting late; I'm tripping over my words—standing together against a fundamental attack on local democracy. Here's a quote from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario: "The combination of provincially appointed heads of council with strong chair powers is fundamentally undemocratic. It erodes the ability for local residents to hold their elected officials to account."

Here's a quote from Marcus Ryan, chair, Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus: "Local leadership matters—especially in rural and county systems where collaboration across municipalities is critical. A one-size-fits-all approach does not reflect how counties operate or the realities of our communities." Really, you can apply that statement to everything they're doing right now, especially with the education bill.

Here's a quote from the mayor of Fort Erie: "I happen to believe that if you have more elected representatives, that's actually better for the residents, because you've got more access to the people that are making the decisions that affect their daily lives."

In my last minute and a half here, in my closing statements: This government loves to claim it is protecting Ontario. To the residents of Durham, Halton, Muskoka, Niagara, Peel, Waterloo, York and Simcoe, it doesn't look like protection; it looks like control. We are watching this government try to override democracy itself. More than 5.5 million Ontarians will lose the right to elect their regional leadership. They will lose the ability to influence major regional decisions on housing, transit and health care. Councillors will lose the authority to choose their own chair. Candidates already running in 2026 will be removed from the race by ministerial decree. And now, even three lower-tier councils will see their composition rewritten by ministerial regulation. And it will all happen under the banner of "better regional governance"—a name so misleading that it should be entered into Hansard as evidence of the doublespeak this minister has built upon this government's reputation.

This bill should be renamed for what it actually does: "the better regional bureaucratic red tape act," "the Premier's hand-picked chairs act" or, most accurately, "the bill that cancels your vote act."

Ontarians elected this government to build homes; not to consolidate political power.

We will be voting against Bill 100, and we urge every member of this House who still believes in the simple proposition that voters should choose their own leaders to do the same.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. Lorne Coe: I think it's time we start speaking about accountability and results.

If the member from Nepean is not supportive of strengthening regional leadership structures, including clear roles for regional chairs and improved coordination mechanisms, what specific alternative governance model would he propose to ensure accountability for housing delivery targets?

People I speak to and represent—and have for 10 years, and in the time I served for seven at regional council—expect governments at every level to be responsible not just for planning, but for actually delivering results.

This legislation is designed to ensure leadership at the regional levels is focused, decisive and accountable for outcomes. If they reject this approach, how would the member ensure that housing commitments are not simply aspirational but actually delivered on time and at scale?

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you to the member for that question.

I suggest that you read the amendments that the Ontario Liberals put forward in committee. We gave you real solutions to help actually address the many faults in this bill. The amendments we put forward were there to help. We want to see houses being built. We want to see red tape cut. But this doesn't do any of that.

You talk about accountability, but you're installing a hand-picked person of your choice, who we already know is probably going to be someone from the PC Party itself—install them into these positions of power, remove the ability of local representatives and the residents there from having their say and voice. That doesn't sound like accountability to me. That sounds like control.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I appreciate the member's information that he provided. He talked about housing targets and how the government has this lofty goal and, unfortunately, we didn't meet that either.

The fact that we're talking about regional chairs and appointments—chances are there are going to be amalgamations, there are going to be cuts to the representation of people out there.

I go back to just three years ago—about the dissolution of the Peel and the Mississauga and the Brampton and the Caledon area, and then they had to reverse it.

What could they have done better this time so that they can actually get the results they're claiming to propose with this legislation?

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you to the member for that question.

Of course, their proposal is to have unelected regional chairs with those same powers. What do you think about that?

MPP Tyler Watt: Again, I don't think we should be taking our advice from examples from the United States at this point.

There is nothing more powerful than a democracy that's strong, and that comes from those who vote, where they live and choose their representatives—not the government from downtown Toronto placing their own people there to make decisions and mess with that area.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Further debate? I recognize the member for Mushkegowuk—James Bay.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Merci, madame la Présidente. Puis, je vois que ma collègue est toute contente; elle voulait faire certain que je me lève.

I rise today to speak to the Better Regional Governance Act. Now, to be honest, there is not a whole lot in this bill that reflects life in northern Ontario. Once again, the north is an afterthought. Once again, we're left out of the legislative priorities of this government. But more than that, this bill is not really about making regional governance better. It's about power and who gets it.

Madame la Présidente, j'écoutais les débats, j'écoutais le monde parler, puis vous savez que nous autres dans le Nord, on n'a pas ce système à deux niveaux, si je peux utiliser—puis qu'on entend qu'ils veulent « appointer » les « regional chairs », ce qu'ils appellent les « regional chairs », les présidents régionaux. Puis qu'on entend qu'ils veulent leur donner, en plus de ça, un pouvoir accru comme ils l'ont fait pour les maires des grosses villes, ou qu'on a vu dans certaines communautés aussi, des municipalités du nord de l'Ontario aussi qui ont eu des pouvoirs accrus. N'oubliez pas, là, que ce monde-là va être « appointé » et non élu.

S'il y a de quoi qu'on sait, c'est qu'on est dans un pays démocratique, que tout le monde qui est ici, assis à Queen's Park, ou assis dans nos chaises, qu'on est là et on représente—on a tous été élus démocratiquement, que ce soit par quatre voix ou que ce soit par 1 000 voix ou que ce soit par 10 000 voix, ça n'a pas grande importance, mais on a été élus. Il faut qu'on réalise comment c'est important.

Puis on voit que c'est un gouvernement qui aime tellement s'ingérer dans la politique municipale. C'est plus fort que lui, le premier ministre; il faut qu'il se mette les deux mains dans la politique municipale. Il est obsédé par la politique municipale. S'il l'aimait tant que ça, pourquoi est-ce qu'il s'est présenté en province? Il y a une raison pourquoi il y a le fédéral, la province et les municipalités. Mais on voit qu'il s'ingère constamment—puis en s'ingérant, par exemple, il veut contrôler encore plus les municipalités. Il veut les contrôler parce qu'il veut « appointer » son propre monde—pas que le monde ne décide qui il veut avoir comme « chair », ou comme présidence de ce gouvernement à deux niveaux.

Tu te demandes encore quelles sont les raisons, mais ils nous disent : « Faites-nous confiance. » On n'a rien qu'à

penser à—leur fait-on confiance après ce qu'ils ont fait, pourtant? Puis j'écoutais certains députés dire : « Il faut être "accountable." Il faut que ça fonctionne. Il faut être transparent. » Bien, c'est drôle. Le premier ministre a été dit de donner accès à son téléphone cellulaire—pas par n'importe qui, mais par la Cour. Il ne l'a pas fait. Au contraire, il l'a emmené en appel. Il a perdu. Je ne sais pas combien de millions ça nous a coûté, mais je sais que c'est venu avec des coûts assez additionnels.

2050

Il a perdu la décision. Il a perdu la décision en Cour d'appel. Mais ça n'arrête pas là. Bien voyons donc, qu'est qu'on va faire? On va légiférer. On parle de « accountability »; on dit « transparence ». Prenez le premier ministre, qui joue les jeux. C'est lui qui joue le pire. Il va légiférer pour se protéger, pour qu'il ne le donne pas. Puis il va rétro-activement, en plus de ça, jusqu'à 2018. Puis on essaye de nous faire la morale, puis on essaye de nous faire la leçon quand ça vient à la transparence. Puis quand tu dis : « Non, non, faites-nous confiance », je m'excuse.

C'est difficile de vous faire confiance quand vous légiférez pour l'accès à l'information. C'est de ça qu'on parle : il a légiféré pour se protéger. Si ça ce n'est pas un manque de transparence ou un manque—à son propre pouvoir. Mais il essaye de nous faire la leçon, par exemple, que « non, non, on va régler le problème municipal avec tous les problèmes, c'est parce que ça marche—nous, on est mieux placés, on est là, on comprend mieux que les régions, que les personnes. Non, on est mieux placés, on est le gouvernement provincial. Vous ne savez pas qu'est qu'il y a—il faut que ça avance, ça va faire bâtir plus de logements. »

Je peux vous dire, toutes les décisions que vous avez prises, les maisons, elles, ne se bâtissent pas plus vite. Ça, c'est une réalité. On est la pire des juridictions quand ça vient au logement.

Ce n'est pas une affaire pour se péter les bretelles, ça. Mais c'est la réalité en Ontario, là. Ils disent des belles paroles, mais quand tu commences à regarder en détail puis tu commences à regarder ce qu'il en est et ce qu'ils font—bien, écoute, excusez-moi, mais, après ça, vous nous demandez de vous faire confiance? Ça ne va pas loin.

Fait que moi, je ne l'ai pas, ça, dans le Nord, mais je peux vous dire, moi—puis je pense à mon collègue de Timiskaming—Cochrane qui le dit très bien. Il dit qu'une gouvernance à deux niveaux, chez nous, je ne sais pas si ça fonctionnerait parce qu'on connaît nos maires, aussi. Parce que moi, je peux vous dire, les maires que j'ai dans ma région, si moi je pense que je suis le député et je peux m'ingérer dans le municipal, ils vont me dire : « Bourgouin, dans ta cour. Tu as été élu comme moi, et moi j'ai été élu maire. Mêlé-toi de tes affaires », et avec raison.

Ils ont été élus démocratiquement par les concitoyens pour gérer le municipal, comme moi j'ai été élu démocratiquement au provincial et puis comme le député fédéral a été élu. Écoute, n'importe qui assis ici, on ne peut pas s'ingérer dans le fédéral. Ils vont te le dire : « Ce n'est

pas ta juridiction; mêle-toi de tes affaires. On a un député qui est là pour ça. »

Mais, c'est drôle, ça ne s'applique pas à vous autres. Ça ne s'applique pas. Au contraire, on est les deux mains dedans puis on veut éliminer la transparence, on veut faire certain qu'on contrôle. C'est tout du contrôle, ça, parce qu'on veut mettre le monde qu'on veut pour prendre des décisions. Puis en plus de ça, on va leur donner du pouvoir accru. Faut le faire, là. Vous avez du front tout le tour de la tête. Ça, c'est un terme en français qu'on dit : du front tout le tour de la tête. Ça n'a pas de bon sens. Je ne sais pas comment tu vas traduire ça, mais c'est un terme francophone qu'on utilise très souvent. Je pense que c'est une réalité qu'il faut avoir du front.

Mais la réalité des choses, c'est qu'on érode la démocratie. S'il y a de quoi dont on est fier d'être ontarien, canadien, c'est quoi? C'est notre démocratie. On est un pays libre. On est d'un pays où on peut élire qui on veut. On n'est pas tous d'accord, mais il y a une affaire qu'on sait, par exemple : s'il y a de quoi qu'on tient à cœur puis qu'on respecte, c'est notre démocratie. Sinon, on ne serait pas ici.

Puis c'est tellement fragile, la démocratie. C'est ça qui est le problème. On ne réalise pas comment c'est fragile. Ça, ce sont des exemples de comment tu érodes la démocratie. Ça, c'en est un noir sur blanc, qu'on érode une démocratie. Je pourrais continuer là-dessus quasiment pour un autre cinq, 10 minutes, mais je manque de temps.

I want to use this time, my time tonight, to talk about what the bill actually does, what it means for regional governance and what the governance really looks like to the north.

Speaker, in the north, government is not so abstract. It's a road that's not been plowed. It's a clinic that is short-staffed. It's a council trying to stretch a budget that was already too small five years ago. It's whether a family can get to work safely in the winter. It's whether seniors can access care close to home. The connections between people, the sense of community, is something we are proud of in the north. That's how it's supposed to work. That is what democracy is: people making decisions and being accountable for them.

C'est ça, la démocratie.

Speaker, Bill 100 breaks that relationship. It takes decision-making powers away from elected representatives and hands it to the people who are not elected. That is a power grab. It attempts to take control away from communities and concentrates it at the centre.

So I want to walk through what the bill actually does. Let's start with appointing regional chairs. Under this bill, the provincial government can choose who leads the regional government—not the people, but the government. Think about this. It's like if the government says, "No, we're going pick who is going to be official opposition, who's going to be third party and who's going to be?"—

Interjection: Don't give them ideas.

Mr. Guy Bourgoïn: Don't give them ideas, right.

But think about this. That's abuse of power. It's abuse of power. And if they don't see that, then we're worse off

than we think. I say this, not lightly, because we forget that democracy is very fragile. We take it for granted. What you're doing is dangerous.

So, now, the regional governments will have someone who is not elected, who cannot be removed by voters—think about this—but who has real authority over budgets and decisions, and with the strong-mayor powers, on top of that, they get all the power, but without any accountability.

When power is not accountable to the people, that is when democracy starts to erode. Then, we have what the government is calling strong-chair powers. I think a more accurate term would be unelected, unaccountable chair power. Under this system, one individual can override an elected council even without majority support.

So let's be clear: This bill allows for a minority rule. A council made up of elected representatives, people chosen by their community, can be overruled by one individual, with support from only a minority.

Then there is weighted voting. The minister can decide how much each vote counts. In the north, we fight to ensure smaller communities are heard. And when the government decides whose vote matters more than the others, we move further away from democracy.

Je veux prendre un moment pour parler à ce gouvernement des enjeux qui touchent les résidents de Mushkegowuk—Baie James—un gouvernement qui, trop souvent, nous oublie.

2100

Alors, je veux parler de ce qui compte vraiment pour les gens de ma circonscription et de ce que ce projet de loi ne règle pas, malgré les problèmes bien réels auxquels ils font face. Il n'amène pas plus de médecins dans nos hôpitaux, déjà en manque de personnel. Il ne fait pas baisser le prix de l'essence. Il ne construit pas de logements là où il y en a besoin. Il ne répare pas toutes les routes sur lesquelles les gens comptent tous les jours. Il ne s'attaque pas au coût de la vie qui ne cesse d'augmenter dans les communautés du Nord.

Ce que ce projet de loi-là fait, par contre, c'est de déplacer le pouvoir, en l'enlevant aux gens sur le terrain pour le donner à ceux qui l'ont déjà. Et pendant ce temps, on s'attend à ce que les municipalités fassent le travail : le logement, les infrastructures, les lacunes dans le service public. On leur demande d'en faire plus, tout en leur donnant moins de contrôle sur leurs décisions.

Nous n'avons pas besoin d'un gouvernement régional non élu qui pense savoir mieux que les gens qui vivent ici. Nous avons besoin de gouvernements qui ont la confiance des communautés locales. Nous avons besoin de représentants qui comprennent—c'est important qu'ils comprennent—la réalité sur le terrain parce qu'ils la vivent. C'est ça, la démocratie.

Trop souvent, les projets de loi de ce gouvernement passent à côté de la réalité. Ça démontre, encore une fois, qu'il ne comprend pas cette province au nord de Barrie. Parce que les défis sont différents : les distances sont plus grandes; les coûts sont plus élevés; les services sont plus

difficiles à offrir. Et les solutions doivent refléter cette réalité, pas l'ignorer.

On a un gouvernement qui est tellement concentré sur le Sud, puis qui oublie les enjeux du Nord. La province ne s'arrête pas à Barrie. La province continue. Il y a North Bay, puis après North Bay, vous savez quoi? Il y a encore une province. Puis ça, c'est une réalité que vous—puis je le dis très souvent en Chambre ici. Les richesses, là, puis les matériaux dont on a besoin, ils viennent des régions. Ils ne viennent pas du Sud. Le bois pour bâtir les maisons, il ne vient pas des villes; il vient des régions. La nourriture qu'on mange, elle vient des régions; elle ne vient pas des villes.

Mais pourtant, c'est un gouvernement qui nous traite comme des enfants pauvres. Le Nord est traité comme des enfants pauvres. On entend parler du Cercle de feu. On entend toutes sortes de belles romances, puis on dit comment ça va sauver la province. Mais qu'est-ce qui arrive? Pour supporter les régions, vous manquez le bateau pas à peu près.

Je vais terminer là-dessus. Je pense que le gouvernement fait une erreur. À toutes les fois où on touche à la démocratie, à toutes les fois où on veut éroder une démocratie, à toutes les fois où on pense qu'on fait la bonne chose en « appointant »—c'est un abus de pouvoir. Il s'est ingéré à Toronto. Quand il a été élu, il s'est mis les deux mains dans la ville de Toronto pour faire certain qu'on élimine des conseillers. Pour quelle raison? Je ne sais pas; il était accroché là-dessus.

Après ça, il s'est ingéré dans d'autres municipalités : donner des pouvoirs aux maires, aux grandes villes. Il a donné plus de pouvoirs à ça. Encore là, il s'en va encore éroder pour « appointer », pour contrôler encore. C'est tout à propos du contrôle. Je pense que c'est très clair avec ce projet de loi.

Je demande au gouvernement de faire la bonne chose, de retirer un projet de loi comme ça parce que notre démocratie qu'on prend tellement pour acquise est fragile, mais vous la mettez en danger.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

MPP Jamie West: Merci aussi à mon collègue de Mushkegowuk—Baie James.

Maintenant, il est environ 20 h, et la priorité du gouvernement conservateur, c'est de prendre le pouvoir. Mais mon collègue, il fait débat pour le logement abordable. Il fait débat pour la santé, les autoroutes. Il fait débat pour le prix de l'essence, le prix de l'épicerie.

Pourquoi est-ce que la priorité du gouvernement conservateur est si bizarre?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Le mot, c'est « bizarre », parce qu'on a tellement d'enjeux dans la province que de vouloir s'ingérer dans les responsabilités municipales—on a des gens qui ont la misère à payer leur nourriture, on a des gens qui ont la misère à payer leur loyer, on a des gens qui ont de la misère à y arriver. Ils sont toujours rendus aux banques alimentaires. On n'a jamais vu autant de monde dans les banques alimentaires, puis eux autres sont concentrés pour donner plus de pouvoir ou encore se donner plus de

pouvoir. C'est de la gérance mal placée. C'est de l'abus de pouvoir d'un gouvernement.

Puis le monde commence à voir très clair. Je peux vous dire que le monde le voit très clair, ce gouvernement-là, puis ils vont payer le prix. Puis, mais qu'ils payent, ils vont planter pas à peu près.

On a vu le gouvernement libéral : ça leur est arrivé. Ils ont pensé qu'ils étaient capables de faire des choses sans consultation. Qu'est-ce qui leur est arrivé? Ils sont tombés pas à peu près. Ils font face à la même chanson, puis ça va venir très vite.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

M. Andrew Dowie: J'aimerais bien remercier le membre pour Mushkegowuk—Baie James pour ses remarques.

Ce que je vois dans mon comté, c'est que nous avons des différences entre les municipalités et on perd tous nos efforts à faire la coordination.

In past debates, I've highlighted the case of our garbage collection. I know municipalities in the north are not quite the same at all. But we were unable to find, among seven municipalities with the same contractor, contiguous boundaries, an opportunity to harmonize for a single collection contract which could have actually saved money, improved flexibility and had no real downside. Yet, this was a power that the municipalities were unwilling to cede.

So my question back to the member is, when are we leaving behind the ability to help our constituents when we are more parochial with our approaches versus working together?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Merci pour faire l'effort d'avoir essayé de faire ta question tout en français. Je l'apprécie beaucoup plus que tu penses.

Mais je dois admettre que c'est encore le municipal. Je ne sais pas pourquoi vous voulez vous ingérer là-dedans. Moi, ce que je vois sur ce bord ici, là, c'est que vous avez un premier ministre qui marche avec une main de fer. Si tu ne dis pas ce qu'il te dit de faire, tu vas te ramasser sur notre bord. Puis je peux voir qu'il y a du monde—puis je les connais. On vous parle. Il y a du monde qui sont là pour des bonnes raisons, les mêmes raisons que nous on est là : pour défendre la démocratie, pour défendre de quoi qu'on pense dedans.

Mais à quelque part, il va falloir que vous vous réveilliez, que vous vous teniez debout. Parce qu'il y a du monde en province qui voit très clair puis qui commence à réaliser que, peut-être, il est temps d'un changement. Je pense ça va venir plus vite que vous pensez. Parce que la vague commence à changer, puis un gouvernement s'essouffle, puis le vent est fort sur votre bord.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

MPP Jamie West: My colleague spoke in depth about the erosion of democracy in our province. We have a government that's talking about protecting Ontario, but bill after bill seems to be about buying jets or protecting itself from liability or hiding information from the people of Ontario.

I want to know if the member would like to comment on how their priorities don't reflect the needs of the people of Ontario, who are struggling with the price of groceries, with the price of gas; who are struggling with the need to know how the government is spending their money and abusing the spending of money.

2110

M. Guy Bourgouin: Merci à mon collègue de Sudbury de poser la question. Je vais te répondre en français puisque c'est beaucoup plus facile pour moi.

C'est certain que tu te poses la question; tu te poses la question, si toutes leur priorités, comme un jet dont on n'a pas besoin—qui était, quoi, 29 millions de dollars? Quand il y a du monde qui a de la misère à se nourrir, comment justifiez-vous ça? Sérieusement, puis on vous demande de montrer où est l'argent et, tu sais, « l'avez-vous vendu? À qui? » On vous demande; ces questions-là sont demandées. Vous n'êtes même pas capables de nous montrer de la transparence.

Puis vous voulez qu'on vous fasse confiance. Je peux vous dire, le monde en parle. Ça ne s'arrête pas là. Il y a toutes les autres décisions que vous avez faites qui affectent à long terme les gens qui en arrachent le plus dans la province.

Je sais que vous comprenez, parce que je suis certain qu'il y a des concitoyens qui vont cogner à votre porte—s'ils cognent à la mienne, ils cognent à toutes les autres. Vous ne me ferez pas accroire qu'ils n'existent pas chez vous, là, parce qu'ils nous appellent, nous aussi.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Merci au député de Mushkegowuk—Baie James d'avoir livré avec autant de passion sa frustration de voir l'érosion de notre démocratie à travers toutes les mesures que le gouvernement est en train de prendre. On le voit dans les différentes lois, on le voit en santé et on le voit en éducation, où tout est centralisé à Queen's Park. On la voit aussi, cette érosion de la démocratie, dans la façon dont le gouvernement adopte des lois.

Et au bout du compte, ce qu'on fait, c'est qu'on tait les voix locales. Et on sait très bien que le nord de l'Ontario est déjà malmené. Je pense qu'il est négligé dans ses besoins. Et quand les gens de l'Ontario voient tout ce qui se passe ici à Queen's Park et la façon dont on ne permet pas les voix locales de s'élever, comment est-ce que vous pensez que les gens vont se sentir?

Quand vous allez retourner dans votre circonscription puis leur dire : « Savez-vous quoi, on a encore moins de voix à Queen's Park », qu'est-ce qu'ils vont penser, les gens du Nord?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Écoute, c'est sûr qu'ils se sentent délaissés puis se sentent trahis par le gouvernement. Parce que ce gouvernement-là a été élu. Il a été élu, puis il faut le reconnaître. Ils sont le gouvernement au pouvoir, puis ils sont majoritaires. Mais ils ne sont pas juste majoritaires pour les conservateurs; ils sont majoritaires pour tout le monde, que tu sois libéral, vert ou NPD.

Vous représentez tout le monde, puis vous semblez oublier ça très souvent.

Puis, très souvent, quand on regarde les régions du Nord—quand vous parlez du Cercle de feu, puis qu'on a du monde qui meurt sur la route 11 ou qui meurt sur la 17, nos routes principales, puis qu'on est ici et on vous en parle jour après jour, à toutes les fois qu'on a une chance d'en parler—on a eu tellement de fermetures. Il y a eu des fermetures à cause qu'il y a du monde qui sont décédés, mais non seulement ça; on a des camionneurs qui ne sont pas qualifiés pour conduire. Vous le savez, puis vous ne faites rien.

Fait qu'à quelque part, il va falloir que vous commenciez à faire votre travail puis respecter les gens du Nord, pas juste respecter les gens du Sud à cause que les votes sont là.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

L'hon. Sam Oosterhoff: Je veux vous remercier pour votre présentation cette nuit.

À Niagara, avant cette législation, nous avons eu plus de 124 conseillers municipaux dans ma région. Après ces changements dans ce projet-là, nous avons moins de 100 conseillers municipaux à Niagara. Avant, il y avait plus de conseillers municipaux que de députés dans toute la province.

Quand tu considères le nombre de députés ici dans la Chambre et quand tu considères le nombre de conseillers municipaux à Niagara, est-ce que tu crois que c'est nécessaire, avant cette législation, d'avoir plus de conseillers municipaux dans la région de Niagara que de députés pour toute la province ici dans la Chambre?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Merci d'avoir posé la question en français; je sais que ton français est très bien, et je veux le reconnaître.

Ceci dit, je ne suis pas un expert de la municipalité de Niagara, mais je peux vous dire : le plus de voix, le mieux c'est. Plus de voix, c'est mieux, parce qu'on peut apporter une voix forte, on peut représenter plus de régions. C'est pour ça qu'on a des municipalités. C'est pour ça qu'il y a des conseillers. C'est pour ça qu'on a des voix de différents domaines qui amènent les enjeux qu'on a besoin d'entendre. C'est pour ça qu'on a trois paliers gouvernementaux : fédéral, provincial et municipal. Il faut les respecter.

Mais encore, ce que j'essaye de vous faire comprendre, c'est que la démocratie, on la prend pour acquise. On la prend très souvent pour—

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

Mr. Ted Hsu: Usually when I stand up I say, "It's a pleasure to" whatever, but it's not really a pleasure because we're sitting late at night. We're sitting late at night because this government has decided to keep elected MPPs away from this Legislature and it's decided to squeeze the schedule instead of having us sit normally, as we would do according to the calendar and the standing orders, from the middle of February to June.

But we are debating something serious here tonight and that is this government's actions to centralize power in

itself and to reduce the power of voters in many parts of Ontario. I say many parts of Ontario—I'm actually feeling good that Kingston is far enough away from the reach of this government and also doesn't have this regional and independent municipal structure to be free from this.

But you know we also have to think about what this government is going to do in the future if we were to pass this bill, which we're debating at third reading today. I note that in Kingston no candidates yet have declared that they're running for mayor, and I have to wonder if it has crossed their minds what this Conservative government might do in the future in terms of taking away the powers of locally elected people in Kingston. Should we, some day, worry about this government appointing mayors instead of having elected mayors? It's what they're doing in the regions here closer to Toronto. I'd like to know what the Premier's plans are for eastern Ontario. We seem to be mostly protected from the control that this government wants to exert over regional governments.

However, it's actually not the case that Kingston is completely free, that the voters in Kingston are completely free from the autocratic control of this government. A few years ago, Kingston held a referendum in its municipal election—that would have been the municipal election of 2018. We held a referendum on electoral reform and Kingston voters passed by a 2-to-1 margin—two thirds of Kingston voters voted for a ranked ballot system in municipal elections, so a pretty strong mandate when you have a 2-to-1 majority.

But, unfortunately, when this government took power, it decided to overrule the democratic will of voters in Kingston and so we do not have a ranked ballot system. We do not have the system that the voters of Kingston voted for. I have to say, it was a rather vigorous campaign, so it's not like it's a mandate from a small number of people who showed up to vote. A lot of people did show up to vote and the mandate was pretty clear, but it was overruled in an undemocratic way by this government.

I think that was just the start of a pattern, so you've got to wonder where this pattern is going to go. What other democratic mandates are going to be trampled under the boot of this Conservative government?

That reminds me of this very amusing title that my colleague from Nepean thinks that this bill should have. He gave it a number of things but the one that attracted my attention was perhaps this bill should be called "the bill that cancels your vote act." That is essentially what is happening. The Premier and the minister are going to appoint unelected people, and you have to wonder what kind of people they're going to appoint. You just have to look at the kind of people they've appointed to run other organizations that are tied to the provincial government to see that there is a serious risk of them appointing their friends, appointing party people who need to be rewarded and having people who are potentially not qualified to be appointed to important jobs, heading up regional councils.

2120

Let's say an appointment is made of somebody who doesn't really know what they want to do—they will be

told what to do. They will be interviewed: "Hey, I would like to appoint you to head up this regional council, but I need you to do A, B and C." There's a good chance there will be a mandate from this government for a head of regional council to do their bidding, and so you've got to wonder if this is going to be written down and ever published. Probably not because this government hasn't published the mandate letters of its own ministers, unlike the previous government that was much more transparent and published the mandate letters from the Premier to each of the ministers so that the public could see what the government was trying to do. I think it's really important.

People ask me, "Are you going to take money from developers when you run for office?" This is a very sensitive question. It's a tricky thing, right? My answer to that question is: Say what you believe in first; say what you believe in when it comes to housing, when it comes to economic development, when it comes to social policy; say what you believe in first and then you can, with a clear conscience, accept donations from different people because you've made it clear what you stand for. That's the right way to do things. But if you don't know what you're going to do—and what I worry about is appointed regional councillors who don't know what they want to do—then you're going to be very susceptible to people trying to influence you. If you're serving at the pleasure of a Premier, then you're going to do what the Premier wants you to do or you might lose your salary.

Probably the mandate letters are not going to be published. Now, there could be something else. Let's say the Premier goes on a nice ride in a nice vehicle with the person he wants to appoint and says, "Let's have a talk. I want to appoint you, but I want to make sure you can do A, B and C," and the person who would like to get this cushy job starts taking notes and says, "Okay, the mayor wants me to get this done and that done." When you have a meeting for government business, normally those kinds of notes are accessible under freedom-of-information requests.

So if these documents are part of a meeting between a minister and somebody and now, with the changes the government has made to freedom of information, what happens when we can't access those things anymore? What happens to these secret mandates? What happens to these secret agendas that we are being governed by, even though we didn't vote for them and we didn't have a chance to debate them and discuss them publicly? This is the kind of danger we're dealing with, and it is the kind of danger that we should think of as having your vote cancelled.

Now I think that some of the government members may not actually understand what is going on here. I'm sorry to single out the member from Windsor-Tecumseh, but in debate earlier he mentioned mayors of US cities, about how they had strong-mayor-like powers and they were able to do things in their cities, but we have to remember that those mayors were elected. They were elected. They have a city-wide mandate. They got a lot more votes than

individual councillors—the same thing as in councils in Ontario.

The mayor of Kingston got a lot more votes than each of the city councillors in Kingston. The mayor of Kingston, however, wisely delegated many of his powers, and he hasn't really used his powers to force anything through. He has tried to build a consensus, which he was already doing anyway.

If we think about what this Conservative government is trying to do, I think the appropriate analogy is to say, “What if Donald Trump got to appoint the mayors of US cities instead of the voters of those cities getting to decide? What sorts of things would those people feel that they owed Donald Trump because they got that appointment?” Just look at all of his cabinet secretaries who've got into trouble and have had to quit. That's the appropriate analogy: What happens if we appoint regional councillors that don't get a vetting by the public and potentially even by the government that appoints them?

There's more evidence that we can look at for the effect of strong-mayor powers. There's a survey published by StrategyCorp. It's a survey of CAOs. Every year, they do a survey. It's a long survey—lots of questions.

Last year, there was a section on strong-mayor powers. It's chapter 6 of the 2025 survey of CAOs from StrategyCorp, and there are some summaries of what the CAOs told StrategyCorp that are very revealing. Remember, the original idea of strong-mayor powers was to build homes. I'm just going to quote from this report some of the summaries of what CAOs of municipalities in Ontario told StrategyCorp.

Here's the first one: “When reflecting on strong-mayor powers, most CAOs continue to share a similar tone—one of frustration, skepticism, and sometimes anger.” Here are the people who have the most front-row seat that you can have in municipal government—you don't have a better front-row seat than being the CAO of a city—and they are expressing “frustration, skepticism, and sometimes anger” about strong-mayor powers.

Here's another quote. It says, “In past iterations of this survey, CAOs cautioned that strong-mayor powers could invite the politicization of staff. This year, many said that shift is under way—the line between politics and administration is becoming blurred, threatening the integrity of local government as we know it.” That's pretty serious stuff, that “the integrity of local government is being threatened.”

Another quote: “The authority of the mayor to hire or dismiss the CAO and other senior positions has heightened anxiety across municipal senior leadership teams and tempered their willingness to speak truth to power.”

That's very serious, because I think that when the public service works best—this is a saying that you can often hear from senior public servants—it's the idea that they give fearless advice and loyal implementation. What the CAOs are telling us is, because of strong-mayor powers, because senior leaders can be fired at any time, they are afraid and they lose “their willingness to speak

truth to power.” That is a very dangerous thing to have in the people who advise our governments, Speaker.

Okay, one more—at least: Several CAOs said that “the nature of their role is shifting and that they feel more like political support staff than members of the professional public service.” The strong-mayor powers have been undermining the professionalism of the public service. Because now, they're just doing politics, which we know can lead to all sorts of problems and can focus on things like fighting each other that are potentially taking away time and effort and energy from the well-being of the people.

2130

Now, let's go back to the original reason for having strong-mayor powers, and that was to build housing faster. We know how dismal—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Can we keep the conversations down to a minimum? Or you can have it on the outside. Thank you.

Can the member go ahead? We're almost there.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Thank you, Speaker. And let it be noted that, yes, the government side is not really paying attention in this debate, just like they're not paying attention to what's important for the people of Ontario. No wonder housing in Ontario is behind every other province. I think maybe if the government members would pay more attention, they would see the light and do some things that were better than what they are doing now.

Here is the quote about housing from the CAO survey by StrategyCorp: “CAOs remain unconvinced that the additional mayoral powers have moved the needle on housing supply in Ontario.”

Well, they certainly haven't moved the needle on housing supply because the building of housing in Ontario is behind every other province. So the original reason for having strong-mayor powers hasn't played out. It hasn't made Ontario a leader in building housing.

Why could that be? It says here CAOs “questioned the breadth of the expanded mandate, particularly around staffing and budgeting, which appear disconnected from the stated goal of housing delivery.”

So this whole design of strong-mayor powers was just poorly designed because it was not well connected to housing. It's causing CAOs to worry a lot, and not only that, it's not even designed well so that it's connected to building more housing. And we can see the results in numbers; we can see if you just ask people who are struggling to find affordable housing.

There are a couple of more quotes here. Here's another summary from the survey by StrategyCorp: “As the potential for politically driven dismissals becomes more real,” decisions “around employee contracts are becoming more frequent and pointed.”

So now we're having disputes, like labour disputes. We're not taking all of our time—or at least the public service is not taking all of their time—to do the work of being a good public servant and serving the people. They're taking the time to make sure that their contracts

are written carefully so that they will be protected from politically driven dismissals.

That's a cost. Maybe it doesn't show up in dollars and cents, but it shows up in, "Oh, I didn't have time to do that for the people because I was busy making sure that my contract was written carefully. I had to go and consult my lawyer. I had to pay some money to make sure that I couldn't lose my job for political reasons. I need to protect my job so that I can speak truth to power so that I can give fearless advice to elected officials."

Finally, some people will say, "What happens when a bad mayor comes along?" "Even in municipalities where strong-mayor powers have not been used—or have been exercised responsibly—many CAOs are bracing for change. A new mayor could bring an entirely different approach in terms of how they seek to use or not use the authorities."

The final statement from many, many CAOs, who not only have the most front seat on the front benches of municipal politics but, also, in the time direction, they go back. Politicians come and go, but the CAOs stay on for many years. They've seen how different politicians work differently and how they've affected the quality of municipal government and they are worried. What happens when a bad mayor comes and gets those strong-mayor powers? And here, we're going to let the government choose unelected officials, unelected people, to have these strong-mayor-like powers.

It would probably be better if they just kind of picked a name out of the hat by random, because the alternative is they're going to pick someone who is liable to just be under the influence of the government, is not going to think independently, or owes favour to the government that appointed them. That would be worse.

I'm nearing the end of my time, but I hope that I have had a chance to let people know, not just in this chamber—because half of them are not paying attention on that side—but people across the province who are watching this debate: If they haven't heard some of these facts, if the experience of CAOs hasn't be related to them, if the experience of all of the things this government has done to centralize power and squash democracy—if they haven't heard of that, I hope that I have given them some examples to think about, so that they will remember them for the next—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I recognize the member for Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member from Kingston and the Islands for his remarks. I can assure him that I'm fully aware of what's in this bill. I do enjoy engaging in the chamber, though, on points that are raised.

Your remarks brought me back to a time early in my career. I worked first for a CAO, and then I worked for a mayor, and I found that the relationship between the mayor and the CAO is vital. You need to have people who are able to work together and collaborate. If you have one side that's off, it needs to be corrected.

So my question back to you is: What do you say should be done in the event that an administrator of an municipality, whether it be regional government or otherwise, is unable to work collaboratively with the other official—the regional chair or the mayor—and how do things get done if they don't get along?

Mr. Ted Hsu: Thank you for the question. I think it's always the case, if you're working in an institution, if you're working with lots of people—it always happens that certain people don't get along. But you try to be professional; you try to prevent power imbalances. One problem with the strong-mayor power that's been expressed by the CAOs is that there is this imbalance, and this imbalance is making any conflicts in personalities worse, because one party—the CAO, for example, or somebody else—is afraid to say what they really believe, to give their best advice. So that is the imbalance that we want to avoid.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I recognize the member for Parkdale–High Park.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you to my colleague for the debate.

I understand that the Premier has said that the reason for this bill is that Niagara has too many politicians, which is rich coming from the government with the most bloated cabinet in the history of the province. I think this has to do with giving the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing the power to appoint and remove regional chairs that will be beholden to the minister.

So, to the member, my question to you is around the erosion of democracy that this bill might create.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Response?

Mr. Ted Hsu: I think that this idea of there being too many politicians in the Niagara region is a red herring. There are different ways you could reorganize a municipal government in Niagara. Maybe you could group it into three or four communities of interest and reduce the number of politicians.

Every time we consider riding boundary adjustments—I'm curious to know if this government is going to adjust the boundaries, before the populations in some ridings really get out of whack. But I think it's fine to adjust the number of councillors in Niagara. What's not good is having unelected leaders of councils that have so much power. That is the problem, and I think we should focus on that.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): I recognize the member for Orléans.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you for your presentation tonight.

We've heard repeatedly from the Premier over the years about his fondness for all things American, in particular his fondness for Chicago, where he worked for a long period of time. We know, of course, that two separate Mayor Daleys of Chicago tried to build new airports. One of them tried to build a new airport in Lake Michigan. Things are starting to sound familiar.

Chicago has a version of strong-mayor powers with a veto. I bet the Chicago mayor flies in a private jet. He might even have a Trump-style corporate helicopter to get around Chicago and the surrounding area. That wouldn't surprise me. The mayor of Chicago built a massive underground parking garage at great expense, except that didn't cost the taxpayers' money. He raised money from the private sector to do that.

2140

I'm wondering, based on this connection to Chicago and American-style politics, if you're concerned that Americanism is influencing our Premier?

Mr. Ted Hsu: I like Chicago, too. I've been there. It's a nice place to visit, a wonderful cultural and economic centre. But what I will say is, when I listen to my colleague from Orléans, it reminds me that it's not improper to call the Premier the mayor of Ontario. He really wants to control Ontario and centralize power in the Premier's office and cabinet—just like the mayor is elected by everybody in Ontario and tries to manage all of the province.

We have a big province with lots of different regions and lots of different interests. That's why we have elected representatives from different regions, so that they can bring the voice of their region to this chamber and we can try to balance the powers and figure out what works for the whole province. What I see from this government is a Premier who wants to be the mayor of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: I want to thank the member for Kingston and the Islands. He speaks clearly very passionately about what should or shouldn't happen to the Niagara region. He clearly thinks he has all the answers about what should be happening to Niagara.

But I would be very curious—I know, for example, that this legislation was developed after listening to and hearing from local mayors. I believe 11 out of the 12 local mayors in the Niagara region spoke about the need for reforms in the Niagara region. They have 126 municipal politicians—more municipal politicians in the region of Niagara than there are MPPs in the entire province of Ontario, if you can believe it or not, Madam Speaker. And yet here he comes and says, “This is bad legislation. No, I don't want to listen to the voices of mayors from Niagara,” he says. “No, I don't want to hear them. I don't think we should bring in reforms that respond to the calls of the people from the Niagara region. I don't want to see changes that make the government down in Niagara more efficient and more effective.”

And so my question is to the member is, is it really democratic that you would say no to those local voices from the Niagara region?

Mr. Ted Hsu: Speaker, I would like to hear the democratic voices of voters in the Niagara region. Why don't you call an election right now—right now?

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Mr. John Vanthof: I listened intently to the member from Kingston and the Islands and his description of the bill. He focused a lot on strong-mayor powers, which we also have some issues with. But I would like him to expand a bit on the fact that the government is now giving strong-mayor powers to unelected officials who are appointed by another level of government, which adds a whole new layer of context which the government doesn't seem to be focusing on.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Speaker, this is an important point to emphasize. It makes some sense if the mayor has somewhat more power than councillors. In Kingston, councillors might be elected with 1,000 or 2,000 votes, and the mayor might be elected with 20,000 or 30,000 votes. It makes sense if the mayor, because the mayor has a much larger mandate, has certain powers that councillors don't. But what this government is proposing is not only unelected people randomly selected from the phonebook, but unelected people chosen by this government to do their bidding or to pay back some favour that is owed. That is much worse than even selecting a random person from the citizenry.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Question?

Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, through you to the member for Kingston and the Islands: You just finished talking about a government appointing someone unelected as the chair, and that was a bad thing. I appointed Jim Bradley, who had not been re-elected in this House. Do you think that my choice of a fine parliamentarian, a fine individual—do you think he did everything that I asked him to do? Or do you think he operated for the best interest of the people of Niagara?

Mr. Ted Hsu: I'm very glad that my colleague from next door, Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, has mentioned that, because we'll hold him to account for having said that when we look at the other appointments that are made.

My question for my honourable colleague is: How many times was Jim Bradley elected?

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Further debate? I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Steve Clark: Thanks, Speaker. Did I tell you tonight? It's great to see you in the chair.

I'm very pleased to join in the debate of Bill 100, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 and the Municipal Elections Act. We're here to do third reading of that bill, and I have to say—and I have to be totally transparent with the legislators that are here tonight—that municipal government is something that I'm very, very interested in. I want people to know that whether I was a mayor at a very young age or a chief administrative officer, the one thing that I learned right from the very first day I walked into city hall was the word “change.” Change in municipal government can be the biggest obstacle that councils and staff face—because I was on both sides of the council table—but it also creates tremendous opportunity.

I'm going to take a few moments to talk about change when it comes to the format of municipal government, and that's what we're talking about. Minister Flack looked at this issue and ultimately brought forward a piece of legislation regarding regional governance. Minister Calandra, who's here as well tonight, did the same thing when he was minister. I did the same thing in the short time that I was minister.

But I do want to—Speaker, through you—thank the member for Perth–Wellington. The member for Perth–Wellington, in his capacity as parliamentary assistant to all three members who are here tonight who have had the title either presently or past of Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and who owe this gentleman a vote of thanks, and the reason we owe the member for Perth–Wellington a vote of thanks is that he made a very important step in Bill 100 coming to the Legislature this evening. He held, under three different ministers, extensive consultations on regional governance to support the review that our government did on the file. He met with regional councillors. He went to regional offices and asked both those elected and appointed officials and the public what they would like to see in a regional government system.

All of that consultation—with all due respect to some of the rhetoric that I've heard tonight and at other points of debate in this Legislature—really exemplify the fact that change, for some, is a very scary idea.

Now, I was the mayor of Brockville, and the CAO of Leeds and the Thousand Islands. But, you know, I got a picture sent to me today by somebody because it was McHappy Day, and they sent me a picture, and I always laugh because I see myself with long, curly hair. That was my nickname, “the mayor with the curly hair” and you know what I look like now, so it's a big change.

But back then when I became mayor, it was the first three-year term—the very first three-year term. Now, a municipal councillor I was talking to—MPP Denault from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, he was an ex-councillor. There are lots of ex-councillors here. And for the most part they're not my vintage, so they served four-year terms. But way back in the day, when I was a kid, terms for municipal councillors were one or two years. So there were a lot of mayors and a lot of councillors who would have to, almost immediately after they were elected or re-elected, start the campaign for their next election in 12 months. It was a cycle that was—in fact, formats change for council all the time. If you go back to city hall in Brockville and look back to some of those early councils in the early 1900s, there were 11 members of council for a community that only had a few thousand people. In fact, they had five wards.

2150

In fact, when I was mayor, I thought, “Wouldn't that be great to live in a couple-of-thousand community with five wards?” I could probably, in an afternoon, gauge public opinion. I wouldn't have to hire Nick Kouvalis to do a poll. I could literally take an afternoon, knock on a couple of hundred doors in my riding and I would probably get a

sense of whether, in the small-ward system, I would get re-elected. Those would have been the days—those would have been the days.

But that council with five wards and 11 councillors—10 councillors and a mayor—became, under a three-ward system, in probably the early 1950s and 1960s, a 10-member council—nine councillors and one mayor. When I was mayor, we had a study, just like the minister has done with his regional government consultations and, ultimately, today, you've got no wards in that community. So you've gone from five wards to three wards to no wards, and now you've got a council of nine where, four decades ago when I was there, you had more councillors.

So the Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries lives in a riding within a region that has long been discussed about the number of politicians who are located at council and long had been discussed about the number of councillors at regional council. So all of the consultation, under three different ministers, has resulted in this bill coming forward.

The opposition, they talk about an American-style system, and, yes, there are jurisdictions in the United States that have strong-mayor powers. In fact, one of the first days after my election as mayor, I got a call from the mayor of Ontario, California, which was a sister city to the city of Brockville—the Chaffey brothers were the connection; they were builders and architects and they made a number of large—

Hon. Paul Calandra: The Chaffey brothers?

Hon. Steve Clark: Yes, I know. It's a funny name, right?

The issue there was they called to find out who I was going to fire, because they thought that we had strong-mayor powers in Brockville back in the early 1980s. It was an interesting conversation. It allowed me to study that whole system of strong-mayor powers.

The member for Windsor–Tecumseh tonight talked about a number of American communities; in fact, there are communities in Europe as well that run under a hybrid system—they're not all the same. Some of them include taxation powers; ours, obviously, don't in Ontario. The strong-mayor-power legislation I did for Toronto and Ottawa, and the expansion that the other two ministers have done, aren't exactly like the American system but it makes for a great sound bite, it makes for a great opportunity for the opposition to cast doubt.

But to say that this had no consultation is one of the most humorous statements that I have ever heard in this Legislature when it comes to municipal government. The difference between Bill 100 is the fact that we are in a point where we are so polarized that many, many communities and many individuals don't want to hear about change. The world did not end when I cut Toronto council down to 25 councillors from over 42 councillors; the world did not end when we allowed mayors in Toronto and Ottawa to have strong-mayor powers. People chased through the streets and yelled and screamed, but at the end

of the day, change did not result in chaos in the province of Ontario. Just like it was before—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Order. Come to order.

Hon. Steve Clark: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate that.

The challenge in many communities is they're just fearful of the unknown. I happen to think the system that is being proposed in Bill 100, that has been consulted on and had conversations about in every corner where regional government exists today—that that change can provide great opportunity. There is a record in our province where different governments with different political stripes—and I'm one of the few ex-municipal politicians who, in the nine years that I was mayor, had all three political parties that took the reins of power, and I can tell you, and I have said it—Mr. Vanthof has heard me. The member for Timiskaming—Cochrane has heard me in debate say there were times where—it's hard to admit, I know—I liked some of the stuff, as a mayor, that all three governments provided. Now, I also didn't like a lot of the stuff too, because that's what mayors do, right? Mayors come to conferences. Mayors come to ROMA. Mayors come to AMO. I did the same thing. I asked for things from the Conservative government. I asked for things from the Liberal government. I asked for things from the New Democratic government. Things change in Ontario.

And what I found when I was a CAO, the biggest challenge is that fear of the unknown. We've always did what we've always done. We always got from the government what we've always asked for. Those things—it's a terrible, terrible situation when you get into that point where change is something that people fear.

This opportunity that the government has put forward that has gone through a lot of debate, both before a bill was drafted and now that a bill has been drafted, I think is, in the end, from our government's perspective, a good thing. It provides an opportunity for a new structure.

Listen, since I was in council, you had in big communities like London—and the member for London—Fanshawe is here—they used to run under a board of control in addition to their council when I was first mayor. We didn't run under that system where I lived, but I was very interested to see how that system worked for that community.

In fact, when we first started doing the regional government review, there were a lot of people that looked at that old system from the 1980s and said, "Isn't that a nice hybrid system where we don't have to regionalize, where we can have a board of control that would work complementary to council?" We heard it in rural areas. The member for Perth—Wellington talked about counties under the county structure. There have been lots of studies over 40 or 50 or 60 years that looked at changing that county system.

When I walked into county council for the very first time, there were 44 members, reeves and deputy reeves. There

was literally a chamber half this size for a county that had less than 80,000 people. Did that need to be changed? Is it nice that you can go in and have a third of that size govern now in over a 105,000 county? Have government services changed? Has the county system failed the people of Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes? Not at all. Has it caused great stress, great grief to the staff members who are there? No, not at all.

So the one good thing that I can compliment Minister Flack on—the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing—is that he's taken the time and not rushed this bill and these initiatives. Yes, there is a sense of urgency. We are very, very close. We're already into nominations for municipal council. Some councils are already lining up in terms of a platform both for or against this government or the federal government.

One thing I know is sure: The people of this province will deal with the changes that are proposed. Decades later, just like I'm talking about a career that I had in municipal politics four and a half decades ago, things will move on. Things will change.

I'm convinced that while the systems that we have in our municipal governments—whether they be at the county level, whether they be at the single tier, whether they be in northern communities—there's a very strong opportunity for us and through that ministry to be able to sit down with members of staff, to be able to sit down with members of council and to be able to work out those same problems. Just like the times that councils changed from one-year terms to two-year terms to three-year terms to four-year terms, where you've had boards of control or regional councils or county councils.

Things do change all the time. The beauty of the fact is that you've got a ministry with personnel in every corner of the province that are going to help those new councils, that are going to orientate those new councils when they get elected this fall—and be able to work with that chair to make sure that they make the best decisions for those men and women that are going to be putting their names on the ballot.

Any time I talk about municipal government, Speaker—and I know that my time is dwindling down—I just want to take this opportunity. I don't care what political stripe you are. I don't care what riding you're in, whether you're in the farthest northern riding, whether you're in our neck of the woods—as Minister Quinn says, the far east—or whether you live in southwestern Ontario; I appreciate every corner of this riding.

I just hope that people let voices and ideas be heard. The electorate is going to make their decision on those local councils. You're going to have a new system in a number of regions and I think when AMO begins in August, we will hear a lot more of those great ideas. People will have their say—just like the people had their say for us a little over 12 months ago—and we will move forward.

I just want you to know, Speaker, that I look back at that young mayor, that ideologue that took over and

thought that municipal government was the best level of government. He is still in here somewhere. There was a time where I said I wanted to be the young mayor and then I wanted to be the really old mayor. I don't think like that anymore; I'm okay doing what I'm doing, and I love the fact that we have such a great opportunity to debate ideas, to put forward motions, to put forward bills like this.

Again, I want to thank Minister Flack for his work. I want to thank Minister Calandra for his work in that portfolio. I want to say, again, how much I really appreciate the member for Perth–Wellington. Not only did he have to deal with three different types in the ministry, but he piloted through a lot of the consultations that are direct in Bill 100 today.

We're now at a point where I think, Speaker, I'll allow you to rule, but I would move that the question now be put.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): The government House leader has moved that the question be now

put. I'm 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? I hear a no.

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

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

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Orders of the day?

Hon. Steve Clark: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): This House is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m. Thank you.

The House adjourned at 2202.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-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
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Tim McGough

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Allsopp, Tyler (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	
Anand, Deepak (PC)	Mississauga—Malton	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London—Fanshawe	
Babikian, Aris (PC)	Scarborough—Agincourt	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia—Lambton	
Bell, Jessica (NDP)	University—Rosedale	
Bethlenfalvy, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (PC)	Pickering—Uxbridge	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
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	
Bresee, Ric (PC)	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	
Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)	Markham—Stouffville	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Cerjanec, Rob (LIB)	Ajax	
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough North / Scarborough-Nord	Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)	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	
Crawford, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	Oakville	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises et de l'Approvisionnement
Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC)	Mississauga—Lakeshore	
Darouze, George (PC)	Carleton	
Denault, Billy (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Dixon, Jess (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Dowie, Andrew (PC)	Windsor—Tecumseh	
Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	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	
Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	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

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	
Firin, Mohamed (PC)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
Flack, Hon. / L'hon. Rob (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	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
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	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	
Hamid, Hon. / L'hon. Zee (PC)	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	
Harris, Hon. / L'hon. Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Hazell, Andrea (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Holland, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin (PC)	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	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Trevor (PC)	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	
Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC)	York Centre / York-Centre	Solicitor General / Solliciteur général
Khanjin, Hon. / L'hon. Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Minister of Red Tape Reduction / Ministre de la Réduction des formalités administratives
Kusendova-Bashta, Hon. / L'hon. Natalia (PC)	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
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Energy and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie et des Mines
Lennox, Robin (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	
Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)	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
McCarthy, Hon. / L'hon. Todd J. (PC)	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	
McGregor, Hon. / L'hon. Graham (PC)	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	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones
Oosterhoff, Hon. / L'hon. Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries / Ministre associé des Industries à forte consommation d'énergie
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)	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
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	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	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Northern Economic Development and Growth / Ministre du Développement et de la croissance économique du Nord
Quinn, Hon. / L'hon. Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security / Ministre des Collèges et Universités, de l'Excellence en recherche et de la Sécurité
Racinsky, Joseph (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation / Ministre des Affaires autochtones et de la Réconciliation économique avec les Premières Nations Minister Responsible for Ring of Fire Economic and Community Partnerships / Ministre responsable des Partenariats économiques et communautaires pour le développement du Cercle de feu
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Rosenberg, Bill (PC)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Chris (IND)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Skelly, Hon. / L'hon. Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Speaker / Présidente de l'Assemblée législative
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre associé des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Smyth, Stephanie (LIB)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée des Petites Entreprises
Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon. Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué à la Santé mentale et à la Lutte contre les dépendances
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Attorney General / Procureur général associé
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	Deputy Speaker / Vice-Présidente Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Tsao, Jonathan (LIB)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Vaugeois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Vickers, Paul (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
Watt, Tyler (LIB)	Nepean	
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Vacant	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough- Sud-Ouest	