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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 14 May 2026

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 14 mai 2026

The House met at 0900.

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

Now a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Let us pray.

Prières.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

KEEPING CRIMINALS BEHIND BARS ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 VISANT À MAINTENIR LES CRIMINELS DERRIÈRE LES BARREAUX

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 13, 2026, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 75, An Act to enact the Constable Joe MacDonald Public Safety Officers' Survivors Scholarship Fund Act, 2026 and to amend various other Acts / Projet de loi 75, Loi édictant la Loi de 2026 sur le Fonds Joe MacDonald de bourses d'études à l'intention des survivants d'agents de sécurité publique et modifiant diverses autres lois.

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

MPP Robin Lennox: It's always an honour to rise on behalf of the people of Hamilton Centre. Today we are speaking about Bill 75, and the articulated purpose of this bill is to try to promote community safety. On that, I can say that the Ontario NDP is unanimous and consistent in what we have said in the past: We believe that everyone should be able to live in safe communities and that we must ensure that no one is exposed to violence in the places where they live, play and learn. But how we get there differs wildly.

Recently, I was at a vigil for a 16-year-old boy who was shot and killed in downtown Hamilton. His name was Nabil Askafe. A 14-year-old boy has subsequently been charged with second-degree murder. This was a shocking event for our community. Families' lives are altered forever as they grieve the loss of their child.

I attended the vigil for Nabil at Hamilton city hall just a couple of weeks ago. While there, we heard from his friends, his family, his teachers and his faith leaders. They called upon all of us as political leaders to take action to prevent this kind of senseless violence from taking place.

Nearly everyone who spoke called for improvements in community safety through deep community care by investing in our young people and wrapping our arms around

them to keep them safe, by ensuring the youth in our communities have safe and well-resourced schools, food to eat, a place to rest their head and programming that helps them thrive and realize their fullest potential. We heard calls to action to expand funding for recreational programming and safe spaces for our at-risk youth and to ensure that every single young person can see a path forward for themselves that is healthy and free from involvement in violence.

Just as the vigil was ending and we were all starting to walk away, we saw police start running up the sidewalk up the street. Just as we were mourning the loss of one teenager, another teenager, a 19 year old, had been killed in another shooting happening just 200 metres away.

These events are a stark reminder of the increase in violent crime involving youth in our community. We must do so much more to ensure that no family has to mourn the loss of their child to gun violence.

We all agree that community safety is an essential priority. Every single person deserves to live, work and play in our communities without fear. Right now, we know that this is not the case for too many people. Too many Ontarians have experienced violence or have been failed by our justice system.

The thing is, we know the work that needs to be done to make our communities safer. We know that if we improve the social conditions within our communities, we will put people in a position to thrive so that they do not become involved in violent crime. That starts with and includes poverty reduction, doubling Ontario disability support payments and Ontario Works and having a poverty reduction plan that actually uplifts people out of poverty instead of keeping them locked in legislated poverty. It means investing in education, ensuring that caring adults are in each and every one of our classrooms, preventing students from being expelled or suspended and getting into trouble and ensuring pathways for our students into meaningful training and educational opportunities. It means having a jobs plan that ensures that our youth and our young people see a path forward for themselves, an ability to provide for themselves and their family without becoming involved in violence or crime. It means ensuring that everyone is able to put a roof over their head and investing in supportive housing; we know for every dollar we invest in supportive housing, we save double that in saved social services, health care and justice costs. And it means ensuring that we have programs available to help people in our communities exit situations of violence.

Just this spring—in March—in Hamilton, nine youth violence prevention programs lost their funding. We need

to address those gaps and ensure that crime prevention is at the forefront, not just talking about putting more people in jail. But instead, this Conservative government has systematically dismantled those essential pillars of community safety, and so here we are today. They have underfunded our schools; refused to fund universal mental health care; caused record-high unemployment, including 17% youth unemployment; and they have widened income inequality year after year after year. Last year, we saw one million Ontarians accessing food banks and 85,000 people sleeping outdoors on our streets or in encampments.

This Conservative government has failed to create the conditions for our communities to be safe and prosperous. They're making it more and more difficult for people to get by, and we're seeing Ontarians put in positions where they have very few options left to improve their circumstances. And so it's difficult to hear this Conservative government talk about this bill as being one dedicated to promoting community safety. There are many issues in our justice system that require fixing, but this bill does not encompass all of those interventions that we need.

We see some elements of this bill that are commendable and important, particularly elements that strengthen protections for animals against abuse and provide scholarships to family members of public service officers who tragically die in the line of duty. These are important changes, and I'm glad to see them brought forward. But unfortunately, rather than focus this legislation on those positive advancements and create dedicated legislation to see them through, this Conservative government decided to create an omnibus bill that includes both the commendable and the truly reprehensible.

Schedule 2 of this bill is where we find the truly reprehensible. Schedule 2 significantly expands provisions for cash bail in Ontario, a system that will further erode our justice system and instill a two-tiered system based on wealth status. The proposed cash bail system would have its most severe consequences for those with limited financial means. Accused who cannot afford the required deposit will face prolonged pretrial detentions. Thus, schedule 2 will create a wealth-based system of pretrial detention—a system in which it is actually better to be guilty and rich than it is to be innocent and poor; a system in which the determination for pretrial bail isn't determined by whether or not you're a risk to the public or a risk to reoffend, but rather relies on an income test. An income test: Where is the justice in that?

Make no mistake, cash bail is an attack on the working class. Already, we have a million people accessing our food banks, 85,000 people unhoused and sleeping on our streets and millions more living paycheck to paycheck. And with schedule 2, working class people and families who find themselves involved in the justice system will face impossible choices. Already, it is difficult to find sureties to take responsibility for an accused person when they are released on bail. Our overreliance on sureties is one of the issues with our justice system that our Attorney General should be fixing, not making worse.

We could make our bail system more effective by ensuring that we invest the resources in bail supervision that will ensure that accused people meet their bail conditions without unduly burdening their family members and friends as sureties. But with an expanded cash bail system, accused persons will either need to find a surety who has a few thousand dollars cash in the bank lying around that they can use for bail—which, by the way, many working people in Ontario do not have access to right now—or sureties will need to liquidate assets in order to prevent their loved one from sitting in a jail cell for months on end awaiting pretrial detention.

0910

This will further push working-class people—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Stop the clock. Sorry to interrupt the member. The side conversations and the heckling are not going to continue.

I will return to the member to continue her remarks.

MPP Robin Lennox: A cash bail system will further push working-class people into financial distress at a time when they're already struggling to get by under this Conservative government's failed economic policies.

On this point, I was alarmed to hear the Associate Attorney General say that making life more difficult for sureties was an intentional change in this legislation. As the Associate Attorney General said in debate, "If someone is going to take the risk of allowing that individual to come out and put up the bail, then there should be real consequences for that individual as well." Maybe "if those conditions were a ... bit tougher," and "tougher on the family as well, there would be less ... crimes." I wonder if the Attorney General will stand by that.

Ontarians deserve to know if the government considers it just for family members of an accused person to have to suffer financial hardship, including worsening stress and stigma, simply because a person they are related to has been accused of a crime. That's not justice. It is a blatant attack on the working class and an attempt to further instill a two-tiered justice system in which the rich are able to walk away free while the working class are held in jail for months or years awaiting trial, many of whom will go on to be found innocent.

Already, we know that the wealthy escape justice far too often. They're able to hire slick defence attorneys and strike deals, while working-class people scrape together every dollar for their defence. This will further exacerbate that problem. With cash bail, individuals and families will have to bear stiff upfront costs just to make bail. That's money that's not going to paying for their legal consultation or defence, meaning we will likely see rising caseloads for our public defenders, who already can barely meet the demands in our courts.

We know that low-income individuals, racialized communities and people struggling with mental health and substance use are already disproportionately impacted by the justice system. Expanding the use of cash bail deepens these inequities while doing little to actually improve community safety.

Like so many other pieces of legislation that come from this Conservative government, schedule 2 in this bill will cause more problems than it solves. First, we have heard from organizations like the Ontario Bar Association and the Canadian Civil Liberties Association that schedule 2 is likely to be deemed unconstitutional and jurisdictional overreach. The Conservative government must know that this schedule is likely to face constitutional challenges.

In particular, the Bail Act amendments may be determined to be beyond the powers of a provincial government if the imposition of cash bail requirements is found to be a matter of criminal law and criminal procedure, and thus strictly under federal purview. If this is the case, Ontarians deserve to know: Will the Conservative government spend their tax dollars on millions in legal fees for a constitutional court challenge? Exactly how much money is this government willing to spend to keep poor people in jail simply because they are poor? Ontarians deserve to hear the answer to that question.

In addition, there have been a number of other issues in this legislation that have been highlighted by organizations like the Ontario Bar Association and others that have a deep interest in ensuring that our court processes run smoothly, that justice is well served and that we do not see further injustices because of problems in our court system.

Already, we know that our courts are overburdened. We do not have enough judges, enough administrators in our courts, enough time for cases to be heard before they are thrown out. In Ontario, we have seen hundreds of sexual assault cases thrown out because we could not make sure that those cases had their day in court in the allocated time. Because of Jordan's Principle, we have seen sexual assault survivors who have come forward—who have been so courageous in bringing forward their truth—and they have been told that their case will never be heard because we cannot make space for them in our court system.

That problem will only be worsened by the cash bail system. As many legal experts have warned, cash bail will put increased stress on our court system. We will see more court hearings related to cash bail, related to the administration of the cash bail system, and that will further slow down our court processes. We risk seeing more cases thrown out because we cannot guarantee them a trial date within the required period. That is not justice.

We will also see a disincentivizing for sureties. Sureties have been given a disproportionate role in our bail supervision system because this government has chosen to put more responsibility onto family members and friends of the accused than they are willing to actually invest in appropriate bail supervision, or in making sure that if someone does not have their day in court or return to their day in court, that bail amounts are recouped. We could actually just invest the resources in recouping forfeited bail amounts rather than requiring payment up front, but that's not what this government is choosing to do. Instead, we know that the introduction of mandatory cash bail will significantly deter or prevent individuals from acting as sureties. It will also mean that those sureties have to take

on significant financial risk up front, and they may not be able to see that money back for months or for years.

We also know that we have significant overcrowding in our jails. Overcrowding in our jails is not just a significant health and safety problem, both for the people working in our jails and for the people currently incarcerated, it also is a major barrier for people accessing justice through our court system.

We have seen, over the past several years, because of worsening conditions in our jails, more cases are being either stayed or sentences are being shortened because, in this province, judges have to take into account the conditions in pretrial detention or in our jails when deciding on sentencing. That means that, with this provision, we will see more people in our jails awaiting pretrial detention, more overcrowding. We risk having more cases stayed and thrown out because the conditions in our jails are so poor.

This happened, just recently, in October 2025. We saw the Ontario Superior Court stay first-degree murder charges against three men because they experienced "torturous" treatment that they suffered while awaiting trial—they were in pretrial detention—at Maplehurst Correctional Complex in Milton. We will see more of those types of situations happening. That is not justice served. But also, we know that there are several examples where sentencing has actually been reduced because of the conditions in our jails and in our prisons. How does that match up with what this government's stated goal is, which is to ensure that those who are at risk of reoffending are kept in our jails? It just doesn't make sense.

Beyond that, we know that there is also a very significant risk that when we introduce a cash bail system, we also increase the likelihood of wrongful convictions, because you can only imagine that if you are unable to pay your cash bail just because you are poor, even if you are innocent—there are many people for whom they would have to be weighing whether or not they want to wait months or years in jail awaiting their trial, or whether they would rather plead guilty to be able to just, hopefully, see a shortened sentence allotted and hopefully see release earlier. These are going to be the impossible choices that we are putting in, and that is not justice served. We do not want to see innocent people pleading guilty simply because they cannot make cash bail. It's shameful.

0920

We also know that there are alternative measures to be able to achieve the stated goals of Bill 75's policy. For example, we could consider investing in the bail recoupment system so that when someone does not make their day in court, we are able to more efficiently recoup lost bail amounts. Right now, that is a tremendous issue, and that will not be fixed.

We could also improve the bail system by improving the persistent delays within the justice system itself. As previously raised by the Ontario Bar Association, there have been substantial delays between an accused who is in pretrial custody being requested in court and their actual attendance in court. These delays directly contribute to

overcrowding in Ontario jails, where a substantial proportion of inmates are actually held in pretrial detention.

Again, we don't know yet whether they are innocent or guilty; they have only been accused, and yet they are taking up a majority of the spots in our jails. How is that protecting public safety? The provisions in this cash bail system do nothing to predict whether or not someone is a risk to the public, whether or not they are a risk to reoffend, whether or not they are innocent or guilty; it simply adjudicates whether or not they are able to pass an income test. Again, I would say that is not justice; that is a cheap populist trick to try to say that you are doing something while actually doing nothing.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the time to speak on this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Time for questions.

Mme Lucille Collard: I want to thank the member for her remarks, which really resonate with what I've been saying all along. Your comments on bail reform are really on point. The constitutionality of that I'm sure is going to be challenged.

More importantly, this is so the wrong way to go about keeping criminals behind bars. As you noted, many people behind bars are just on remand, waiting for their day in court. This is just going to put more pressure on our justice system and on our jails.

We all know that keeping people in jail costs a lot of money; we're talking about over \$300 per day. How could that money be better invested to really help people?

MPP Robin Lennox: Thank you to the member for your question. I think it is really important.

When we think about the investment of public money, we need to know that what we are investing in is going to yield the desired outcome, which is, as we have all agreed, community safety. We know that keeping someone in jail is actually the most expensive place to possibly keep them. We could take that money and invest in community programs that promote community safety, like, for example, the nine youth violence prevention programs that I talked about being defunded in Hamilton. We could invest that money in violence prevention because I'm sure that many of us would agree that we would rather violent crime never take place than see more people convicted of violent crime.

Why don't we prevent the harms rather than just focusing on locking people up after the harms have already occurred?

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

Hon. Zee Hamid: I'd like to thank the member for that speech.

It's something we've clarified a number of times: Cash bail becomes due upon release. People are not held in if they can't pay.

It's important to note that judges who set the bail know the situation, they know the law, they know the condition, so they can set bail as low as a dollar for people who are

arrested for shoplifting. Higher bail is only set for violent and repeat offenders.

Take an example of somebody who repeatedly commits intimate partner violence. A judge would have a sliding scale of bail. It might start a bit lower, but eventually it will become higher because it becomes a matter of public safety.

My question to the member is, do they really believe that repeat and violent offenders should not have consequences of their actions, and is it not fair to the victims to make sure that they are held behind bars in these cases?

MPP Robin Lennox: Thank you to the member opposite for providing that example because I think it really helps us understand what a wealth-based bail system would mean, because in your example you talked about how bail amounts are going to go up based on the risk of reoffence, the risk of public safety. But the determination for release on bail shouldn't be whether or not you can pay the amount, because in your example, a millionaire could commit an extremely violent crime, but they have the wealth to be able to pay any amount of bail and they would be released. Whereas a poor person could commit the same crime and not be able to pay. So we would posit that the determination for bail should be about risk to the community, not a dollar amount that a wealthy person could pay and walk free and a poor person could not.

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

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to my colleague for her debate on this bill. My colleague just said if you do a crime, you get locked up. I am concerned about people with addiction problems. We know there's a growing number of young people who have gambling issues. This government has allowed Ontario to have open advertising, targeting young people to get them addicted to gambling. I have friends who have recovered from alcoholism, who are struggling with alcoholism, and because of this government they can't go to grocery stores, they can't go to parks. They have more and more difficulty avoiding places with alcohol.

It seems like the government wants to appear tough on crime after crime happens but doesn't seem interested in preventing crime. I wonder if the member from Hamilton Centre would like to comment on that.

MPP Robin Lennox: Thank you to my colleague. I would agree that when we contrast this with some of the other policies that this government is putting forward, we really have to question whether or not you are consistent in what you say is promoting community safety, because just recently, in this bill, you are saying that you're going to try to make our roads safer by cracking down on people who are driving impaired, or dangerous driving, or careless driving. But at the same time you just announced that you want people to be able to bring their own alcohol to community events and public spaces. Let me tell you what small, rural towns are saying about that, because there are small, rural towns and municipalities who are rejecting that policy because they know it's going to make the roads unsafe.

I grew up in small town, and let me tell you, when you go to a community event in a community park downtown in your little town, everyone is driving up or they are boating up. Then you're bringing your alcohol, there are no safe serves, there are no safeguards. Then what your policies are doing is telling everyone, "Bring as much alcohol as you want and then drive home." That is not safety.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member from Hamilton Centre for her thoughtful debate. This government has a tendency to name its bills in contradiction to what they're actually doing. Whether it's getting more homes built and yet we have fewer homes built in 2025 than we did in 2021—here we've got a bill entitled Keeping Criminals Behind Bars Act, and yet this government has released prisoners accidentally and won't tell us what's going on with them.

Could you comment a little further about why you think the government names a bill one thing and then does the exact opposite?

MPP Robin Lennox: Thank you to the member for that question. I would agree. They say you can't judge a book by its cover. You certainly can't judge a bill by its title, because this government gets very creative in naming its bills.

Certainly I don't think that we could, in good conscience, say that we are keeping criminals behind bars when we are throwing out hundreds of sexual assault cases in this province before survivors get their day in court. How can you possibly say that you are serving justice when that is the case and when schedule 2, as in this bill, will further exacerbate that problem, slow down our courts and lead to more cases being thrown out before our victims get their justice?

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: I appreciate the member from Hamilton Centre for her remarks this morning. It's great to hear—I learned something new about that member: She comes from a rural town. It's great to have more members either representing or coming from that type of community.

I know she mentioned our government's policy to allow more choice around alcohol in public spaces if the municipality chooses. It's actually been rural communities, I've found—some are choosing not to, but some in my riding have chosen to already implement some of those bylaws: the city of Stratford, for example, during COVID. You can see it in some of the beautiful parks we have there.

0930

My question, though, is related to—the member mentioned some of the initiatives in this bill around drunk driving and if, God forbid, there is drunk driving and a guardian or parent is killed, our government is bringing forward this piece of legislation to ensure the person that committed that crime would then pay child support to the surviving beneficiaries of that individual. Does the

member opposite support that initiative supporting those victims of that crime?

MPP Robin Lennox: Thank you for the question.

We have always stood in support of victims of crime. But what I would like to be able to guarantee every family member when they come to me and they tell me that they have lost someone who has died on the roads because of impaired driving, I would like to say to them that we are doing every single thing we can to say that that will never happen again, that no family should ever have to lose a loved one on the roads to impaired driving. And that starts with making sure that we have smart and safe policies around alcohol. That is the exact opposite of what your government has been doing. Every safeguard in place to make sure that alcohol is safely regulated and managed, you have stripped away—putting alcohol in every corner store and every public space at every opportunity.

We are going to see more people at risk of death and harms from impaired driving on our streets because we are not investing in prevention.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Unfortunately, there isn't time for another round of questions. Further debate?

MPP Tyler Watt: Here we go: Another bill—flashy title, but when you actually read the substance of it, it doesn't accomplish what it's setting out to do.

Listen, we can all agree on the fact that there are issues in our judicial system—in our present system—and there certainly should be folks who are not getting out as easily and as fast as they can. We've even seen examples with this government mistakenly releasing prisoners and losing track of them. We still have five on the loose, have no idea where they are. The Solicitor General won't give us an update on that.

But let's talk about Bill 75, Keeping Criminals Behind Bars Act—again, flashy title, but there are some really deeply concerning things in here. We all know that the prison system right now is way beyond capacity. We have three prisoners to one cell. We have overcrowded conditions. I know this government likes to say that the previous Liberal government closed jails. That's not true. We consolidated them and created new beds—

Hon. Zee Hamid: No.

MPP Tyler Watt: Yes, it is true—it is true, and I'll get to the misinformation that you were talking about in your question later.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Through the Speaker.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you, Speaker.

So there are lots of issues, right? It costs money to keep people in prison, but to have three in one room is not acceptable. We know it costs \$357 per day to keep one person in an Ontario jail. It costs \$5 to \$15 daily—the cost of the community bail supervision program—which is roughly one twenty-fourth to one seventieth of the cost. When we are at 150% capacity in some Ontario jails—that's per the Ombudsman: 150%. So you've had eight years and now you want ram this bill forward with no actual real amendments to address it, and the problem is

only going to get worse. An 80% share of people in Ontario jails are in there on remand—legally innocent, awaiting trial. This bill is Americanizing our system. I do see a lot of inspiration with this government trying to imitate what our neighbours are doing down south.

What is going on with the bail reform in this bill is totally unacceptable, and I really appreciate what my colleague from Hamilton Centre was bringing up about, essentially, the wealth inequity issue that's going to go on there. If you can afford it, then you can get out.

This schedule—I think it's schedule 2 I'm talking about here—in this bill really crosses a line. Criminal procedure, including the rules that govern how bail is set and what conditions can be attached, is exclusively a federal jurisdiction under section 91(27) of the Constitution Act of 1867. Section 515 of the Criminal Code already sets out the complete framework for what release conditions a court may impose, including a very narrow circumstance in which cash deposits are permitted.

Provinces administer bail; they do not get to redefine it, but that's what this government is trying to do. Schedule 2 does not administer. It legislates a new release condition not contemplated by the Criminal Code. That is textbook definition of *ultra vires*.

What the Supreme Court has already said about this: In *R. v. Antic* 2017, the Supreme Court of Canada was unambiguous. The court held three things that gut this bill: Cash bail has no additional effect compared to a promise to pay. Requiring it on top of a recognizance does not make compliance more likely.

Cash bail can become a *de facto* prison when an accused cannot raise the funds, which directly engages section 11(e) of the charter, the right not to be denied reasonable bail without just cause.

The ladder principle is mandatory. Release must be on the least onerous terms necessary, and each more onerous rung must be considered and rejected before the next is imposed. Schedule 2 inverts the ladder. It contemplates cash deposits as a default mechanism through regulation, exactly what *Antic* forbids. The government has been put on notice by the legal community that this is the case and is proceeding anyway.

And really, this does open up the possibility of loan sharks and those who will loan people bail money. We see how that system works in the United States, and this government is going to create that here.

This is not a way to actually keep criminals behind bars. We're not actually addressing the core issues of what's going on here. This is just a superficial title of a bill being slapped onto a piece of legislation to attempt to show Ontarians that this government is tough on crime and doing something about it, but this bill does not actually do that.

This bill will not actually make Ontarians safer. The premise is false. This government's cash for bail rests on a story about dangerous people walking out of bail hearings and reoffending. The data does not support that story. Testimony before the Standing Committee on Justice Policy from the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples found over 80% of individuals released on bail never breached a

condition of any kind. Of the breaches that did occur, 98% are administrative: missing a court date, breaking a curfew, failing to check in. Fewer than one in 300 people on bail commit a substantive new offence—a.k.a. a real crime—while released. So tackle those ones. Tackle the outliers. We don't need to change the entire system in an attempt to convince Ontarians that this government is tough on crime.

Cash bail is being prescribed as a treatment for a disease that affects less than one third of 1% of the patient population. And the treatment doesn't even work: *R. v. Antic* already established that a cash deposit has no greater coercive effect than a non-cash promise to pay.

Judges can already order cash bail when it's warranted, by the way. Nothing in current law prevents a judge from requiring cash bail in an appropriate case. Section 515(2)(e) of the Criminal Code already authorizes it. It is used sparingly because the ladder principle requires it to be and because, in practice, less onerous conditions accomplish the same public safety goal. This government is not creating a new tool; it is replacing judicial discretion with an administrative rule and centralizing power to design that rule in the hands of the Attorney General through regulation—a common theme that we have been seeing this entire session with centralizing all power to all ministers in every single sector.

Now this government is claiming that schedule 2 will keep dangerous criminals off the streets. But schedule 2 targets the wealth of the accused, not the risk that they pose. That's the actual issue here. A dangerous person with money walks, as my colleague from Hamilton Centre pointed out. A non-dangerous person without money sits in jail, a jail that could be at 150% capacity. That costs us money, taxpayer dollars, to keep them there, by the way.

0940

The government claims the current bail system is broken and lets too many people out. Sure, there are circumstances where people have been let out. This government has mistakenly let out prisoners, lost track of them for—don't know why; don't know who to blame for that. Some are still on the loose. There are real situations where people are getting out—we can admit that—but let's actually address that situation instead of this superficial piece of legislation. The reality is, the Supreme Court found in *R. v. Antic*, 2017, that cash bail has no additional coercive effect compared to a non-cash promise to pay.

This contradicts the government's own report. In March 2023, the Standing Committee on Justice Policy released *A Report on the Modernization of the Bail System: Strengthening Public Safety*. The committee concluded that bail reform should be targeted at repeat violent offenders in high-risk cases and should avoid broad tough-on-crime approaches that sweep in low-risk accused. That is the concern with this bill.

Again, it's not targeting the actual problem. It is just doing a sweeping target that will ultimately hurt people that simply can't afford it, those that haven't been proven guilty yet but have to remain in jail simply because they

can't afford the upfront bail. This broad, blanket regulation-making power that schedule 2 gives the Attorney General is the opposite of targeted; it is exactly the approach the government's own committee warned against just three years ago.

But again, this is a common thing that I see. On the rare occasion that a bill actually goes to committee—a lovely and rare treat with this government—we have public hearings, but they pick and choose who they're going to listen to. So it doesn't even matter if we have experts or stakeholders coming in who are warning the government against this bill; they're just going to do what they want to do anyway. They'll find that one person, probably with ties to the PCs, who is going to say what the government wants to hear, and then they're going to use that to justify their bill.

The conditions of provincial corrections today—the Ombudsman of Ontario, the Auditor General, correctional officer unions and the courts are saying the same thing: Ontario's correctional system is in crisis. The numbers are the government's own. In April 2026, Ontario's correctional facilities were operating at an average of 130% of capacity province-wide, up from 113% just two years earlier. Some institutions—Maplehurst, South West Detention Centre—are running at 150% of intended capacity, with triple- and quadruple-bunking now routine. Complaints to the Ombudsman about correctional services jumped 55% in a single year, reaching nearly 7,000, the highest on record.

I think I've gone above my time here, so to conclude, this bill is not what the government claims. It is unconstitutional. Every major legal body in this province has said so. It is ineffective. The Supreme Court has already ruled in *Antic* that cash bail does not improve compliance, and over 99% of people on bail never commit a new offence anyway. It is reckless. Ontario's jails are over 130% capacity—the Ombudsman calls this system a moral failure—and packing more presumed innocent people into them will result in less time served by people who are actually convicted. It is unnecessary because cheaper, constitutional, evidence-based alternatives already exist, and this government refuses to use them.

This is not a public safety bill; it is a press release with royal assent attached. Ontarians deserve better, and so do the police officers, crown attorneys and victims who depend on a justice system that actually works.

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

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I've been listening to the member across from Nepean, but he never spoke about victims. I want you to speak to my executive assistant that had a home invasion. They broke through her front door. They stole her purse. Then they came back after the police were there and they tried to steal the car. Not only that, now they had to spend \$45,000 on metal gates, cameras, 3M film, bollards.

Why are you supporting the criminals over the victims, and why should the victims be paying for the crime that is happening in our communities? And not only that, for two

years, they couldn't sleep at night; tell me what you want me to tell her.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A reminder to direct remarks through the Chair in future.

Response?

MPP Tyler Watt: That's a loaded question and a lot of words to put in my mouth. I obviously support victims, and I've said that there is a problem in this bill. That person should not have gotten out, so it's up to you to deal with that. This bill doesn't actually address that. It is a superficial title, Speaker, that is going to Americanize our system here.

That victim, I feel for her. They should not be dealing with that. I've had stories in my own riding considering this stuff.

I'm willing to work with you and I support you with this stuff to actually ensure that we are keeping those violent criminals behind bars. This bill doesn't do that. So don't stand there and say that I support the criminals. I support the victims. Let's get this done right.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. Again, through the Chair.

Question?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Through the Chair to the member: You were just asked a question about victims. In 2019, the Ford government cut the funding for criminal injuries compensation and it also eliminated the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. Victims' services people at the time said this was an attack on victims. It was reducing the government's burden but actually made life far more difficult for anyone who was the victim of criminal activity.

Do you have any comment on the space between the question you were given and the government's actual actions?

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you to my colleague for that excellent example. If we're going to talk a big talk and accuse the other side of not caring about victims, actions speak louder than words.

If that was a stunt that this government pulled back in 2019, then you've had eight years now to address it, instead of a bill that—you have experts trying to sound the alarm on how this isn't actually going to address anything. I think victims want to be taken seriously. They want to feel supported. And I don't know what this bill actually does to address that.

If you say that you're for the victims, then prove it. Prove it with a proper piece of legislation where you actually listen to experts, you listen to stakeholders, you listen to victims. You have a majority; you have the power to get it done. Open your ears and actually use your power to put through proper legislation that's going to support victims.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Through the Chair; through the Chair, please.

Question?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I want to thank my great colleague from Nepean for his passionate debate.

As I said earlier, we're faced with a government that names a bill one thing and does another. We've got a government that has let criminals out of jail and doesn't know where they are and we have a government that is, again, talking about doing one thing but showing us that they do another with their budget. The budget shows that justice sector spending is not keeping up with inflation. Basically, they're cutting justice sector spending. The justice sector is where they pay our crown prosecutors, our judges, the jail system—which we know, as you pointed out, is overcrowded, which is why people are getting let out of jail.

So, again, could you talk about how this government does not put its money where its mouth is when it comes to actually protecting our communities and keeping criminals behind bars?

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you to my colleague for that really great question. That really goes to my point—through you, Speaker—that this isn't actually addressing the root cause. We see this in everything, like with what they're doing with health care. They're just slapping Band-Aids on hospitals, hoping the problem will fix itself. They're slapping Band-Aids on prisons, thinking that the problem is going to fix itself. We're not actually getting to the root of the problem.

They are cutting funding towards our judicial system; they're not addressing the fact that we don't have enough judges. We just don't have enough actual people to be dealing with this, so we have, presumably, innocent people—they haven't been proven guilty yet—who are just going to languish in a prison cell with three other criminals, who taxpayers are going to pay for because they can't afford their bail, simply because the court system is so backed up.

0950

If we want to keep the actual criminals behind bars, why aren't we addressing that in the first place? Why aren't we making sure that those court systems are properly funded and that there are enough actual resources there to deal with the criminals?

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

MPP George Darouze: I do want to thank my colleague from Nepean for his presentation this morning. I do want to highlight the fact that I personally went and I talked to the stakeholders in our community. I went to the Solicitor General, I met with Ottawa police—we met with lots of people. We had a round table with stakeholders.

The member himself, in his own riding—the criminals come in, do the crime and the next day they are out on bail and they're back out on the street racing, stealing cars, doing all that. I don't understand where the member is coming from, that he's saying we're not doing anything. Bill 75 will address those issues, those concerns, not only in Nepean but also in the city of Ottawa.

We heard it time and time again. Ottawa police support this. We have so many stakeholders we heard at the committee that are supporting this. I'd like him to comment on that one.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you to my colleague for that question. Yes, I am concerned about public safety in Nepean. I'm concerned about public safety in Carleton and in Ottawa. But the problem with this bail reform, Speaker, is the fact that if you can afford it, you can get back out on the street right away. Again, how is that actually keeping criminals behind bars? That's what I'm not understanding.

What in here is going to address the fact that our judicial system is completely under-resourced and underfunded? There are gaps and holes in this. My colleague sat in on the public consultations, and it wasn't a blanket universal love of approval of this bill. There is room for opportunity to make amendments to this bill to actually address the title of it, the goal of it, to actually keep criminals behind bars. This bill doesn't fully get to that.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you to the member for his comments. Last time I toured the Sudbury jail, I would say I knew at least 90% of the people who were in jail, a great majority of it—again, close to 90% of the people who were there had a severe mental illness or used substances.

Do you think that it is a good use of our jails to have people there with mental illness? Do you figure jail is a good place for people with mental illness or substance use to be cared for? If we want to keep criminals behind bars, do you really think that people who have a mental illness are criminals? Are there other services that we should be providing, so that our jail in Sudbury is not full, with 90% of the people in there who have a mental illness or use substances?

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you to my colleague for that really important question. That really goes to the point of this being more of a superficial bill than anything. It's the flashy title, Keeping Criminals Behind Bars Act, but it's more complicated than that.

My colleague's question really gets to the mental health crisis and the public health crisis that we are facing. People who are battling addictions do not belong in prison. They shouldn't be going through withdrawal and dealing with their addiction in prison. They belong in rehab. They belong in proper treatment, things like the HART hubs that are opening right now. That is something that we can get behind.

Certainly just throwing them in jail, where they certainly won't be able to afford the new cash bail system that this government is creating, is not necessarily the appropriate place for them to be.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): There is no more time for questions.

Further debate?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I appreciate this opportunity to rise in defence of this important piece of legislation. I want to thank the Solicitor General, the Associate Solicitor General and all the parliamentary assistants who have done great work in developing this legislation.

I had the benefit of listening to members opposite as they provided comment on this bill, and often, in these debates, you can tell the philosophical differences across

the aisle. When the debate is focused on the first instinct of some legislators, on the root causes of crime, trying to understand how a criminal may have gotten here—and I say this, Madam Speaker, with the full recognition for mental health and addictions; compassion actually needs to be part of this discussion. But if the first instinct of legislators is to contemplate why or how a criminal got here instead of how we defend victims from revictimization, if the debate is centred on the criminal, not on the rights of the victim, we are doing something wrong in this place; our priorities are distorted.

The instinct of this government and of every legislator should be a policy of deterrence to avert the most heinous forms of crime that take place in all of our communities—urban and rural, English and French. It doesn't matter where you're from, the rise of crime afflicts us all. It hurts us all. It just puzzles me that this is something that, for the Liberal Party, they want to make this debate about those criminals, instead of centring this debate on the victims of crime who have done nothing wrong.

There is a gentleman in my community, Abdul Aleem Farooqi—you will know his name; you will remember his name. This is the father who bravely stood up to a thug who entered his home, in front of his three children and his wife, shot him. This debate should be focused on the rights of victims and their families. This debate should be centred around the rights of law-abiding Canadians. We feel strongly in our conviction that this discussion isn't centred around those stories of incidence rates.

When you think about the number of individuals in 2023, when there were 127 lives taken on the roads because of impairment, because someone was drinking or using illicit drugs and then going on the road—this debate, this legislation and our engagement on this file should focus on preventing the very incidents from happening again. Because no one should have to deal with that call—a brutal experience that I cannot imagine for a family.

Therefore, we brought forth a tough-on-crime bill, not a talking point. It is in the statute. It is proposed and codified with a series of actions that actually create some sense of accountability on those that would bring about that sense of senseless pain for a family and their loved ones.

And so, Madam Speaker, when I hear Liberals speak about the issues of the administration of justice or the capacity of our jails—all fair public policy discussions, but making this debate about those issues, not about the obvious issue before us, which is a weakened Criminal Code that allows a revolving door of justice, we are not seeing the forest from the trees. That is the ultimate case study of the problem—that we're missing the mark in the moment.

Canada's bail system is a failure, and all of our communities and families have been afflicted by this pain because they've been led out of a revolving door of justice. And what did our government and Premier do? They led a campaign to call on the federal Parliament, as we do today, to pass the bill that is on the order paper.

Implement meaningful bail reform. That's what the federal government should do; that's what this Parliament should say in one voice, unified. I'm calling on all parties—not just the federal Liberals; every party—to get off their hands, pass the bill, enable a meaningful sense of toughness within our criminal system.

What can we do in Ontario, within our realm, within our area of responsibility, to toughen the law, to send a signal of deterrence, to say we are zero tolerant on crimes? It could be impairment on the roads. It could be violence on our streets. And so we brought forth a legislative package.

I'm grateful the government had the courage to do this, because when you look at bail and at the actions we can take, when we have the imposition of a new cash security deposit requirement, it puts a greater onus on those that are charged. It puts a greater sense of accountability on the system. And I believe it strengthens the integrity of Canadians that their system is on their side, the side of law-abiding people, not the side of those that commit the crimes or alleged crimes in the province of Ontario.

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When we introduced a user-fee system for GPS monitoring for those offenders released on bail, that the offender will pay to use the tech, it puts the onus of responsibility on those committing the crime. The victims have paid; they will pay in their memories for the rest of their lives. It's now time for a sense of justice to actually be realized and that's why I believe enhancing bail measures is in the public interest of Ontario.

My community of Vaughan is not unique. We have all faced this, but it is certainly not immune to crime. It's been a hot spot of violent break-ins, shootings, just brazen acts, people shooting at places of worship and synagogues, graffiti on mosques—totally inappropriate, totally un-Canadian, so I support actions that say zero tolerance. I strongly support engagement that is on the side of law-abiding people.

We also brought forth a series of measures and toughened the sanctions for those that drive under impairment—suspended licences—careless driving, as a case study. The new proposal expands, for the first offence, for the second offence, for the third offence, longer periods of suspension. There has got to be some sense of accountability when you foolishly drink and drive. I know Mothers Against Drunk Driving and so many organizations throughout my life—and hopefully, I know, for decades to come—will be leading the way for their sons and daughters who have perished on the roads because of the carelessness of some individuals on the road.

I support measures that increase fines for suspended and careless drivers. I think we have to do everything within provincial areas of competence under the law to toughen those sentences. And so, for the first conviction, going up to \$10,000 when it could have been upwards of \$5,000 and to move it to \$15,000 from \$5,000 on the second fine at least signals to Canadians, to Ontarians, to law-abiding people, to everyday parents, families and seniors who just want to live their life with the sense of

security, that we are on their side and we are decidedly and absolutely against those who commit crimes. That is the message we're sending today.

Madam Speaker, I also want to affirm to you today that this government has taken a policy position when it comes to standing up against the real criminals before us. I hail from suburban community, but I have a rural part in King township. The same is true for many of you. The real criminals are not our hunters and anglers. They're not our farmers and they're not my grandfather's antique rifle that he's had in his family for 100 years. He's not the person government should be seized with. It's the illegal handguns coming from America. It's the focus on true crime before our eyes.

I'm going to just do a very quick time check, Madam Speaker, because I have one more minute to go.

We need to focus on the real criminals before us. We need to focus on the rights of law-abiding people. We need to stand up for the victims of crime, reorient and rebalance the justice system back in their favour, because the federal Liberals, with great respect to the former Prime Minister, diluted every legislative act we took.

Mandatory minimum sentences for a gun crime: How is that controversial in this place? You commit a gun crime, you kill an innocent person, you will go to jail—no discretion, no flexibility. There's got to be a message of deterrence, but that is an issue where the Liberals would disagree.

It's baffling for Canadians. This is how people lose public confidence in their government—when they have Liberal members who reduce the number of full-time police officers on our streets, Liberals who weakened our laws, Liberals who actually campaigned for the Justin Trudeau approach to justice, where we've never seen a higher rate of violence on our streets. There's causation between the two.

So the Liberal members today and their federal cousins should actually focus on the obvious problem before us—it's not the root cause of crime; it's the criminals themselves. And if they were honest, if they were committed to the cause of justice for all, they'd stand in their place and support a tough-on-crime policy like the one this government has brought before this House today.

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

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to my colleague for his comments. I agree with most of what he said. But I have to say, he knows that part of our job, as opposition, is to talk about ways to improve the bill.

Tough on crime—absolutely. But how do we prevent crime from happening in the first place?

The other thing that I would challenge, and maybe part of my question is that we know there's between—the latest report, I think, is close to \$100 million of wage theft that was stolen from workers going to work, which is a crime. The Conservative government has not collected this money. They allow this to happen. They actually embolden those criminals to continue to steal money from the workers.

I wonder if you'd agree with me that if you're going to be tough on crime, let's be tough on all criminals.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: If we can agree that we need to be tough on crime, that we actually need deterrence and policies that are zero tolerance, that's a good thing, and I celebrate that, actually. I don't take that for granted in this House. So let's start with a message of unity on that purpose.

When it comes to other forms of crime like fraud, white-collar crimes, these are not to be dismissed as lesser crimes. If you defraud someone of their home, their assets, their salary, it could be cataclysmic. It could lead to mental health issues.

I think there's a willingness of government to be open to measures that can send a signal to employers and, likewise, to employees that they both have to fulfill their rights under labour law.

This bill speaks specifically to impairment; it speaks to bail. I think it deals with the main issues facing Canadians. But I don't discount that there may be other ways, in the future, for debate in this House—about how we can strengthen the law and public confidence within our justice system.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I would really, really like for the government—and the minister, in particular, to tell me if he really believes that asking people for money before they can be released is actually going to weed out the violent criminals from the innocent ones. How would that work in any world?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The basis of our system is to put obligations on the accused. That is the nature of our Commonwealth, Westminster democracy. It's not unique to Canada. It is the basis of our civil law system. There has to be an element of obligation placed on those accused. There has to be an element of accountability.

No one is suggesting that this policy in isolation is going to solve world peace, but it is one additional layer we can impose to send a message: that if you are going to commit a crime, there will be accountability imposed, which can include financial. And I just think, why not throw everything at this problem?

The member opposite knows I have profound respect for her knowledge and legal knowledge in this place. I'm open to alternatives.

But why wouldn't we set some sense of expectation, some sense of obligation on the criminal to demonstrate their capacities and to put some skin in the game? I have no concerns with that at all. In fact, I support it, and I'd support further action in this respect.

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to thank the minister for standing up and being a great supporter of our public safety.

The purpose of this bill is to remind Ontarians that we stand with them; we stand with their fundamental rights to

go about their lives, just the same way that my parents and my grandparents had their rights fulfilled.

What this bill does is it rebalances the responsibility—that if somebody breaks the law, there must be consequences.

What we're saying in this bill, especially with the security deposit and the sureties—that you must be held responsible as defined by the courts because they're the ones that set the amount under our proposal.

1010

But I would ask my friend, in the absence of being a government that takes public safety seriously, what is it that we have left?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I do appreciate the Solicitor General's leadership in bringing this bill forward. You have been with police officers. You have been at their funerals. You have been at their graduations. You celebrate their milestones. The associate minister has done the same. And I am grateful that you are on the ground, in the trenches, supporting them, standing with them, unapologetically defending the women and men in blue.

I will say, in this Legislature, we have not always had a unified sense of support for police. There have actually been political parties in front of us, candidates for leaders of their parties today, who have actually called for the defunding of police, which may have been in vogue in the moment. The effect is the undermining of public confidence in institutions.

Our public safety, our police, play a vital role in our democracy. We should stand with them. And when we have a policy before legislators today to toughen the rules, toughen the sentences—zero tolerance—that should bring us together when we have never seen rates of recidivism like we do today.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Reminder: Through the Chair.

Questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I was listening to the debate specifically around the court system. We do know that the court system and having timely access to justice is a key deterrent for future crimes. So 48 survivors in the Sloka case in Kitchener-Waterloo waited over four and a half years for justice—almost five years; and 1,639 sexual assault cases were dispensed or stayed in 2025, which means that those women who reported did not get justice. When women do not feel supported by the justice system and they don't report, that means that there are more sexual offenders still out there on our streets.

Does the member understand how the backlog in our court system is preventing justice from being played out in our province? Will you and your government support Lydia's Law, which is meant to address the lack of justice in Ontario's justice system?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you for the question from the member opposite. I know she has been a strong advocate for the rights of women and those who have been trafficked, and I appreciate that.

Bill 75 does explore parts of making the Ontario sex offender and trafficker registry publicly available. The first principle in recognizing the problem is in naming the

problem. I hope the Liberal Party today will agree with this premise—because it sounds like there is a sense of alignment here with the official opposition—if you are a sex offender in Ontario, your name should be publicly available. It is in the public interest.

The administration of justice is important, for which I know the Attorney General has added more resources, more staffing to help remediate those challenges. But at the end of the day, if you are a human trafficker, if you are a sex offender, we believe it is in the public interest for your name to be disclosed. I hope all members will support that provision today, which is so obviously in the interest of families, of parents, of all Canadians.

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

MPP Mohamed Firin: I would like to thank the minister for his comments and for always being there for our police officers and working to protect our province.

Recently in the minister's riding, there was an act of violence that took place where a father was murdered in front of his kids. What I want to ask the minister is how that heinous crime impacted his community and why is it important that we keep violent offenders behind bars?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It is true that we've all had to face acts of crime in our communities. The incident that the member from York South-Weston is referring to deals with Abdul Aleem Farooqi, who was a young father who perished in front of his three children and his wife because a brutal murderer entered his home—in his act to defend his children and his wife.

This is the humanizing element of crime that it is important that we do not decouple from the debate. These are not numbers; this is a man, a father, a husband, a partner. He was a great man, loved in our community, and his memory should not be in vain. We should impose the toughest sentences—that's what his wife asked—on the criminal to send a message that no wife, no husband, no child would have to grieve the loss of their loved one again.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): It is now time for members' statements.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SCARBOROUGH HEALTH NETWORK

Mr. Aris Babikian: Last month, I had the pleasure of attending the Scarborough Health Network's volunteer appreciation dinner. Every year, I look forward to this event as it gives me an opportunity to thank and celebrate the extraordinary contributions of the hard-working volunteers, whose dedication and compassion play such an important role across our hospitals.

Madam Speaker, under the leadership of our government and the Premier, Scarborough is no longer a forgotten part of Toronto. We are making significant investments into

health care. Residents call me frequently to tell me about the improvement of service quality and wait times at SHN.

Just in my riding, our government is investing over \$1 billion to build a new 450-bed hospital. This funding includes \$3 million to renovate the existing Birchmount Hospital. Our government is also investing \$15 million to add 27 new hemodialysis stations across SHN. Furthermore, just last year, we celebrated the opening of the new Northpine diagnostic imaging department after a \$36-million investment by our government.

It gets better, Madam Speaker. Our government announced the new medical school in Scarborough, which will be opening their doors this year. I am happy to report that Scarborough is finally getting the attention it—

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

Members' statements?

SERVICES DIAGNOSTIQUES

M. Guy Bourgouin: Partout dans le Nord, les patients font face à des temps d'attente inacceptables pour un MRI. À la suite d'une référence envoyée par un médecin de famille, les patients attendent cinq à six mois pour un rendez-vous. Sans accès local à ces examens, ils doivent parcourir des centaines de kilomètres jusqu'au service le plus proche à Timmins, sans mentionner les conditions sur la route 11.

L'imagerie précoce est essentielle aux soins préventifs. Les délais de diagnostic signifient vivre avec l'incertitude pendant des mois, et peuvent entraîner une aggravation des conditions, ainsi que des traitements plus complexes. Ces délais ont aussi des impacts concrets sur notre main-d'œuvre locale. Les travailleurs et travailleuses blessés ne peuvent pas retourner au travail sans l'autorisation médicale, qui dépend souvent d'un MRI. Cela entraîne des pertes de revenus des familles, des pressions pour les employeurs et des effets en cascade à l'économie locale.

Il est temps d'implanter une capacité de MRI à l'hôpital Sensenbrenner qui pourrait desservir les communautés régionales tout en réduisant la pression sur l'établissement de Timmins. Améliorer l'accès à l'imagerie diagnostique, c'est soutenir les patients, les travailleurs et travailleuses, ainsi que nos communautés partout dans le nord de l'Ontario.

SCARBOROUGH HEALTH NETWORK

MPP Andrea Hazell: It's national nurses' week. I stand today to honour Scarborough Health Network and all the incredible nurses, donors and volunteers. They are all my health care heroes.

My connection to SHN and the SHN Foundation is deeply personal. I started volunteering with Scarborough Health Network in 2014, and since then I have seen first-hand the dedication and sacrifice of staff, doctors, nurses and volunteers from all three hospitals. They are truly our health care heroes.

Speaker, two weeks ago, I attended SHN's volunteer appreciation event. I helped present awards to incredible volunteers who were beaming with pride and joy. I want to recognize Michele James, executive vice-president at SHN, for her tremendous leadership and dedication over 18 years. Michele James, I wish you a beautiful next chapter in your retirement.

I want to thank every nurse in Ontario for their care, compassion and service, and for never giving up on us, no matter how difficult it gets.

To the SHN team, thank you for caring for my beautiful mom in her final days. I will forever be grateful. I will always stand with SHN and especially everyone at SHN Foundation. You have my heart. Thank you.

1020

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A reminder to all members that it's far easier to hear the members' statements if the rest of the room is listening. Thank you.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Bonjour, Speaker. I rise today to recognize a historic milestone for Brampton West, the groundbreaking of Brampton's first-ever French-language Catholic secondary school. Our government is investing \$43.8 million, including \$27.5 million in additional funding, to create 410 new student spaces for local families and support the growing French-speaking Catholic community in our city.

Speaker, this investment builds on our government's strong record of delivering education infrastructure in Brampton West. Construction is under way on the new Mount Pleasant secondary school, supported through an \$84.2-million provincial investment that will create 1,660 student spaces and 73 child care spaces.

Not only that, Madam Speaker: Last year, Red Cedar Public School and Malala Yousafzai Public School opened their doors, creating 1,700 new student spaces and 146 child care spaces combined for local families.

Through our nearly \$180-million investment in the Toronto Metropolitan University School of Medicine in Brampton, we're also helping train the next generation of health care professionals right in our community.

Speaker, our government is making the investments needed to ensure students and families in Brampton West have access to modern schools and opportunities for success for generations to come.

KIDSABILITY

Ms. Catherine Fife: Parents, staff and community members have been sharing their concerns with me about the recent workforce reductions and lack of financial transparency at KidsAbility. KidsAbility is a treasured institution for child development and inclusion. In the past, they reinvented the way care is provided to better meet the needs of local kids and their families earlier in their journey.

But according to public records, there's been a consistent increase in funding since 2020, yet to date, 63 people have been laid off, 45 of which were front-line staff. Service levels are being impacted.

It's difficult to justify these staffing cuts when last year, KidsAbility's CEO saw a 22.1% increase in her salary. The IT and marketing departments are steadily growing while front-line clinical services have been slashed. Resource allocation should prioritize children, especially given the wait-list.

As one parent says, "Since there have been no cuts to funding, KidsAbility leadership owes the public a clear explanation as to why these layoffs were necessary. The loss of experienced staff and the disruption of services caused by these layoffs cannot be easily recovered. Institutional knowledge, trust and continuity are not easily recovered. Leadership must be accountable...."

We agree. Families and children in Waterloo region demand better. We demand transparency as well, and we will not stop fighting for those kids.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Earlier this week, I was proud to join the Minister of Health at the Mississauga Hospital to celebrate Nursing Week and to thank the nurses and other front-line health workers for their compassion, dedication and extraordinary commitment to parents and families.

We were thrilled to hand out a few cookies from the Trillium Health Partners Foundation and even more thrilled to see the progress of the construction on our new hospital. Excavation is now over 70% completed. Cranes are up at the site, and the first concrete pour will happen next month for the largest, most advanced hospital in Canada.

I also joined the minister last month at the Edwards Lifesciences heart healthy breakfast to help raise awareness for heart valve disease. Last week, we celebrated Thalassemia Awareness Day, another one of my private members' bills.

I also wanted to thank the minister for expanding access to colon cancer screening. Speaker, this will save lives.

Over the past few weeks, I've had the opportunity to celebrate world autism day with the Minister of Social Services at the Hullabaloo in my riding. We attended events to support the Luso charities and individuals living with disabilities, the Embrace agency and survivors of gender-based violence, the Passion for Parkinson's Foundation and many more.

I want to thank them all again for everything they do to care for the most vulnerable and to strengthen our community across Mississauga and the province of Ontario.

ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Speaker, since 2005, this Legislature has been recognizing the importance and history of Asian Heritage Month in Ontario. Each May, we celebrate the cultures, the traditions and the achievements

of Asian communities, whose labour and leadership helped build this province and country.

Asian Heritage Month is also a time to remember injustice: Chinese Canadians made enormous sacrifices in building the Canadian Pacific Railway in the 1800s, performing some of the most dangerous and underpaid work that built the national railroad which connected our country from coast to coast; the unjust internment and displacement of Japanese Canadians and the confiscation of their homes, their farms and their personal assets during World War II; the hostile welcome from the Canadian government to the South Asian immigrants who were British subjects aboard the Komagata Maru, fleeing poverty and unspeakable hardship in what was then known as British India.

Across Ontario, Asian communities have long contributed as entrepreneurs, farmers, health care workers, educators, artists and public servants. They help grow our cities, strengthen our economy, enrich our social fabric, despite facing discrimination and exclusion.

Asian Heritage Month reminds us that our province's story cannot be told without Asian Ontarians. Their resilience built our past, strengthens our present and will shape our future. Thank you to all.

ONTARIO FARMERS

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Essex county has many successful enterprises and none of them are more successful than Essex county farms. Wheat, corn, soybeans, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and apples all come from Essex county. Essex county contributes, every single year, approximately \$3 billion in food production and contributes to Ontario's gross domestic product.

We have great farming families in Essex county. The Wismer family is famous for their world-class Clydesdales. The Drouillard and the Mailloux families have been farming since the 1870s in Essex county. Essex county has over 100 farms that are over 100 years old. This great legacy deserves protection and that is why I applaud the introduction of Bill 109, the Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act.

I want to thank the Premier and I want to thank the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness for introducing this act. We are protecting Ontario farmers, we are protecting Ontario farms and we are protecting Ontario.

RALPH MCMULLEN

Hon. Steve Clark: I rise to celebrate the life of my friend Ralph McMullen, who passed away on Friday in Brockville, surrounded by his loving family.

Ralph's smile, his sense of humour, his compassion for others and his willingness to roll up his sleeves to get things done made him literally a larger-than-life figure. Many knew Ralph as the hard-working, affable produce manager at the Dominion store, but Ralph's career didn't define him; his love for his family and his community did.

He was an umpire. He called balls and strikes for over 40 years, an experience that took him to the Little League World Series and led to his induction in the Brockville and Area Sports Hall of Fame.

Ralph's legacy, his remarkable impact on the Brockville Royal Canadian Legion Branch 96—who marked his passing by saying, “Ralph was more than a long-time Legion member and leader—he was part of the heart of the Brockville Legion.” His service to the Legion resulted in Ralph receiving medals for his work with veterans—the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal, the King Charles III Coronation Medal—and last year, I was honoured to present Ralph with the first Ontario Veterans Award for Community Service Excellence.

To his daughter, Teresa, his family and all of Brockville and area, thank you for sharing him with us. All I can say is we're going to miss you, Ralph.

WEARING OF PINS

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

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Madam Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for members to wear pins in the House in support of the Moose Hide Campaign.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Simcoe–Grey is seeking unanimous consent for members to wear pins in the House in support of the Moose Hide Campaign. Agreed? Agreed.

I recognize the Leader of the Opposition on a point of order.

1030

Ms. Marit Stiles: I seek unanimous consent of the House that in the opinion of this House, the Premier should personally pay for the \$191,000 in fees arising from the government's purchase of a private jet.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): MPP Stiles is seeking unanimous consent of the House that in the opinion of this House, the Premier should personally pay for the \$191,000 in fees arising from the government's purchase of a private jet. Agreed?

Interjection: No.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Members, if I could have your attention, for the very, very, very first time, we are introducing and welcoming people—and young people—from the Speaker's virtual gallery.

Joining us all the way from Marten Falls First Nation, teacher Joann Soriano and the students from Henry Coaster Memorial School;

From Kenora, Ontario, teacher Joy Parsons and students from Valleyview Public School; and

From Moose Factory, teacher Vilma Ccopa and students from Delores D. Echum Composite School. Welcome to Queen's Park.

And a special shoutout to the representatives from Connected North who make all of this happen. In the Speaker's gallery, Jennifer Corriero; and online, Waukomau Pawis. Thanks so much for all your help.

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: I rise to recognize Dominic Paul, the national ambassador of the Moose Hide Campaign, an Indigenous-led grassroots movement dedicated to ending violence against women. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: I have students from my riding online right now: Henry Coaster Memorial School in Marten Falls—welcome—and Delores D. Echum Composite School in Moose Factory. Welcome to your House.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I would like to welcome the YouthCAN provincial advisory council, as well as the many children and youth in and from care who are here today for the 12th annual Children and Youth in Care Day. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to welcome Kelly Grover, Lily Davidson and Shauna Rempel from Cystic Fibrosis Canada. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Good morning. I'd like to welcome to the House today a leading Ontario barrister and dedicated and excellent legal counsel, Mr. Sean Brown, along with two leading and excellent insurance professionals, Ms. Anne Baumgartner and Ms. Tina LeBlanc from Gallagher Bassett. Welcome to the House.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I'd like to congratulate our page captain Kieran Campbell from my beautiful riding of Parkdale–High Park and welcome his family to the House.

I'd also like to welcome the members of Ontario's venerable Buddhist community who are here today for the tabling of the Buddhist Heritage Month Act. Welcome to your House.

Mr. Adil Shamji: This morning, I'd like to welcome the members of Cystic Fibrosis Canada. I'm looking forward to meeting with Kim Steele, Lily Davidson and Dylan Brenneman.

Hon. Zee Hamid: I'd like to introduce my constituents KJ Viridi and Reena Ubhi, who are also parents of my rockstar EA. Welcome.

Ms. Laura Smith: I would like to thank all of the seniors in Ontario, including the First Chinese Seniors' Association of Vaughan who are going to be here today in the House.

Hon. Stan Cho: I want to welcome Michele Austin, president and managing director of the Motion Picture Association Canada. MPAC plays a huge role in film and television. If you're bored at 10 p.m. tonight, watch my cameo on Law and Order Toronto: Criminal Intent.

Hon. Graydon Smith: I'd like to welcome Ryan Jedynak and Adam Truax, who are from one of our local churches in Huntsville, Bethel Huntsville. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mme France Gélinas: I would like to welcome Kelly Grover, who is the president and CEO of Cystic Fibrosis Canada; Kim Steele, director of government and community relations at Cystic Fibrosis Canada; Lily Davidson, who I got to meet this morning, a person living with Cystic

Fibrosis; and Dylan Brenneman, their consultant. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: We have two incredible residents of Bay of Quinte here today: Chris and Susan Finkle, welcome to your House.

Hon. Stephen Crawford: Today, I have a few Oakville residents, Lisa and Drew Bradstock, and I'm happy to have the Oakville Youth Council here today at Queen's Park. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: I have two amazing constituents here, Anna Bozza and Brett Sweeney from FACS Niagara. Welcome to Queen's Park.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I have two introductions today.

I'd like to welcome everyone from the Moose Hide Campaign and thank the entire team for the work that they're doing, their advocacy and education to end violence against women and girls.

I would also like to introduce Olivia Akena, our media relations officer. Her last day is tomorrow, Speaker, and I want to thank Olivia for all of her help over the past year. She will be deeply missed, especially by those of us in southwestern Ontario. Olivia, I wish you all the best in your future endeavours.

Mr. Brian Riddell: I'd like to welcome Alex Piccini, my riding president. I don't know if he's here yet, but he should be here shortly.

QUESTION PERIOD

GOVERNMENT JET

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

"I'll always be frugal with the people's money." That's the promise that this Premier made to the people of Ontario. And what did he do instead? He bought himself a \$30-million private luxury jet. When he got caught and he was forced to return it, he promised that Ontarians were not going to be on the hook for a single cent, but yesterday we learned that the people of Ontario are indeed on the hook for nearly \$200,000 in extra fees.

Can the Premier stand up and explain this inconsistency?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Madam Speaker, the words we invoke in this chamber matter. Our actions matter as leaders. And just yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition actually had the audacity to compare this seat of democracy to the Kremlin, comparing it to a place a genocidal dictator occupies.

This follows a week where the Leader of the Opposition actually had the gall to suggest that she would jail or imprison her political opponents, which is deeply unsettling, a language of division.

Will the Leader of the Opposition do the right thing, as she often reminds our Premier, lead by example and retract that deeply divisive language today?

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I get it; this makes the government very uncomfortable. And I get it; I understand why. We only found out about the plane in April, thanks to the reporting of the Toronto Star. But as it turns out, this Premier has been trying to buy this airplane since January. For months, this government has been hiding the fact that they were spending millions trying to purchase a private luxury jet for their Premier.

Let's take a look: a \$500,000 deposit in January, a \$1.2-million payment early in March, followed by a \$22-million payment. For months, this Premier was putting his hands in the pockets of the people of Ontario, taking their money for his private gravy plane jet. Does this Premier have absolutely no respect for the taxpayers' dollars?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: The Leader of the Opposition seems to like a lot of numbers, so why don't we talk about the \$222 billion worth of investment we've landed here into Ontario?

When you think about the fact that Ontario is North America's second-largest tech cluster—\$40 billion in the tech sector alone, since we were elected:

—Ranovus in Ottawa: a \$100-million investment and 125 new jobs;

—Toast, a software company that helps restaurants streamline their operations: a \$47-million investment in Ontario, 33 new jobs;

—Stack, a developer of data centres: \$100 million and 100 new jobs;

—Hinduja Global Solutions: 150 new jobs in Waterloo.

Those are just numbers in the tech sector. Those are numbers.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Some 700,000 Ontarians are unemployed right now, looking for work, and the numbers are growing because this government is just hemorrhaging jobs in the province of Ontario. And now, the people of Ontario are on the hook for \$200,000. It may not seem a lot to this bunch, but for most people, that's more than they'll earn, right? Of course.

1040

The documents show that the Premier's story doesn't add up. The Premier is so entitled that even after spending over \$30 million from the people's pockets, he doesn't think that he owes them the truth. So I want to ask the Premier to stand up and tell us, will you pay the people of Ontario back for your mid-life crisis gravy plane?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, while the opposition likes to talk down the Ontario economy, the Ontario people and the Ontario workers, we know that our businesses here in Ontario are resilient, and we will do everything possible to help them.

Just last month, we witnessed 42,400 new jobs in the province of Ontario. We understand Canada lost 18,000 jobs and the United States created only 115,000 compared

to Ontario's 42,400. That's a 637% difference between what we have done here in Ontario, and that's because we've been out selling Ontario, working on the message globally, following the Prime Minister around the world, or in some cases, leading him before he gets to other countries. It's the message we've created that Ontario is a strong, stable, reliable, dependable and, quite frankly, predictable partner.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is to the Premier again. Seven long years ago, this government announced that by 2030, Scarborough's subway extension would be complete. But here we are yet again. The government is literally leaving the people of Scarborough behind.

We found out this morning that the project will not be completed on schedule. In fact, it's going to be another six years before this subway extension is up and running, if we're lucky—another enormous failure by the Premier's friends at Metrolinx.

Why has the Premier let this project get so off track?

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

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: After 15 years of Liberal mismanagement, that government, supported by the NDP, was able to accomplish absolutely nothing, Speaker. It's under the leadership of this Premier that we're investing \$70 billion in public transit.

You want to talk about Scarborough? It's our government that's moving forward with the Scarborough subway extension, something that the members opposite didn't support.

We're working towards building transit in this province, and the members opposite only hinder and delay that progress, Speaker. We're here for the people. We're going to build transit. We're going to make sure rapid transit is available at people's doorsteps. We're going to continue doing that.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, back to the Premier: 2033—that's going to be 14 years since this Premier announced that he was going to restore subway service to Scarborough. It sounds awfully familiar to me.

The Eglinton LRT took 15 years, and we all remember what happened there. Families left, businesses closed, and here we are again: more delays, more secrecy and no improvement to transit.

So I want to ask, again, the government and this Premier, what is the Premier going to do to get this project back on track?

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Again, to the member opposite, other than hindering and delaying projects, voting against the great work that we're doing, we're moving forward. Fifty per cent of the tunnelling has been completed on this project, 3.5 kilometres, and that's three stations, all of which the members opposite voted against.

Let's take a look at other programs that we've initiated to save commuters money. The One Fare program is saving them \$1,600 every year, putting money right back into their pockets. You know what the members opposite did, Speaker? They voted against that very measure that supports individuals, that supports transit riders.

This is the government that's building transit. We're going to continue to do so. We're not going to take lessons from the members opposite who supported a Liberal government that built absolutely nothing. We're embarking on the largest transit expansion plan in Ontario. We're going to continue to do so so people can have reliable public transit in this province.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, that member should be embarrassed. Press releases and announcements are not going to get people to work faster in Scarborough. The project is delayed. The price tag has doubled again. It is clear that the Premier's buddies at Metrolinx are taking Ontario taxpayers for a ride, just not the ride that they thought they paid for.

The community of Scarborough has been treated like an afterthought time and time again by this government and by the Liberals before them.

People need to get around. Not everyone in Ontario can buy themselves a \$30-million private jet.

Are you going to hold your buddies at Metrolinx accountable and get this project delivered on time?

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: They love to talk about public transportation today, but where were they for the 15 years when the Liberal government built absolutely nothing for Scarborough?

It's this government, when Premier Ford took office, that stood up for the people of Scarborough, building subways, building transit—and not only stopping there, Speaker, but building the first medical school in Scarborough, with classes that are already taking place. And do you know what the members opposite did, Speaker? They voted against every single measure that helped improve the lives of the people that live in Scarborough.

The line that the member opposite is speaking about is going to have 105,000 daily boardings and put 38,000 more people in walking distance of transit. It mind-boggles me that the members opposite don't want the project to move forward. They don't support the project.

But with this government, with this PC caucus, we're going to continue to build public transit and make sure people have ready access to public transit at their doorstep. It's our government that's going to do so. You've heard it loud and clear from the opposition members: They're not willing to do anything other than delay and hinder projects. We're going to keep tunnelling, and we're going to keep moving forward.

GOVERNMENT JET

Mr. John Fraser: We finally got an answer on the Premier's luxury private jet—no thanks to the President of

the Treasury Board. But the Premier needs to know he's always going to own it because he's always going to wear it.

Now, we found out that the Premier burned through \$200,000 to fulfill his fantasy of owning a luxury private jet. Then it vanished before his eyes—failed to launch.

My question is simple: Was \$200,000 for three days of fulfilling his fantasy of owning a luxury private jet worth it?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. Mike Harris: Let's talk about some numbers. Let's talk about the \$25 billion that the Liberals were ready to waste on the unfair hydro plan. Let's talk about eHealth. Let's talk about gas plants. Let's talk about the lack of investment in northern Ontario. Let's talk about the members on that side of the House that called northern Ontario a no man's land. That member—the interim leader of the third party for the third time—was here for that.

Madam Speaker, we are making investments in the north. We are making investments in rural Ontario. We will not apologize for that. We are reducing red tape to the tune of \$1.3 billion. We're making it easier for people to do business here in Ontario, and we will not apologize for it.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I apologize to the member of the third party, but before you begin—I'm not sure if it's your earpiece that's close to the microphones, but we're getting some feedback, so if you could just be careful where your phone or your earpiece is.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): And please do not talk across the aisle. Order.

I recognize the leader of the third party.

Mr. John Fraser: I really hope that the Premier got a chance to get up front and sit in the pilot seat and pretend to be the captain of his own luxury private jet. And I hope that some of his cabinet colleagues got to join in on the fun, because they had supporting roles in fulfilling the Premier's fantasy of owning a luxury private jet. That's a lot of co-pilots.

Again, my question's really simple—super simple: Was burning through \$200,000 worth pretending to be the captain of your own luxury private jet?

Hon. Mike Harris: Let's talk about a few more numbers: eight, that's the number of jails closed under the Liberal government; 700, that's the number of schools closed under the Liberal government; thousands of nurses fired under the Liberal government; residency seats at our medical schools cut under the Liberal government.

Once again, this Progressive Conservative government is making investments in Ontario. Myself and the Associate Minister of Forestry and Forest Products were very happy to very recently make a \$10-million announcement in Englehart with Georgia-Pacific, who is putting \$191 million into their facility to retool. They see the vision of our government. They see the good things that are happening here, not only in Ontario but in the north. They're making those investments. We're going to stand

with them. We're not going to listen to what's happening over here. We're going to keep moving forward.

1050

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

Mr. John Fraser: To all the cabinet ministers kind of having a smirk and a laugh on the front benches, you better be careful, because the captain and Teneycke are going to take you down. But don't worry—

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

Mr. John Fraser: You have to know, Speaker, that love is going to keep them together.

Speaker, it took us four weeks to get the receipts of the Premier's purchase of the luxury private jet, and it shouldn't take so long. There are lots of other questions, like, how was it procured? What were the options that the Premier had—leather seats, a mini bar? We're not quite sure.

But the question that most Ontarians want to know is, why—when 700,000 people are out of work; people can't afford groceries, gas and their rent or kids' clothes—did the Premier think it was right to buy a luxury private jet?

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Again, they can't run a nomination meeting, but they think they can run the province.

Why do you talk down the province, the economy, the jobs and the workers? Why are you talking down the 375,000 businesses that will benefit from a small business tax? Madam Speaker, why is the member of the Liberal Party there talking down the 21,000 new construction jobs based on the 13% HST house-building tax cut that we put forward that will help with the dream of home ownership for many people across the province? And why are they turning down the 30,000-plus jobs in my home riding of Pickering to refurbish the four nuclear generating stations?

Those are the types of things that the people of Ontario want: a strong economy, good jobs and people working right across the province.

GOVERNMENT JET

Mr. John Fraser: It's nice to hear from the co-pilot again. I'm not quite sure who the navigator is over there.

But let me take you back to January 19, when your government made the first instalment on the Premier's luxury private jet. First instalment: How much? Half a million dollars. Then, less than two weeks later, you reversed OSAP. You made kids go further into debt, their families go further into debt. Yet you found \$29 million in the coffers, mister co-pilot, to buy a luxury private jet.

Speaker, to the Premier: Can you explain why having a luxury private jet is more important than our students' future?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I will apologize to the member before he responds.

We do not refer to other members as “co-pilots.” We refer to them by their riding or their title.

I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Madam Speaker, I'm still trying to get over the fact that I understood the Captain and Tennille references in the previous question.

Look, I just came this morning from Pickering with the Premier, celebrating a Building Faster Fund cheque for building new homes in Pickering for the third year in a row of over \$4 million. That, my friend, is what the people of Ontario want us to do: to build new homes, to get them good jobs.

We also talked about the fact that we're widening Highway 7 so that more people can move between Markham and Ajax through Pickering—what a concept—so that businesses like FGF Brands, who are investing in Pickering, investing in Ontario, staying in Ontario; like Kubota, who set up their head office on that innovation corridor on Highway 7—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Response.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Madam Speaker, that's what the people of Ontario are looking for. They're looking for leadership. They're getting it from this Premier, this government, and we're going to continue to support the people of Ontario.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I'm glad that the minister mentioned celebrating, because we do know that for three days last month the Premier and the cabinet were celebrating having a luxury private jet. It must have been a really fun time. Did everybody get to sit in the seats, or did you just get in and pretend you were flying? And just like your government, it can't get off the ground?

So, Speaker, the Premier spent too much time on his fantasy island dreaming of his luxury private jet. I'm not sure who was yelling, "Boss, it's de plane! It's de plane!" We do know that the Auditor General told us that this government is failing our kids—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Mr. John Fraser: You'll get a chance, Minister.

This government is failing our kids because they're starving special education and schools aren't safe places to learn or to work.

So my question is simple: Is buying a luxury jet, owning a luxury private jet, more important than making sure kids with exceptional needs get the help that they need?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Madam Speaker, let me quote a wise former Premier: "This looks like a mess," the wise words of Kathleen Wynne yesterday morning on Newstalk 1010, on the total dysfunction of your party happening before our eyes—

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: There are now sights of election irregularities. There are so many irregularities with this Liberal Party, Madam Speaker; we all know them to be true.

But the truth is, in the ultimate contrast of priorities, while the leader of the opposition chases the headlines of two weeks ago, the government landed a \$14-billion investment of confidence from the country's largest oil producer: \$14 billion and 5,000 jobs—the ultimate case study of confidence in our regulatory regime, and the fact that the Premier has created an environment for capital to go back in the province.

That is what this government's Premier is focused on: jobs and opportunity for the people we serve. Maybe the Liberal Party should join us in doing just that.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Do you want to know what's a mess, Speaker? What's a mess is what this government has done in eight years in our kids' schools. They starved special education.

I spoke yesterday about Marigold, a young girl in my riding who needed speech pathologists, right? She needed a speech pathologist. Two years—hasn't got one. Her parents paid for the assessment. And do you know what? The minister's supervisor in Ottawa cancelled speech pathologists.

So I guess my question is: Is owning a luxury private jet more important than Marigold's speech pathologist?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I'm going to continue on something that the Minister of Finance talked about, because we were in the same neck of the woods yesterday. We were in Ajax to cut the ribbon at Volkswagen's new head office expansion. This is 115,000 square feet of new space, positioning them for continued growth.

Now, the Liberals can continue to talk down the people of Ontario and Ontario's economy in this House, but they can see the results in their own ridings. Companies continue to invest for the long term, creating good-paying jobs.

One more time: \$222 billion has landed in the province of Ontario; over one million new jobs have been created in the province of Ontario. That's what's happening under the leadership of Premier Ford.

LABORATORY SERVICES

MPP Jamie West: The question is to the Premier.

A US company bought LifeLabs, and then they decided to pad their profits by closing Sudbury's testing facility. The people of Sudbury have sounded the alarm for months. They wanted to save 40 northern Ontario jobs. They wanted to keep the placements for northern students in those Learn and Stay programs. They wanted northerners to keep getting their test results as quickly as possible. They wanted to keep the lab testing in the north, for northerners.

But instead of listening, the Premier put American profits ahead of northern access to health care, and now LifeLabs testing in Sudbury is closed. My question, Speaker: Where was Captain Canada and why didn't he fight to save these jobs?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As the member knows, LifeLabs has also expanded six new specimen collection sites to make it more convenient for northern Ontario and rural communities to get lab tests closer to home. As I have said many times, they have contracts with the Ministry of Health which they must continue to ensure that they cover off.

We know that when northern Ontario has access to diagnostics and treatment, they get better health care outcomes, and that's why they have expanded through six net new opportunities in Spanish River, in northeastern Ontario, in Ignace, in northwestern Ontario. Those are opportunities for people to make it more convenient for them to actually get their blood work done.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: The closing of LifeLabs analysis services in Sudbury is having a negative impact on patient care already. Their solution to fix that: Small, northern hospitals can provide community lab services, transport the samples to their hospital, do the analysis and report the results in record time. LifeLabs sends their sample down Highway 69, a frequently closed two-lane highway. Northern hospitals can do this better, faster, cheaper.

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Why won't the minister allow small, northern hospitals to get paid to provide community lab services?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I'll never talk down our northern hospitals. Health Sciences North is actually leading in research through Ontario. Through an international BREVITY clinical trial, northerners are actually leading the world. With a \$1.1-million investment from the province through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp., a Sudbury-based researcher has advanced made in northern Ontario diagnostic technology towards real-world use. The test is now being evaluated in a large international clinical trial involving 650 patients across seven countries, with—wait for it—all laboratory testing happening in Sudbury.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: The Premier wasted at least \$190,000 of taxpayer dollars on purchasing his private jet, even when he's already flying high in that OPP jet. At the same, rightfully so, we saw this government put a school board under supervision for spending \$145,000 on a trip to Italy. Now, by that measure, this government should be placed under supervision.

I'd like to think the Premier has lost his way, but it seems like it has been like this from the start. Why does the Premier have one standard for others and not the same standard for himself?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Actually, I did not put a school board under supervision for spending \$145,000 on a trip.

I actually fired the trustee who refused to pay back that money.

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

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: The Premier should be paying back the \$200,000 for this private jet.

What we've seen as well is there's a pattern with this Premier and government. We learned of a secret Metrolinx settlement on a \$500-million claim for air rights a buddy of the Premier never owned. This government gave \$10 million to the owner of a strip club connected, once again, to the Premier. And now the Premier is hiding his phone and government records so the people can't find out what he's up to.

There used to be a time when Progressive Conservatives respected the value of a dollar. So, once again, why does the Premier not hold himself to the same standard he tries to hold others?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Madam Speaker, it is difficult to hear a question from the member opposite talking about standing up for responsible government and a strong economy when that member from Durham is part of a political party that campaigned on closing one of the most consequential job creators in the Pickering nuclear generating station.

The official position of the Liberal Party of Ontario is they would have turned their backs on 30,000 workers—30,000 people in your communities—and yet they seem to be laughing about it, almost casually suggesting turning their backs on an entire community and industry is somehow in the national interest. There is no political upside for this member to stand today without recognizing the fact that their party is on the wrong side of history.

This government is campaigning and initiating a nuclear refurb that's going to add, conservatively, \$41 billion and put 30,000 Canadians to work. That is a message you can campaign on in the riding of Ajax the next election.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Steve Pinsonneault: My question is for the Associate Minister of Forestry and Forest Products.

Forestry is the backbone of many communities in Ontario, supporting good-paying jobs, local businesses and families across our province, but when this government took office in 2018, the sector was already in sharp decline after years of Liberal neglect. Under their watch, pulp and paper mills were closing, investment was drying up and communities were being left behind. Since then, our government has worked alongside industry leaders, workers and communities to rebuild confidence in Ontario's forestry sector.

Speaker, can the associate minister explain what actions our government has taken to stabilize the sector and support long-term growth in Ontario's forestry sector?

Hon. Kevin Holland: Thank you to the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex for the question and for all the work you do every day to support your riding.

Speaker, our government recognized early on that forestry communities needed a government willing to fight for their future and invest in long-term competitiveness. In 2020, we released Ontario's first-ever forest sector strategy, focused on modernization, diversification and expanding opportunities across the sector. That is why our Premier established Ontario's first-ever Associate Minister of Forestry and Forest Products, ensuring the sector has a dedicated voice at the cabinet table and a government fully focused on its success. Since then, our government has invested over \$355 million through programs like FSIIP, the forest biomass program and critical forest access roads infrastructure.

Forestry built Ontario and our government will continue to stand up for the workers and communities that depend on it.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

Mr. Steve Pinsonneault: Thank you to the associate minister for that response.

Unlike the Liberals, who neglected this vital sector, our government has made it clear that Ontario's forest sector is a priority through historic investments, dedicated leadership and a long-term strategy to strengthen the industry.

Speaker, forestry workers and communities are facing growing uncertainty from President Trump's unfair duties and tariffs. They want to see actions that defend forestry jobs, that include building a more competitive, resilient and self-reliant sector. But we know that protecting forest jobs requires more than short-term reactions—it requires a clear plan for the future.

Can the associate minister explain why our government introduced the new forestry road map and how that will protect and grow Ontario's forest sector during these challenging times?

Hon. Kevin Holland: Thank you again to the member for that question.

We know President Trump's unfair duties and tariffs are putting enormous pressure on our forest sector and creating uncertainty for workers in communities all across the province. That's why, on April 28, we launched Ontario's forestry road map. The road map's three pillars—defend, adapt and grow—build on more than \$355 million already invested to modernize mills, strengthen infrastructure and support long-term competitiveness.

The road map sets clear two-, five- and 10-year benchmarks to protect jobs, grow domestic demand, expand trade opportunities, cut red tape and increase the use of Ontario wood in building homes and infrastructure across the province. That includes last week's investment of more than \$5 million at Greenwater Technology in Thunder Bay and this week's \$10-million investment at Georgia-Pacific North Woods in Englehart to help modernize operations, support innovation and protect forestry jobs in northern Ontario.

We will continue to invest in the sector.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Chandra Pasma: When it comes to private luxury planes and Austrian spa companies, the Premier always has money, but when it comes to our kids, somehow the cupboard is always bare. After eight years of funding cuts, our kids are in large classes in unsafe schools. The teachers and education workers who support them are being fired. There's no mental health supports and special education is failing. And yet, the Premier has nothing to offer them except another cut in funding.

What will it take for the Premier to put our kids ahead of his own personal vanity projects?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: It was actually interesting—I did read the NDP press release yesterday when it came to education funding and they said it was a cut hidden in an increase. And it meant so much to me because it really explains to me everything about the NDP. When their caucus was cut in half, they actually assumed it meant that they were increased, right?

But what happened in education yesterday was an increase in funding yet again—the highest level of funding in the province's history. We are well on our way to doing exactly what we said we were going to do: take the division out of education; focus on students, parents and teachers, not ideology that divides people; focus on student achievement across the board; a more consistent level of education so that no matter where in this province you are, you have an education system that you can rely on and where teachers and students have the opportunity for the highest level of academic achievement. That's what we're going to do and we will not be put off on that mission.

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

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Ms. Chandra Pasma: It sounds like someone would get an F on the grade 10 financial literacy test, Speaker.

Our kids are in the midst of a mental health crisis without the trained, caring professionals needed to support them. One high school in eastern Ontario with 1,000 students has one student support counsellor, so students have to take a number when they need help. But at least that school has someone; half of our schools have no mental health professional at all.

For the Premier, this is apparently good enough. Funding for student mental health is not going up a single cent this year. Why does the Premier think it's okay to abandon kids when they need help?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Colleagues, this is a member who yesterday was upset that we fired some people at the Ottawa–Carleton District School Board—some of the higher administrators—because we want to save \$1 million and put it back into the classroom. This is a member, yesterday, who fought against that. This is a member who fights against us eliminating trustees because they are spending more money fighting each other than

they are putting into special education across the province, because that's what the opposition likes. See, for the opposition, if you have a system that is built on division, a system that is built on dividing people as opposed to bringing people together, that's what they thrive on.

So what we're going to do is continue to do what we do. We're going to work together—the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, the Minister of Health. That is what the Premier has asked us to do: Work together across government—shocking—to ensure that we have the best levels of support for our children in school and in community, because that's exactly what has to happen if you're going to build a bigger, better, stronger province of Ontario—

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

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: We have a phenomenal major airport in Toronto right now called Lester B. Pearson. Currently, 47 million excited travellers pass through it yearly. Because this airport is so popular, the \$3-billion expansion plans are well under way to increase its capacity to 65 million passengers. There is much to celebrate with Lester B. Pearson's popularity. So then why, oh why, would we be focusing on an expansion at our boutique Billy Bishop island airport in downtown Toronto? With Pearson's plans, the expansion is mapped onto already empty acreage. With Billy Bishop's, we will need to build into Lake Ontario, a costly and destructive decision.

Speaker, my question to the Premier: Why would you be so careless with taxpayers' dollars to propose this unnecessary expansion of Billy Bishop airport?

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

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: To the member opposite asking the question: Billy Bishop airport is a vital transportation link not only for people in Toronto but for people in the north as well, Speaker. This investment is going to create \$140 billion of GDP, 10,000 airport jobs and 20,000 construction jobs—all of which the member opposite wants to vote against. We want to make sure that Toronto is the economic hub of this country, and we want to make sure that Toronto is a world-class city.

If you take a look around the world, you go to London, you go to New York, what do they have in common? They have airports that are accessible to their downtown core. Imagine financial executives coming down from New York to Toronto, investing into our city or those family members coming down from the north to Toronto to watch a Blue Jays game or visit a doctor or make their appointments. It's all about accessibility, and that's what our Premier is investing in. We're also investing \$9 billion in the Toronto new deal to ensure that the city of Toronto has the funds necessary to proceed. This airport is going to create thousands of jobs and billions—

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Speaker, to arrive at Billy Bishop island airport, you need to traverse the Bathurst-Queens Quay-Eireann Quay intersection first, and boy, oh boy, is it ever a bottleneck. Billy Bishop is not a congestion solution; it is a congestion problem. Adding a couple of million more passengers to the gridlock by shoehorning a major airport into this small island will not help matters.

Currently, the city of Toronto's transportation data shows that more than 400 vehicles pull up to Eireann Quay every single hour—sometimes double. Now imagine navigating that area if the island airport is expanded unnecessarily, as this government proposes, primarily, of course, for the Premier's snazzy private jet. Everything will come to a standstill.

Speaker, my question to the Premier: Why claim you want to get things moving when you are intentionally creating an endless traffic jam at Billy Bishop airport?

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Under 15 years of that government's leadership, they built absolutely nothing and they did absolutely nothing. And they haven't learned anything. If you take a look around, they're still doing absolutely nothing, and they want us to build absolutely nothing.

But we're not going to do that. We're going to make sure we bring \$140 billion in economic activity to the city's core.

When we take a look at our public transportation network, where the member is talking about cars—do you know what Billy Bishop is going to do, Speaker? It's going to make sure people can ride transit directly to the airport downtown and come back home directly to downtown, not having to take a taxi from Pearson to the city, and increasing connectivity. For example, members in your own riding can now take the TTC to Billy Bishop and fly out of the country.

These are all things that our government is doing to improve transportation connectivity across the province.

RED TAPE REDUCTION

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Red Tape Reduction. Our government understands that a strong and resilient economy depends on government processes that work efficiently for people, workers and job creators. The people of Ontario want approvals that are clear, timely and predictable so projects can move forward and communities can continue to grow.

Across Ontario, we have seen progress, where modernized approvals and smarter rules are helping reduce delays while maintaining strong protections.

At the same time, we know economic conditions are evolving, and it's important that Ontario continues to review and improve how government interacts with businesses and workers.

Speaker, can the minister update the House on how the Protecting Ontario's Workers and Economic Resilience

Act, if passed, will help strengthen Ontario's economy by improving permits and approvals and supporting workers across this province?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Wellington–Halton Hills.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to the wonderful member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell for that question.

Our government believes that effective regulation should protect people and the environment while also allowing the economy to function efficiently and competitively. That's why, under our Premier's leadership, Ontario has taken a targeted approach to red tape reduction, focusing on outdated or duplicative processes that slow approvals, create uncertainty and make it harder for projects to move forward.

The Protecting Ontario's Workers and Economic Resilience Act builds on that work. If passed, it would represent our government's 17th red tape reduction package, helping to deliver clearer timelines, more consistent rules and more predictable permitting and approval processes across government. Just as importantly, this legislation continues to support workers by strengthening WSIB income-replacement benefits, prohibiting fees for mandatory branded uniforms and modernizing employment standards enforcement to better focus on serious violations such as unpaid wages.

This balanced approach helps ensure Ontario remains competitive and resilient while maintaining strong protections for workers and the public.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for a follow-up.

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: Thank you to the parliamentary assistant for that response.

Businesses, workers and communities across Ontario have shared that reducing unnecessary delays can make a real difference. By cutting red tape, projects can get under way sooner and employers can plan with confidence.

Our government has made red tape reduction an ongoing priority, and those efforts are now producing measurable results throughout our province.

Through you, Speaker: Can the parliamentary assistant speak to the progress Ontario has made through red tape reduction and how these changes are supporting economic growth and job creation?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: The progress we have made is significant and continues to deliver real benefits across Ontario. Our government has taken more than 700 red tape reduction actions—modernizing permits and approvals, removing duplication and improving how ministries work together.

These changes are saving Ontario's economy an estimated \$1.3 billion a year and freeing up approximately 1.8 million working hours. That means more time spent building, hiring and investing and less time navigating unnecessary paperwork. Faster and more predictable approvals help infrastructure projects move forward more quickly, reduce uncertainty for employers and support communities as they grow, all while maintaining strong safeguards.

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These efforts are being recognized by Ontario's business community. Recently, we received an A grade from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

By continuously improving government processes, our government is supporting workers, strengthening the economy and helping ensure Ontario remains competitive and resilient.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

MPP Wayne Gates: My question is to the Premier. For more than a century, the Fort Erie Race Track has been a mainstay of tourism and job creation in Niagara, supporting hundreds of jobs in agriculture, breeding, training, racing and marketing.

Through the renewal of the long-term funding agreement between the province, OLG and Ontario Racing, the government agreed to provide \$35 million to 15 tracks, yet the Premier is letting one track control who gets what and when.

Tom Valiquette from Fort Erie Race Track said, "This funding agreement is vital to their survival, and this delay is already impacting our horse supply, putting the track at risk."

Why is the Premier allowing Woodbine Entertainment group and one person, Jim Lawson, to delay the government from delivering these urgently needed resources?

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

Hon. Stan Cho: The border oval, yes, absolutely: Fort Erie Race Track. This thing's been open since 1897, nearly 130 years, and what a place it is.

Interjection.

Hon. Stan Cho: No, it's not as old as me. Come on. That's ridiculous.

This is a valuable track that provides great value to the people of Niagara region and Fort Erie. Of course, it's a great employer and has lots of spinoff economic benefits; we're talking about agriculture.

Horse people are good people. It's an important industry to protect, so I really appreciate the member's question this morning. That's why this government, from the very beginning, introduced a long-term funding agreement to support the industry and, in particular, the Fort Erie Race Track.

Now, I have good news for that member: There is an offer on the table with Ontario Racing that is being looked over now. We hope to get a deal done soon, and as soon as we have the information, we will be sharing it with the House. We completely agree: It is an industry worth protecting that includes Fort Erie.

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

MPP Wayne Gates: I appreciate the answer.

Ontario Racing is one voice for three breeds: thoroughbreds, standardbreds and quarter horses. In my riding, the Fort Erie Race Track, like many of the 13 rural-based tracks, is operated by a small, not-for-profit board of vol-

unteers who know that thousands of jobs and local small businesses in rural Ontario depend on their local tracks operating. And this is important: This includes 12 of the 15 tracks in ridings represented by Conservative MPPs.

This is a rural Ontario jobs issue, so why is the Premier allowing Woodbine and Jim Lawson to control the government's ability to honour their funding agreement?

Hon. Stan Cho: There's not much to disagree with in the member talking about the value of horse racing in this province. It's got a lot of history, it contributes to our rich culture, and I can't think of a more important industry to protect during a tariff when the President down south threatens our way of life and, of course, what we deem to be Canadian values.

Now, we're going to protect that industry. We have an offer on the table with Ontario Racing, as I said, and we are very optimistic there will be a deal reached soon.

What I encourage the members opposite to do—because I remember voting on the first long-term funding agreement, and the members opposite voted against it. Let's do what we can do to support the industry when the cameras are off as well, and we can vote in favour of these supports because before this House, we will have that opportunity once again to protect horse racing and all the spinoff business that comes with it.

Let's do the right thing. Let's support horse people and horse racing in this province.

GAMING CONTROL

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Dr. Shawn Kelly, a youth addiction pediatrician, shared with me his seven-year-old asking him about over and under wagers and early payouts after watching hockey games on TV.

Advertising for online gambling is excessive. Ontario's gambling crisis is causing real harm in communities across this province. The human cost is impossible to ignore.

This crisis did not happen by accident. It has been fuelled by the government's choice to privatize iGaming in 2022. The number of people, especially young men, reaching out for help with problem gambling has been skyrocketing since.

To the Premier: Will the government finally take responsibility, or will it continue standing by while more Ontarians pay the price?

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

Hon. Stan Cho: I appreciate the member bringing up this very important issue. I remember, six years ago when I was at the Ministry of Finance, working on this particular file. I remember in that time, there was a grey market in Ontario where people were gambling online, and they were going to gamble online anyway. There were some very tragic stories coming out back then about people losing their homes and not being able to get help. In particular, I remember a story about a young man who called the 1-800 number online and was rerouted halfway around the world. It was pivotal in our decision to regulate

the iGaming market, so that the people who ask for help can get help. And that's what we've done.

Since 2018, \$471 million has been dedicated to responsible gambling initiatives, through the Responsible Gambling Council, through OLG, as well as through iGaming Ontario. The choice was simple: Do we offer the help that these people need, or do we leave them on the grey market, to suffer without the supports that they need? We're going to continue to move methodically and responsibly to make sure we meet—

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

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Unfortunately, I expected more inaction.

The debate that was had last night on this bill pointed to a compelling case for why we need to stop the advertising and how much worse it has been since 2022. My office has been flooded with emails and calls to ban advertising for online gambling. I know members across the aisle are receiving those same pleas for action.

I recently visited places like Thunder Bay, Almonte, Picton and Timmins. There is no question that people want to see this change. Behind every statistic is a person asking for help, on online forums, often in silence, until it is too late. At what point does the government accept what the data is saying, and accept responsibility?

Will the Premier allow a free vote on Bill 107 to stop harmful online gambling, or will this government continue to prevent members from being accountable to their constituents?

Hon. Stan Cho: Look, this issue is a deeply personal one to me and my family. I understand first-hand the pain that online gambling addiction can cause. That's exactly why we need to make sure we operate within a regulated market, not a grey market where people cannot get help when they have problems with gambling.

That's why we've also tracked this very carefully. We're one of the leaders worldwide in a regulated market. We changed several regulations to make sure that you cannot advertise using celebrities or athletes. We are also leading the charge with the Responsible Gambling Council in the data that is coming in, in a new world.

Look, last year was the first time that gross gaming revenue online surpassed land-based casino gaming. That means people are going to game online, whether it's regulated or not. We need to do the responsible thing and make sure that we dedicate resources to combat this problem head-on. That's exactly what we're doing with nearly \$500 million in investments since 2018. We're going to continue to lead the way. We're going to continue to move responsibly and thoughtfully, and make sure people who need help get the help that they need.

TOURISM

Mr. Matthew Rae: The Minister of Tourism, Culture and Gaming shouldn't get comfortable. My question is for him.

Across Ontario, festivals and events are a big part of what brings people together and highlight the unique character of our communities. They create opportunities for local businesses and help draw visitors from across our beautiful province and beyond.

I was proud to see over \$350,000 invested into my riding of Perth–Wellington for these events and cultural events. Funding through the Experience Ontario Program is supporting six amazing events in the community, such as the renowned Stratford Festival and also the Hayloft Music Festival, which had a great season last year; it promises to be another great one, bringing great country music to Listowel, Ontario. These are just a few examples.

Speaker, can the minister please explain to this House how this program helps communities grow and contribute to Ontario's vibrant tourism sector?

Hon. Stan Cho: Speaker, the ray of hope shines bright in Perth–Wellington with that question this morning, and there is a member who gets it completely.

Festivals and events aren't just a nice-to-have; they are pivotal in driving economic opportunities in every corner of this province. That's why this government is proud to support those very festivals and events with \$20 million. That's going towards 400 festivals throughout the great province of Ontario. This helps visitors get into communities. Of course, they don't just watch or attend the festival or event; they dine at the local restaurants; they stay at the local hotels. And there are a lot of great bed and breakfasts in that member's riding. Bluebird Restaurant: fantastic Ontario lamb chops—go check it out.

1130

These targeted investments help create local jobs, drive tourism to these local communities and, of course, make sure that we highlight everything that amazing areas like Perth–Wellington have to offer in this great province

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Perth–Wellington.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to the minister for that response. I invite all my colleagues to Stratford and my riding this summer. I'm happy to host them at Bluebird. I know the member from Guelph likes to come to my riding and not give me a heads-up, but everyone is welcome in Perth–Wellington.

It's great to hear about these investments our government is making to support local events and festivals, like those in my riding of Perth–Wellington, but, really, across all of Ontario. These events, as the minister mentioned, play an important role in helping communities attract tourism and support good-paying jobs. They draw visitors to our regions throughout our province, supporting small and rural communities and putting them on the map even more.

As more people look to explore closer to home and spend their hard-earned dollars in Ontario, can the minister expand on how programs like Experience Ontario are helping position our province as a top destination, not only for Canadians but for people around the world?

Hon. Stan Cho: Closer to home: I'm glad the member brings that up, because amidst the tariff war, where the President of the United States is attacking our way of life, we not only have to protect our industries, such as clean energy, manufacturing and all the great things that the Minister of Economic Development talks about, we have to protect a \$34-billion tourism industry as well.

Destination Ontario: Last year, 92% of people wanted to explore within our own backyard. And why not? Ontario is amazing. It fits 14 European countries. It has four beautiful seasons, two time zones. You know the best part? People come here from all over the world and get to celebrate their cultures. Think about anywhere else in the world—you can get the best butter chicken next to the best Korean barbeque next to the best Persian kabob. It's a long list, and we're very lucky to have that.

I'll tell you what: Get out there and explore every corner of this province, because we have a lot to offer in all—

Interjection.

Hon. Stan Cho: Our Italian food is amazing. Jerk chicken is amazing, too. It's a long list, like I said, but Experience Ontario is making sure that we give people the opportunity to experience that diversity, that flavour that Ontario has to offer. Get out there and enjoy your own backyard.

HOMELESSNESS

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Speaker, my question is to the Premier. The federal government renewed the Unsheltered Homelessness and Encampments Initiative, providing \$125 million nationally to support people experiencing homelessness. In London, over 2,000 individuals are unsheltered, and more than 7,000 are on the housing wait-list. Organizations like Ark Aid street mission and 519Pursuit play a crucial role. They rely on this funding, and they are waiting.

The province must match federal funding, or it will not flow. Can the Premier confirm that the province will step up, match federal funding and start dealing with the homelessness crisis?

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

Hon. Rob Flack: Thank you to the member from London North Centre. We understand that homelessness is chronic throughout this province and, indeed, this country. That is why, since 2023, we increased funding by 40%, to \$700 million. Overall, in this province for supportive housing and homelessness we invest—and I use the word “invest,” Speaker—\$1.7 billion a year.

We understand that more needs to be done. That is why, as co-chair of the national housing forum with Minister Robertson this year, we're going to sit down with my provincial colleagues and territorial colleagues and look at homelessness, supportive housing and all, step by step by step, to make sure we continue to invest where needed and,

more importantly, what we need to do differently to get better outcomes.

We understand there's a problem. There's a crisis. It's chronic. We are fixing it. We're working closely with the federal government and our provincial colleagues.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: That didn't sound like a funding commitment. This government delayed 209 days on London's HART hub.

This isn't the only federal housing funding that is waiting on the province to step up. Back to the Premier: The Association of Municipalities of Ontario wrote a letter urging the province to partner with the federal government on the new Build Canada Homes initiative. BCH would create new supportive and transitional housing, but the province has to commit \$62 million annually to unlock this opportunity. Now is not the time to sit on the sidelines.

Will the Premier pull himself out of his pouty pity party over his pleasure plane and commit the funds that AMO has requested?

Hon. Rob Flack: Again, I am convinced that we're on the right path, albeit a difficult path. I would also like to point out the \$529 million we've invested this year for 27 homelessness and addiction recovery treatment hubs, HART hubs, of which London was a beneficiary. It has been invested and is working, overall supporting 560 supportive housing units. And as the honourable member opposite understands, London has invested in some shelters south of London, for which funding came from the province. This is going on right across the province.

But, Speaker, in the broader perspective, we understand it's a crisis. We understand it's chronic. That is why, in our budget this year, not a cent was cut. We continue to support homelessness in this province—\$700 million plus. We're going to continue to stay on that track and get the job done.

GAMING CONTROL

Mr. John Fraser: After question period, we're going to be voting on the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore's bill to limit the advertising for online gambling.

We didn't like what we heard the government say. It's not about online gambling and eliminating it. It's about making sure we don't suck people in, that we're not part of allowing an industry to get their hooks into people. And that's what's happening. Gambling is like a heroin addiction. It's pernicious, and young men in this province are getting addicted. It's leading to serious, serious problems in their lives, at the beginning of their lives.

So I encourage all members to think about that today in our third vote and support the private member's bill from the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

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

Hon. Stan Cho: Speaker, nobody on this side—and on that side of the House in government—is denying that problem gambling is something we have to tackle head-on. The reality that the Liberals have to accept is that, whether it's a regulated framework or not, people are gambling. That's a worldwide phenomenon. They are gambling online in illegal or grey markets or not.

That's why we're moving ahead responsibly, making sure that—we have the AGCO—that limited advertising, that created standards, eliminating celebrities as well as athletes from advertising these things. We have to accept the reality out there and work within those confines.

What we are going to do is continue to be a leader in the industry with a regulated market so that problem gamblers can actually get the help that they need. Let's live in reality here and do the right thing for these people who need help.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Ottawa South has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Finance regarding the Premier's private jet. This matter will be debated on Tuesday, May 26, following private members' public business.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): It is now time to offer our sincere thanks to the outstanding group of legislative pages who have been with us for the past two weeks. Please gather in front of the chair.

The member for Nepean looks like he could be a page right now.

To our pages: Thank you for the reliability, dedication and professionalism you have all demonstrated throughout your time here at the Legislature. We have truly been fortunate to have you here with us these past two weeks.

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

For now, I wish you a safe return home and every success as you wind up your school year and look ahead to the summer months. I know many of you will be heading to high school in September and I wish you all the best as you embark on this new and exciting chapter in your lives.

I invite all members again to join me in thanking this remarkable group of legislative pages.

Applause.

DEFERRED VOTES

BUILDING HOMES AND IMPROVING
TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE
ACT, 2026LOI DE 2026 POUR LA CONSTRUCTION
DE LOGEMENTS ET L'AMÉLIORATION
DE L'INFRASTRUCTURE DE TRANSPORT

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

Bill 98, An Act to enact the Fare Alignment and Seamless Transit Act, 2026 and to amend various Acts / Projet de loi 98, Loi édictant la Loi de 2026 sur l'harmonisation des tarifs et l'intégration des transports en commun et modifiant diverses lois.

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

The division bells rang from 1140 to 1145.

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

On May 12, Mr. Smith, Parry Sound–Muskoka, moved third reading of Bill 98, An Act to enact the Fare Alignment and Seamless Transit Act, 2026 and to amend various Acts.

On May 13, 2026, Mr. Clark moved that the question be now put.

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

Ayes

Allsopp, Tyler	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Pirie, George
Anand, Deepak	Gualtieri, Silvia	Quinn, Nolan
Babikian, Aris	Hamid, Zee	Racinsky, Joseph
Bresee, Ric	Hardeman, Ernie	Rae, Matthew
Calandra, Paul	Harris, Mike	Riddell, Brian
Cho, Stan	Holland, Kevin	Rosenberg, Bill
Clark, Steve	Jones, Trevor	Sabawy, Sheref
Coe, Lorne	Jordan, John	Sandhu, Amarjot
Cooper, Michelle	Kanapathi, Logan	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Crawford, Stephen	Kerzner, Michael S.	Saunderson, Brian
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Khanjin, Andrea	Smith, Dave
Darouze, George	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, David
Denault, Billy	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, Graydon
Dixon, Jess	McCarthy, Todd J.	Smith, Laura
Dowie, Andrew	McGregor, Graham	Tangri, Nina
Dunlop, Jill	Oosterhoff, Sam	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Fedeli, Victor	Pang, Billy	Tibollo, Michael A.
Firin, Mohamed	Parsa, Michael	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Flack, Rob	Pierre, Natalie	Vickers, Paul
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Pinsonneault, Steve	Williams, Charmaine A.

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

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gates, Wayne	Sattler, Peggy
Bell, Jessica	Gilmour, Alexa	Schreiner, Mike
Bourgouin, Guy	Glover, Chris	Shamji, Adil
Bowman, Stephanie	Gretzky, Lisa	Stiles, Marit
Burch, Jeff	Hazell, Andrea	Tabuns, Peter

Burch, Jeff	Kernaghan, Terence	Tsao, Jonathan
Cerjanec, Rob	Lennox, Robin	Vanthof, John
Collard, Lucille	Mamakwa, Sol	Watt, Tyler
Fife, Catherine	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	West, Jamie
Fraser, John	Pasma, Chandra	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
French, Jennifer K.	Rakocevic, Tom	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 60; the nays are 32.

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

Mr. Smith, Parry Sound–Muskoka, has moved third reading of Bill 98, An Act to enact the Fare Alignment and Seamless Transit Act, 2026 and to amend various Acts. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

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

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1149 to 1150.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): On May 12, 2026, Mr. Smith, Parry Sound–Muskoka, moved third reading of Bill 98, An Act to enact the Fare Alignment and Seamless Transit Act, 2026 and to amend various Acts.

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

Ayes

Allsopp, Tyler	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Quinn, Nolan
Anand, Deepak	Gualtieri, Silvia	Racinsky, Joseph
Babikian, Aris	Hamid, Zee	Rae, Matthew
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Hardeman, Ernie	Riddell, Brian
Bresee, Ric	Harris, Mike	Rosenberg, Bill
Calandra, Paul	Holland, Kevin	Sabawy, Sheref
Cho, Stan	Jones, Trevor	Sandhu, Amarjot
Clark, Steve	Jordan, John	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Coe, Lorne	Kanapathi, Logan	Saunderson, Brian
Cooper, Michelle	Kerzner, Michael S.	Smith, Dave
Crawford, Stephen	Khanjin, Andrea	Smith, David
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, Graydon
Darouze, George	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, Laura
Denault, Billy	McCarthy, Todd J.	Tangri, Nina
Dixon, Jess	McGregor, Graham	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Dowie, Andrew	Oosterhoff, Sam	Tibollo, Michael A.
Dunlop, Jill	Pang, Billy	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Fedeli, Victor	Parsa, Michael	Vickers, Paul
Firin, Mohamed	Pierre, Natalie	Williams, Charmaine A.
Flack, Rob	Pinsonneault, Steve	
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Pirie, George	

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

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gilmour, Alexa	Schreiner, Mike
Bell, Jessica	Glover, Chris	Shamji, Adil
Bourgouin, Guy	Gretzky, Lisa	Stiles, Marit
Bowman, Stephanie	Hazell, Andrea	Tabuns, Peter
Burch, Jeff	Kernaghan, Terence	Tsao, Jonathan
Cerjanec, Rob	Lennox, Robin	Vanthof, John
Collard, Lucille	Mamakwa, Sol	Watt, Tyler
Fife, Catherine	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	West, Jamie
Fraser, John	Pasma, Chandra	Wong-Tam, Kristyn

French, Jennifer K.
Gates, Wayne

Rakocevic, Tom
Sattler, Peggy

Dunlop, Jill
Fedeli, Victor
Firin, Mohamed
Flack, Rob
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn

Oosterhoff, Sam
Pang, Billy
Parsa, Michael
Pierre, Natalie
Pinsonneault, Steve

Thanigasalam, Vijay
Tibollo, Michael A.
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Vickers, Paul
Williams, Charmaine A.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 61; the nays are 31.

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

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

Third reading agreed to.

STOP HARMFUL GAMBLING ADVERTISING ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 VISANT À METTRE FIN À LA PUBLICITÉ NUISIBLE SUR LE JEU

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

Bill 107, An Act to amend the Gaming Control Act, 1992 / Projet de loi 107, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1992 sur la réglementation des jeux.

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

The division bells rang from 1153 to 1154.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): On May 13, 2026, Ms. Fairclough moved second reading of Bill 107, An Act to amend the Gaming Control Act, 1992.

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

Ayes

Armstrong, Teresa J.
Bell, Jessica
Bourgouin, Guy
Bowman, Stephanie
Brady, Bobbi Ann
Burch, Jeff
Cerjanec, Rob
Collard, Lucille
Fairclough, Lee
Fife, Catherine
Fraser, John

French, Jennifer K.
Gates, Wayne
Gilmour, Alexa
Glover, Chris
Gretzky, Lisa
Hazell, Andrea
Kernaghan, Terence
Lennox, Robin
Mamakwa, Sol
McMahon, Mary-Margaret
Pasma, Chandra

Rakocevic, Tom
Sattler, Peggy
Schreiner, Mike
Shamji, Adil
Stiles, Marit
Tabuns, Peter
Tsao, Jonathan
Vanthof, John
Watt, Tyler
West, Jamie
Wong-Tam, Kristyn

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

Nays

Allsopp, Tyler
Anand, Deepak
Babikian, Aris
Bresee, Ric
Calandra, Paul
Cho, Stan
Clark, Steve
Coe, Lorne
Cooper, Michelle
Crawford, Stephen
Cuzzetto, Rudy
Darouze, George
Denault, Billy
Dixon, Jess
Dowie, Andrew

Grewal, Hardeep Singh
Gualtieri, Silvia
Hamid, Zee
Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Mike
Holland, Kevin
Jones, Trevor
Jordan, John
Kanapathi, Logan
Kerzner, Michael S.
Khanjin, Andrea
Leardi, Anthony
Lecce, Stephen
McCarthy, Todd J.
McGregor, Graham

Pirie, George
Quinn, Nolan
Racinsky, Joseph
Rae, Matthew
Riddell, Brian
Rosenberg, Bill
Sabawy, Sheref
Sandhu, Amarjot
Sarrazin, Stéphane
Saunderson, Brian
Smith, Dave
Smith, David
Smith, Graydon
Smith, Laura
Tangri, Nina

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 33; the nays are 60.

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

Second reading negatived.

HOUSE SITTINGS

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

I also just want to say there will be no standing order 59 today. We will let all the parties know the schedule.

However, I do want to tell members that on Monday morning, May 25, and Tuesday morning, May 26, at 9 a.m., we will have tributes to deceased members, so I invite all members of the House to come and participate in that.

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

The House recessed from 1157 to 1300.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I beg to inform the House that today, the Clerk received the report on intended appointments, dated May 14, 2026, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies.

Pursuant to standing order 110(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

BUDDHIST HERITAGE MONTH ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 SUR LE MOIS DU PATRIMOINE BOUDDHISTE

MPP Gilmour moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 118, An Act to proclaim the month of May as Buddhist Heritage Month / Projet de loi 118, Loi proclamant le mois de mai Mois du patrimoine bouddhiste.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Would the member like to explain the bill?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: This bill proclaims the month of May, the month when the Buddha was born, the month when the Buddha achieved enlightenment, the month when Vaisakhi is celebrated here in Ontario by Buddhists of all traditions, as the month for Buddhist heritage.

I want to thank those who have come here today to share their support for that.

PETITIONS

SNOWMOBILING

MPP George Darouze: Good afternoon, Speaker.

Today, I'm introducing a petition entitled "Supporting our Snowmobilers," which has been signed by over 40 people from my riding and eastern Ontario. The petition talks about the impact that snowmobiling has on our economy, especially in rural areas, generating over \$8 billion in annual spending across Canada, and it is responsible for over 100,000 full-time jobs in North America.

When you look at rural communities across my riding and across Ontario, snowmobilers do so much to support the local businesses and restaurants in those areas. It's very important that the government makes sure that riders, volunteers and landowners feel supported in this sector.

This petition calls on the government of Ontario to explore options to develop a sustainable funding framework in collaboration with Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs, which would ensure that the industry and trails network are supported for years to come; ensuring the viability of outdoor winter recreational and rural tourism, which is essential in small communities, especially in the northern areas.

The petitions I'm presenting today are largely from district 1, from my local district, which also includes clubs from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, Leeds-Grenville-Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston and neighbouring ridings in eastern Ontario.

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

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm tabling this petition to stop privatization and support staffing ratios from ONA, the Ontario Nurses' Association. This petition calls on the Ontario government to mandate safe staffing ratios for nurses and health care professionals across the health care system. They're currently understaffed, which leads to burnout and unsafe working conditions. This forces nurses and health care professionals to leave and pursue other jobs, or sometimes retire permanently.

Understaffing has a devastating impact on patient care and it forces emergency departments' closures. Safe staffing ratios are a proven solution that reduces burnout for nurses and health care professionals. It reduces violence and it also improves quality.

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

I fully support this petition. I will sign and give it to page Jason to deliver to the table.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Ms. Catherine Fife: This petition is called "Justice for Sexual Assault Survivors (Bill 112: Lydia's Law)."

It's hard to believe that in 2025, 1,639 cases of sexual assault were withdrawn or stayed in the province of Ontario.

Lydia's Law is meant to call upon the Attorney General to enact the 2019 Auditor General recommendations, which would have him review why these cases are not getting their day in court and review how resources around mental health and counselling are provided to survivors of sexual assault.

We know that only 6% of sexual assault survivors report these heinous crimes. We want more people to feel more confident in Ontario's justice system, so that more sexual predators do not continue to walk the streets of Ontario.

It is my pleasure to sign this petition, hoping that the government, this time around, will support it and not disperse it to committee without debate.

EDUCATION FUNDING

MPP Wayne Gates: I rise with a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly to reduce class sizes in our public education system.

Speaker, \$6.35 billion has been cut from public education since 2018. It has resulted in larger class sizes, more violence in our schools, and a lack of special-needs and mental health supports for our students.

I support this petition, and I'll sign my name to it.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It's my honour to bring the following petition to the Legislature: "Protect Ontario's Animals: Stop Pound Seizure!"

Animals are living beings who feel pain, fear, stress, and deserve humane treatment, protection, and opportunities for reunification as well as adoption.

Pound seizure, the transfer, sale, or use of impounded or unclaimed animals for research, testing or experimentation—this raises serious issues about ethics, about welfare, and about transparency.

There's a lack of public reporting and oversight regarding the disposition of impounded animals.

This is something that many folks have reached out to my office about.

I am honoured to support this petition. I will affix my signature and deliver it with page Devin to the Clerk.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

KEEPING CRIMINALS BEHIND BARS ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 VISANT À MAINTENIR LES CRIMINELS DERRIÈRE LES BARREAUX

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 14, 2026, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 75, An Act to enact the Constable Joe MacDonald Public Safety Officers' Survivors Scholarship Fund Act, 2026 and to amend various other Acts / Projet de loi 75, Loi édictant la Loi de 2026 sur le Fonds Joe MacDonald de bourses d'études à l'intention des survivants d'agents de sécurité publique et modifiant diverses autres lois.

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

M. Guy Bourgouin: Ça me fait plaisir de me lever puis reparler du projet de loi intitulé, en français, visant à maintenir les criminels derrière les barreaux.

It's a pleasure to rise on Bill 75, on behalf of my constituents, and speak on the Keeping Criminals Behind Bars Act.

Bill 75 touches on topics ranging from animal research ethics to the administration of justice, highway traffic enforcement, bail reform, and even scholarships for public safety officers' survivors. Each of these areas is significant. They are complex, they are interconnected in places, and they each deserve careful, focused debate—not to be bundled together without the scrutiny that they require. So I will be using my time to speak to these issues, to walk through these areas one by one, because they are not interchangeable and they are not minor changes. The people we represent deserve clarity on what is being changed and why. When legislation spans so many ministries, so many subject areas, you have to ask, what is the connecting thread here? Or are we simply looking at a legislative vehicle that allows multiple unrelated changes to move through the House at once under reduced scrutiny? Because if it is the latter, then I think we have a responsibility to slow down and examine what each section is doing.

1310

When we are talking about such important topics, I think it is important to ground that decision in lived experience.

Si vous me le permettez, madame la Présidente, je veux parler d'un sujet qui est très, très proche de ma famille. Je veux mentionner que le 30 mai, mon fils, son partenaire, elle a gradué du collège de Police provinciale de l'Ontario. On est très fiers de ça.

Katelin Mikhaila Kozlovich is now Constable Katelin Kozlovich. We're so proud, because Katelin lost her father a couple of months ago—not even a year, Madam Speaker. We were at the ceremony, and I could see other officers were getting their badges from their mothers or their fathers, both OPP. A couple of months past, she could

have had her father, because he was an OPP officer, give her her badge as an OPP officer.

So, of course, it resonated. It was a very emotional event for us—for her family but also ours, because Katelin is part of our family now, and we're so proud of her. I just wanted to make sure today I spoke about this because she studied psychology, and she was going way ahead with her career.

Elle a eu son bac. She passed her—I don't know what the “bac” in English is. She did actually receive it, but it was a dream of hers to follow her father's footsteps.

So, again, congratulations, Katelin. We're so proud of you. Of course, when we talk about a bill like this, I could not help myself but mention your name and how hard you worked. Your family is so proud. My family and I know your family are so proud of you, so thank you.

Bail reform: Next, I want to speak about bail reform and the administration of justice. This is one of the most sensitive areas of law we can deal with.

Bail is where the justice system makes an immediate decision about liberty, risks and public safety, and changes to bail rules have ripple effects that go far beyond the courtroom. It affects detention rates. It affects police time. It affects court congestion. It affects community safety. It affects families.

We are not dealing with isolated technical amendments. We are dealing with a system that is deeply interconnected. And I think we need to ask, does this bill meaningfully improve the system or does this bill make changes without fully addressing underlying pressures? Because changes without clarity can actually increase confusion in practice.

What I am really confused about is how are animal rights related to bail reform. To me, this is an entirely separate policy domain. But nonetheless, I am extremely passionate about animal rights and have been my whole life. I think animal rights legislation should be introduced on its own merit. But this bill lumps everything together, so I cannot do that today.

Mais, madame la Présidente, je veux vous parler parce que la semaine passée ou la fin de semaine passée—pas cette semaine, l'autre fin de semaine—j'ai eu la chance d'aller au Conseil des trappeurs de Hearst. Ils célébraient leur 50^e anniversaire. Puis, on oublie souvent que les trappeurs font un travail exemplaire pour contrôler la population des espèces. Parce que je sais qu'il y a bien du monde qui pense : « Bien, tu sais, il ne faut pas trapper. » Il y a beaucoup des « animal rights » qui disent qu'on ne peut pas trapper les loups, les renards. Mais il ne faut pas oublier que les trappeurs savent très bien que si la population de martres—mettons, par exemple—est basse dans leur territoire, ils ne vont pas la trapper pour une couple d'années pour donner la chance à la population de revenir, parce que non seulement ils se font un revenu de ça, mais aussi ils réalisent l'impact que ça peut avoir sur la « trap line ».

Ou encore, on sait que les loups—il y a beaucoup de débat sur les loups maintenant. Mais les loups, s'ils ne sont pas contrôlés, ça devient, premièrement, dangereux, mais non seulement ça, les loups peuvent nuire à la population

des originaux, à la population d'autres animaux. Fait qu'on a besoin d'un contrôle. Ça fait partie aussi de contrôler les espèces.

Très souvent, les espèces, s'il n'y a pas beaucoup de trappage—il y a du trappage qui se fait, mais il n'y a pas beaucoup de chasseurs du loup ou d'autres espèces.

Puis le castor, c'est un exemple parfait de ce que les trappeurs font. Je veux remercier les trappeurs parce que nous, quand on vit dans le Nord, très souvent, il y a ce qu'ils appellent des castors nuisibles. Ce sont les trappeurs qui les pognent, qui vont les trapper pour empêcher que les routes se lavent, qu'elles soient inondées, que les territoires se fassent inonder, puis on a besoin d'un contrôle parce que le castor se reproduit très, très rapidement. Puis ça cause beaucoup de «*concernes* » quand ça vient à l'industrie forestière, aux routes, aux «*power lines* », aux «*gas lines* »—écoute, c'est très problématique.

Fait que, je veux remercier le Conseil des trappeurs de Hearst de m'avoir invité, mais surtout pour le travail qu'ils font parce que très souvent ils passent inaperçus. Très souvent ils demandent de l'aide qu'ils ne reçoivent pas. Mais vous faites un travail, puis je n'ai pas de problème à en parler ici aujourd'hui.

I think that part of the challenge with omnibus legislation is it compresses debates into categories that do not naturally belong together. In doing so, it limits how deeply any one subject can actually be examined.

But I will return to the central question: Is this a coherent piece of legislation with a clear policy objective? I want to keep working through this section of the bill.

Next, I want to talk about the scholarship for public safety officers. I want to recognize the sacrifice of public safety officers. Supporting their families is not controversial. It is something I think every member of this House can agree is important. When someone loses their life in the line of duty, the impact does not end there. It is carried by their families, by their children and by their communities for years afterward. So, providing support, particularly education support, to those families is meaningful. It matters.

I find myself coming back to the same question that runs throughout this bill: Why is this here? Why is a measure like this, one that deserves thoughtful design, being placed inside a bill that also deals with bail reform, highway enforcement and animal research ethics?

This is something that on its own could warrant a full and thoughtful discussion in this House. How will these scholarships be administered? How many families will they support? What does long-term funding look like? How does this fit into the broader system of support for families of fallen officers? Because if we are serious about supporting these families, then we should be serious about getting it right, not just including it.

This is one of those sections of the bill where I wish I had more time, not less, to focus on it, because it is one of the few parts that is not about enforcement or penalties, but about support, and that deserves its own space. But again, it is placed alongside a wide range of unrelated

measures and so it becomes part of the broader package rather than a focused commitment.

That brings me back, once again, to the central issue: Structure matters, because structure determines what gets attention and what gets rushed through.

1320

Section 5: That's a section that I love. We're talking about the Highway Traffic Act. We look at this Highway Traffic Act and then, of course, I automatically think about the Auditor General's report. Bill 75 amends it, but it doesn't go far enough.

S'il y a de quoi qu'on a compris—tu sais, parce que c'est certain, quand on parle des routes, quand on parle des enjeux des routes, ça résonne très fort pour moi parce que je peux vous dire que mes collègues du Nord, moi-même, on a fait une tournée, on a vu des choses, puis on a démontré à ce gouvernement qu'il y a des choses.

C'est désolant de voir que ce qu'ils ont mis dedans ne répond pas à ce que nous avons amené à plusieurs reprises, puis on a sonné l'alarme. Ça fait près de huit ans que je suis élu. On a sonné l'alarme. On a dit qu'il y a de la fraude dans l'administration ou dans les institutions qui donnent les licences de camionneur. Mais je veux être très clair, et je vais le répéter peut-être plus qu'une fois : on a des bonnes institutions qui donnent les licences aux camionneurs, qui donnent la formation aux camionneurs. Il faut les reconnaître puis il faut qu'on leur dise que ça continue.

Il y a une différence—je pense que c'est mon collègue de Timiskaming-Cochrane qui l'a dit le mieux. Il a dit qu'il y a une différence entre une institution qui charge 15 000 piastres et une institution qui va charger 3 500 \$ à 5 000 \$ pour le même «*training* », pour la même formation—il y a un problème.

Pourtant, mon collègue, moi-même et les autres députés du Nord, on l'a amené à l'attention. Ce n'est pas comme si le gouvernement ne le sait pas. Ce n'est pas comme si le gouvernement peut dire : «*Bien, écoute, c'est la première fois qu'on entend ça.* » Il y a eu le rapport de Marketplace qui l'a montré. Il y a eu des projets de loi qu'on a amenés pour essayer de corriger le tir. La liste est longue.

Mais qu'est-ce qu'on voit ? Ce sont des petits changements, mais on ne va pas au coeur du problème. Le coeur du problème, monsieur le Président, ce n'est pas compliqué—là, je vais manquer de temps. Le coeur du problème, c'est qu'on a un gouvernement qui, pour une raison quelconque, fait la sourde oreille, ou bien donc, il ne voit pas clair ou je ne sais pas. Mais plusieurs de ces institutions-là sont dans la cour arrière du ministre. C'est à Brampton qu'il y a beaucoup d'institutions qui sont obligées d'être inspectées. On sait que 25 % des institutions n'ont jamais été inspectées.

Écoute, il faut le faire, parce que dans ces institutions-là, on sait qu'elles ne sont même pas certifiées. On sait aussi—elles ne sont pas certifiées, même pas reconnues. On a Serco qui ne sait pas quelle institution ou quelle école de camionneurs est certifiée ou pas. Fait que, lui, il y a du monde qui vient le voir pour passer leur licence. Il passe les licences; il fait le test.

Ça, ce n'est pas moi qui le dis; ça vient du rapport de la vérificatrice générale. Dans son rapport, ça dit qu'il y a 29 écoles non enregistrées, « 29 unregistered », qui ont « schedulé » ou qui ont « booké » des « road tests », des tests pour conduire. Il y en a 3 200 qui ont fait ça. Sur 29, ils ont « booké » 3 200 et plus pour passer la licence, mais elles ne sont pas reconnues, ne sont pas enregistrées. Il y en a 11 qui sont invalides pour le statut, puis ils ont encore enregistré 3 100 et plus pour aller passer des « road tests ». Ce n'est pas drôle, là.

Là, on a le ministère des Transports, on a le ministère des Collèges et Universités—ce n'est pas juste un ministère qui est là-dedans. Premièrement, ils ne se parlent pas. La main gauche ne sait pas ce que la main droite fait. Mais encore pire, le gouvernement a donné sa responsabilité. Ils ont privatisé nos responsabilités à Serco pour gérer tout ça pour les licenciements et pour donner des licences et tout. Mais on ne s'en occupe pas. On ne gère pas ça. On n'est pas au-dessus de la situation.

Quand on a dit, là—écoute, c'est plein d'exemples dans le système qui ne sont pas adressés par les ministères; 25 %, j'ai dit, des institutions n'ont jamais été inspectées. On a des instructeurs—leurs qualifications sont inconsistantes puis n'ont jamais été vérifiées. Il y a des instructeurs qui enseignent qui ne sont même pas qualifiés pour enseigner. Je n'invente pas ça, là. C'est dans le rapport de l'auditrice générale, monsieur le Président.

Après ça, on se demande que 12 % des accidents de camionneurs sont mortels—on a des camionneurs qui ne sont même pas capables de conduire, de reculer un camion. Si t'as passé ta licence, tu dois être capable de reculer un « truck ». On a des conducteurs de camions lourds qui ne savent même pas tourner à gauche dans une intersection qui est très occupée. Ils n'ont pas eu de formation comment se parquer s'ils ont un bris mécanique le long de la route.

Puis nous, dans le Nord, on crie; on sonne l'alarme. Tous les députés du Nord, on dit au ministre—je ne veux pas dire « allume, légume », là. On dit au ministre, fais ton travail, parce qu'on a des personnes qui sont décédées. On a des fermetures de route après fermetures de route. Il y a apparence de neige : nos routes ferment. L'économie est ralentie. Le monde ne peut pas se rendre au travail. On perd nos rendez-vous médicaux.

J'ai parlé que—pour un « MRI », ça prend cinq à six mois. Tu manques l'appointment, qu'est-ce que tu penses qui arrive, monsieur le Président? T'es obligé d'attendre encore pour longtemps? Puis, si tu dépends de ce « MRI » pour retourner au travail, c'est qui qui paye? C'est l'employeur?

En tout cas, le ministre a du travail à faire. Il va falloir, en les mettant dans un projet de loi, que ce soit un projet de loi seulement sur le « Highway Traffic Act ». Arrêtons de mettre des projets de loi omnibus pour faire passer les choses vite faites, puis ne pas adresser le problème à la source.

Puis, je remercie la vérificatrice générale de mettre ça en lumière. Ce que ça prend, selon nous—le ministre, lui-même, dit : « On va tout accepter, les recommandations. »

Ça prend un rapport de la vérificatrice pour qu'il accepte les recommandations, mais quand ça vient de ce bord ici de la Chambre, ce n'est pas bon. C'est une vraie honte. C'est une vraie honte, monsieur le Président, que ça prend un rapport de vérificatrice, quand les personnes meurent, quand on a—il y a de la fraude. Ils falsifient des records d'entraînement. Il ne garde aucun record de formation ou de requêtes pour la formation. C'est très problématique, puis qu'on a ça dans un projet de loi omnibus. Ça ne devrait pas être de même; ça devrait être un projet de loi.

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

M. Andrew Dowie: Merci beaucoup pour le membre de—je veux nommer votre circonscription : Mushkegowuk—Baie James.

Dans ce projet de loi, le gouvernement considère plusieurs nouvelles options pour adresser la manufacture des drogues illégales et l'activité criminelle qui s'associe à cette activité. C'est particulièrement important chez moi, où il y a une frontière toujours en besoin de la sécurité constante. L'impact des drogues dans nos communautés, c'est vu partout à travers la province. Le centre-ville de Windsor, il y avait un commerce, FunGuyz, qui ignorait la loi en force et les procureurs fédéraux ne poursuivaient pas les infractions pénales pour l'activité criminelle là-bas. Les actions proposées cherchent à progresser la capacité de « enforcement », visent les réseaux de la drogue illégale et s'améliorent la sécurité communautaire.

Est-ce que le membre supporte cette direction?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Merci pour la question en français. Je te dis, toutes les fois que tu vas parler français, je vais te remercier parce que je pense que c'est important qu'on parle en français dans la Chambre.

Écoute, c'est sûr qu'on supporte—il y a des bonnes choses dans ce projet de loi-là. Je ne suis pas ici pour dire qu'il n'y a pas des bonnes choses. Quand ça vient à la drogue, on doit faire beaucoup plus. Ce n'est pas juste arrêter les personnes qui vendent la drogue ou qui traversent la drogue et tout ça. Dans le rapport de la vérificatrice, on parle de fraude. C'est criminel, de la fraude. Mais vous n'en parlez pas de ça. On semble cibler certains coins, mais que ce soit—toute action criminelle doit être adressée. On ne peut pas juste adresser une section qui, on sait, va être populaire. Mais ça, pour une personne qui donne la fraude ou qui certifie du monde non qualifié—ce n'est pas plus différent que d'avoir un « gun » dans la main quand tu conduis un « truck » 18-roues et que tu es non qualifié. C'est aussi dangereux, et ça peut être mortel, les deux.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to my colleague for speaking so passionately about Bill 75. This bill is called Keeping Criminals Behind Bars Act. It does, unfortunately, miss a major factor in getting criminals behind bars.

My colleague knows full well that the justice system in Ontario for survivors of sexual violence continues to be a very hostile place. The Sloka case, just in K-W three weeks ago—48 women were not believed when they had

the strength and the courage to come forward and disclose the violations by then-Doctor Sloka. The judge, at the end of the day, said, “You know what? They’re not credible”—the 48 women, not credible to give their testimony.

What does the member feel about the backlog in courts and how this has become a barrier for people accessing justice in Ontario?

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Thank you to my colleague for asking me this question. For women to step up and challenge their aggressor, and have to live—what you just said, 40 that were ruled not—what’s the term you said?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Credible.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Credible—how do you think people who are listening that have been “agressés” feel? Are they going to come out?

This is why your bill should have been part of this—or stand-alone. We’re talking about a serious subject. When we’re talking about keeping criminals behind bars, that should be a stand-alone. We can talk about Lydia’s Law. We can talk about making sure that people come up and say that their aggressors should be behind bars—but not just piecemeal it and do what we’re seeing in this bill.

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

Mr. Adil Shamji: We’ve now learned that under the Solicitor General’s watch, this government has lost at least 150 criminals who have been mistakenly released from prison. I’m led to believe that at least six of them remain on the loose. We don’t actually know any of the details around the kind of crime they committed and the degree of danger that may or may not exist to the public. At the same time, we have legislation before us that, unbelievably, is called Keeping Criminals Behind Bars Act.

Do you see anything in this legislation that might have prevented those criminals from being released, and what more would you like to see?

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Well, if I was one of the victims of one of these six left not found, I tell you, I’d be scared. Or a woman, if a rapist is running, then she’d be scared.

We’re talking about keeping criminals behind bars. They have nice titles for their bills, but sometimes, there are a lot of bills that do not address some of these concerns that you just mentioned. We have to be more vigilant about this.

What’s going to happen is if you have money—and criminals have money, don’t forget. There’s some people that will be not guilty, but they won’t have the money to be able to pay the bail. That doesn’t help the system. There needs to be better ways of doing things.

Instead of trying to fill the jails, let’s try to find solutions to try to keep people out of the jails. There’s a lot of people in jail that have a mental illness. They shouldn’t be in jail; they should be with support. They should be in other places where we can help them, not in jail. We have to do a lot better.

I don’t think this bill addresses what we could do in this province—a lot better than just having nice titles like “keeping criminals behind bars.”

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

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Le projet de loi 75 vise à responsabiliser les auteurs de violence et de récidive en leur imposant des sanctions concrètes tout en renforçant le soutien et la protection des victimes et de leurs familles.

Alors, ce texte législatif comprend des mesures destinées à :

- améliorer la sécurité des véhicules commerciaux;
- consolider le système de cautionnement;
- renforcer la protection animale;
- soutenir les victimes d’actes criminels; et
- aider les familles des agents de la sécurité publique.

Ensemble, ces initiatives visent à renforcer la sécurité publique, à consolider la responsabilisation au sein du système judiciaire et à mieux protéger les Ontariens respectueux des lois.

Alors, ma question : êtes-vous opposé aux réformes qui mettent d’avantage l’accent sur la sécurité publique, la protection des victimes et la responsabilisation des délinquants?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Merci pour la question en français. J’apprécie—comme je le dis tout le temps—du débat en français en Chambre, parce que je trouve qu’il devrait y en avoir plus, mais merci encore.

Comme j’ai dit à votre collègue, je ne dis pas qu’il n’y a pas de bonnes choses dans votre projet de loi; il y a des bonnes choses. Mais je ne crois pas qu’augmenter un « bail » va répondre à ce que vous cherchez faire avec votre projet de loi, parce que, comme j’ai dit à un autre collègue qui m’a posé la question juste avant toi, les criminels ont de l’argent. La plupart des criminels, ils ont de l’argent. Donc ça n’a pas d’importance, quel montant vous allez mettre au « bail ». Ils vont le payer, ils vont retourner sur la rue puis ils vont probablement continuer à faire leur criminalité comme ils la font là.

Mais il y a d’autres personnes, par exemple, qui peut-être sont non coupables et n’ont pas l’argent pour être capables de payer le « bail », comme on dit en anglais. Et puis lui, il va être obligé de rester en prison, par exemple. Vous trouvez ça correct? Moi, je trouve qu’il y a un peu d’injustice là-dedans.

On aurait pu prendre le projet de loi, l’individualiser avec toutes les autres « issues » qu’on a—on les connaît toutes. On les débat, ça fait depuis—

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

We have time for a very quick question and answer.

MPP Wayne Gates: I don’t believe the government is looking at the root causes that are causing to build more jails: 700,000 unemployed; 17% unemployment in young people; mental health issues not being addressed; ODSP, OW, people living in poverty.

I guess I’ve got to do a quick question: Would it not be better to take on the root causes in the province of Ontario instead of building more jails?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A very quick response.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: To answer my colleague: You're absolutely correct. We could look at the root cause, invest in it and try to prevent it. Because there's a lot of youth that, unfortunately, have no work and they're living on the streets. Unfortunately, they have to live, so sometimes they turn to crime. We could do so much better if we had a better vision and not just trying to put them in jail.

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

MPP Andrea Hazell: I rise to speak to Bill 75, the Keeping Criminals Behind Bars Act.

Let me be clear: Every person in this House wants safer communities. Every person in this House wants safer roads. Every family in Ontario deserves to feel safe in their neighbourhood, on our highways, on public transit and in their homes.

Speaker, the question is not whether public safety matters; of course it does. The question is whether this bill actually makes people safer or whether it simply gives this government another tough-on-crime title while ignoring the root causes that are driving people into crisis in the first place. Public safety cannot be built on slogans. It has to be built on evidence, prevention, accountability, mental health supports, addictions treatment, and fair and consistent justice systems.

That is exactly what we heard in committee. Dr. Andrew Thomas, a family physician who works at Central East Correctional Centre in Lindsay, gave powerful and heartfelt testimony before the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, and I want to go through his presentation.

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These are the people that we need to consult with, that we need to listen to, that we need to take actions when we're coming up with bills such as this, which we know are going to impact so many people who have mental illness and addictions.

Dr. Andrew Thomas said, "I'm speaking to" the committee "based on some of my professional experiences. I'm a family doctor in Bowmanville, but my relevant experiences are that I also work at the Central East Correctional Centre in Lindsay, as one of the attending physicians there; I also work as an investigating coroner in the region of Durham. I am also the past president for the Black Physicians' Association of Ontario...."

He had a couple of points he wanted to make off the bat, in case he didn't address some of his most important points—he was bringing forward three.

He said, "First and foremost, the men and women I work with at the Central East Correctional Centre do their best to take care of the patients and inmates we take care of, but working in a broken system makes it quite challenging for us to do the best for the folks we see there and take care of. Overall, there has been a lot of talk about folks who are incarcerated, and some of the language and discussions around this bill" that we're discussing today "really does up the rhetoric around incarcerated peoples.

"Secondly, I think many of us who work in corrections will say that corrections really is the biggest"—and I'm going to say this again. "Secondly, I think many of us who

work in corrections will say that corrections really is the biggest mental health and addiction hospital that we have, because there have been gaps in funding for addressing mental health and addictions in the community."

The last point he wanted to make was about folks who are under-represented. He said, "In my time as a Black physician working with other Black physicians, and certainly working with the Black community in Ontario, we know that being under-represented certainly impacts your likelihood to end up incarcerated"—and we see this over and over again in this system—"and certainly some of the challenges that can affect Black individuals and" other racialized individuals "who are under-represented in the justice system.

"I wanted to, if I could—and I understood, too, that there may be several questions for me"—and he wasn't steering away from the questions. "I can paint a picture of my day, which might help, at the Central East Correctional Centre. I work there a few times a month—about three times a month, on average. When I was last there just two weeks ago, we were at over 1,500 individuals for—you all will know better than I, but for an institution that was designed for about 1,180. Since COVID, since I've been working there consistently, we're always over capacity. A lot of the interactions I have day to day are directly related to the fact that there is a lot of overcrowding."

He spoke about how the overcrowding continues to impact the inmates and their mental health. He said, "They are triple-bunked, so there's one on the top bunk, one on the bottom bunk and one on the ground. There are certainly a lot of fights and things that pop up. So it's not uncommon on a day that I arrive, I may be assessed—to see someone to do stitches or assess them for an ER transfer or otherwise, just because of the amount of violence that happens in this institution.

"Ultimately, the one thing I think about is, when I approach patients—we know that, being a provincial institution, many folks are not yet convicted of their crimes, and therefore, increase in the rhetoric around sending more folks there can be dangerous because we know that many people still are awaiting trial for their time. I see that, in the bill, there are some proposed changes to the ability of sureties to be able to help out folks who are there waiting their trial...."

The reason why I wanted to bring forward to you the information that Dr. Andrew Thomas shared in his presentation is we need to continue to hear it from the people that actually work and live those experiences. Correctional officers were never meant to replace mental health workers. That is what happens when government fails to invest in our mental health and justice system.

When people cannot access mental health care in their community, they fall through the cracks. When people cannot access addiction treatment, they fall through the cracks. When people are homeless, hungry, unsupported or in crisis, they also fall through the cracks. When these individuals end up in the justice system and add to the backlog, add to the overcrowding in the jail cells, add to the bunk beds and the triple bunk beds, I think this gov-

ernment is going to start putting beds on the roof of the jails. This is a policy failure.

In Ontario in 2026, there are people who actually came out of jail and wanted to go right back into the jail system, because it's more comfortable to get a place to sleep and food to eat, because there is no proper rehabilitation system to get them back into society. The findings also indicate that Black, Indigenous and racialized individuals are overrepresented in use-of-force incidents. A recent report noted Black people are 2.2 times more likely to have a police interaction and 1.6 times more likely to have force used.

But I want to make this clear: We want to put the real criminals behind bars. We want to put the real criminals behind bars, but we have a system that is failing our young people, who are experiencing high mental health crisis. I've seen it all through Scarborough. I could answer questions on the youths who are crying out for help because of a lack of resources and investment in Scarborough to save our young people and to save our youth.

I want to close off my statement today: I need a government that is more proactive than reactive. The monies that this government is spending on their fantasy projects—come on. Wake up. Help our young people. Help the people who are having breakdowns because of a tough, tough, tough life in this economy today that we're all living through.

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

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Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I was listening to the member from Scarborough–Guildwood. First, she was talking about the jails weren't comfortable, but then she was saying that criminals want to go back to jail because it was comfortable, so I'm not sure where she was going with that.

But I want to know: What do you want me to tell my constituents? First, my executive assistant on her home invasion, and my constituent as well—her husband was beat up, the wife was held at gunpoint, and her children were there and she said, "Shoot me instead of my children."

So what do you want me to tell the victims—because all you were talking about were the criminals. What about the victims in these situations? Don't you care about the victims of Ontario?

MPP Andrea Hazell: Well, first of all, maybe one of those that committed the crime is one that your government can't find on the streets.

Let me make this very clear to you right now: I have also been a victim of crime, okay? I have seen people all across my constituency that are victims of crimes. I've never stood up here and said, "I'm supporting the criminals on the ground."

Do you know what the meaning of rehabilitation? Look that up in the dictionary if you don't know that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Through the Chair.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I'm looking at the Chair. Thank you, Speaker.

All I'm saying is that rehabilitation for young people and for people coming out of jail matters, because if we don't rehabilitate them, they're going to end up back in jail.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from Scarborough–Guildwood for putting a different lens on this piece of legislation, Bill 75, Keeping Criminals Behind Bars Act.

Some of us in this House are actually trying to get criminals into the jail system through the court system. You only have to look at the offence-based statistics from the Ontario Court of Justice to know that, in 2025, there were 321 criminals unlawfully at large. Maybe the government could also give some thought to having a court system where—if it's one of the sexual assault cases from last year, they're waiting on average 374 days to get their day in court. This is from your stats from last year.

Does the member from Scarborough–Guildwood think that this legislation is going to move these numbers? Because these numbers in the Ontario court system are very, very alarming.

MPP Andrea Hazell: To my colleague across from me, thank you so much for that question.

This bill is just a slogan. It will not do anything to resolve the backlog that we have in the justice system. It will not do any justice to the criminals that were let out because of serving time outside of jail. There is so much that is wrong with this justice system. The government needs to go back and fix that, before they come out with another bill just with the name of a slogan.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you to the passionate member from Scarborough–Guildwood for all you do in this chamber, and actually for the whole area of Scarborough's six ridings.

The member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay had a great speech, and he was talking about preventative measures and things we should be dealing with to help people get on the right path, stay on the right path, especially mental health—dealing with our mental health crisis.

We also have high youth unemployment. We've had opposition day motions here to that effect. What should this government be focusing on, especially for our youth in general and youth in Scarborough?

MPP Andrea Hazell: Last week, on Saturday, I joined Scarborough Southwest on their career fair. I left really defeated—like, really, really sad because I saw almost 500 or maybe over 500 young people come through that line. They're students. They are not students on the street, and they are not students who are going to commit crime. Because when people hear or mention Scarborough, they think of it as the worst place on earth. It is not. We don't just have crime rates because we have crime rates; it's because the young people are left behind. There are limited investment resources for the young people of Scarborough.

The unemployment rate in Scarborough is over 20%. When our young people cannot get an income, when our young people cannot find jobs, when our young people cannot get ahead, that's when they will start getting into a mental health crisis, and you know what comes after that.

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

MPP Bill Rosenberg: To the member of Scarborough–Guildwood: Bill 75 is focused on accountability by ensuring violent repeat offenders face meaningful consequences while victims and their families receive stronger support and protections.

This legislation includes measures aimed at improving commercial vehicle safety, personally supporting victims of crime and assisting the families of public safety officers. Together, these initiatives are intended to strengthen public safety, reinforce accountability within the justice system and better protect law-abiding Ontarians.

Do you oppose reforms that place better emphasis on public safety, victim protection and offender accountability?

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you for that question, but I wish you were not reading it.

My response to that is, I believe in putting real criminals behind bars. I stood up here and I made that very clear because we need to decrease the crime rate. But what I'm talking about in this bill—there are a lot of gaps in the justice system that need to be fixed. It keeps deteriorating, and it continues to deteriorate under this government.

We've got people that you have lost out of jail. We don't know where they are. Crime rates are up. It continues to increase. I have seen it in Scarborough. Just two days ago, three young 17-year-olds were found with guns. Why aren't we looking at the real issue? That's what I want to talk about today in this bill, the real issue.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: To the member from Scarborough–Guildwood: She talked about the experience that is currently happening in our jails. I have toured Maplehurst, I have toured Vanier—I believe it was with you, Madam Speaker. I wish I could unsee what I saw in those places. At that point, under the former Liberal government, there were three inmates to a cell, including on the floor. I wish people could see what it's like, perhaps because then they might not choose to assault somebody or choose to hurt somebody, because if they saw what that's like there, it would be a huge deterrent.

My question to the member, though: Last year in the province of Ontario, under the ministry's numbers there were 14,823 people in breach of probation. Do you think that Bill 75 will actually increase this number or decrease this number, given the fact that 62% are on remand at Maplehurst right now?

MPP Andrea Hazell: Thank you for that question. In this bill, I really tried to review and understand it. I really tried to make sense of it. I've debated schedule 5. That's why I thought I will come in and try to debate this bill by putting forward solutions or giving experience from

doctors that actually work in these institutions. Because maybe the government has not consulted with the doctors who are experiencing these horrible experiences in the institutions and want to put forward solutions to this government.

I do not believe that this bill is actually going to decrease the crime we're supposed to be decreasing all throughout Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. There isn't enough time for questions and comments.

Further debate?

Hon. Steve Clark: It's an honour to join in the debate of the government's Bill 75, the Keeping Criminals Behind Bars Act. I want to talk about this act. I also want to thank the minister for the announcement that they made just moments ago about expanding correctional capacity in Ontario.

1400

The Keeping Criminals Behind Bars Act is a very important piece of legislation that this government has put forward to add upon some of the measures that we've already taken as a government. Obviously, we believe very strongly that for too long, repeat offenders have cycled through the justice system. They've put families at risk, and the government felt a need to act in this way.

This is one of the bills that we, right from the very start, talked to our opposition colleagues about ensuring that people had the chance to weigh in on it. We also said that this was just one measure to add upon some of the things that we've done.

Now, in my home riding of Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, these issues are at the forefront. Obviously, the announcement today is welcome news. We have the oldest operational jail in Ontario, the Brockville Jail, which was built in 1842. I certainly believe that after 184 years, it's high time for the government to make a new investment in correctional capacity, not just to create the capacity, but also for our corrections workers.

I have probably the most patient correctional workers in Ontario, because over my 16 years, I've had many, many Ministers of Community Safety, both provincially and federally; ministers of different political stripes, including ministers from this government, come through, and I've expressed many, many times the need to do something. We had a big announcement on August 27, 2020, where we announced that we were going to increase capacity to Brockville as well as create the new Eastern Ontario Correctional Complex in North Grenville.

I also want to speak just briefly about my predecessor, the Honourable Bob Runciman, who served this Legislature for 29 years. He was a Solicitor General and built the St. Lawrence Valley treatment centre in the city of Brockville—really recognized for its treatment opportunities, the way they're able to deal with Indigenous inmates as well and really created the gold standard for dealing with correctional capacity. I'm glad that part of the announcement today reaffirms the St. Lawrence Valley treatment centre expansion for treatment for women.

I know my staff never likes me to say this, but I live in the neighbourhood. My house is about a kilometre away from the correctional complex. I walk a lot around the neighbourhood, so I go by the site. I'm glad that demolition of some of the old buildings on that old Brockville Mental Health Centre site has begun in anticipation of the new correctional complex being built.

Obviously, I'm going to be totally honest with the House: I wish it had moved a little faster. I think 184 years is not the pace that any government—and let's face it, all three recognized parties in this House had the reins of power at some point and we didn't make that investment. In fact, when I first got to this place, the previous government closed correctional complexes, and I was very worried at the time that, having the oldest jail in the province, we were next on the list. That's why I made sure that people knew the importance of having correctional beds and the investment that's needed.

But that's not the only investment. We have to ensure that we put legislation in place that deals with the issues of the day, and Bill 75 has bold measures that are going to crack down on things like dangerous driving and tightening bail restrictions. We've heard the surety debate going back and forth both at second and third reading.

But again, the associate minister is here, fresh from the announcement, and I want to thank him for his efforts with the new initiative today to create more correctional capacity. I think we can all agree that having that decision made and having a plan in place, now it's going to be up to the government to really put it in favour.

I can't talk about a bill in Sol Gen, though, without deviating, if the members will allow me to—and it will be up to them; you will make that decision. But I always want to recognize the men and women of our first responders, including our correctional officers, who really are heroes. But I want to talk about one hero that's really special to me, and that's my son Mitch. He's back in Ontario, on Halton region police force. He spent a decade—

Interjections.

Hon. Steve Clark: Thank you.

He spent a decade in the city of Edmonton. I have to tell you, Speaker, now that they're back in Hamilton, I like the four-hour drive from Brockville a lot more than the four-and-a-half-hour flight to Edmonton. Not that it wasn't a great opportunity for them. My daughter-in-law got to work for the Edmonton Oilers and I got to see Connor McDavid play, so it's nice. There's the hockey fan, the member for Niagara Falls.

But I really thank my son for taking the route of policing and the fact that he's done this now in two provinces. I just really want to recognize him as well. I appreciate the opportunity. I appreciate you didn't call me out of order.

The advocacy continues by the Solicitor General and other members of our government, but we need to make sure that there is good opportunity for the next bill. And I think the ministers today at the announcement really indicated that, regardless of what happens with Bill 75, our work isn't done, and that there will be additional initiatives, hopefully before the House adjourns, where we'll

have yet another addition to our party and our government's decision to enforce the law, to make sure that dangerous offenders go where they belong.

Again, I want to take the opportunity for today's announcement. It really makes me proud that we're righting some of the wrongs that the previous Liberal government did in terms of closing correctional facilities, in terms of going the other way when it comes to correctional facilities in the province.

There was quite the debate by all three parties, including the official opposition now, who then was the third party. They were on the record quite a lot of the time about the Liberal government's decision. We do hope that they will remember that debate when they move forward with not just Bill 75 but when the next Solicitor General bill hits the table.

So, Speaker, we've had good debate at second reading. We've had committee hearings. We've now had a robust debate at third reading. I would ask your indulgence and I move that the question now be put.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Mr. Clark has moved that the question be now put. I'm satisfied that there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Mr. Kerzner has moved third reading of Bill 75, An Act to enact the Constable Joe MacDonald Public Safety Officers' Survivors Scholarship Fund Act, 2025 and to amend various other Acts. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I declare the motion carried, on division.

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

Third reading agreed to.

PROTECTING ONTARIO'S
FOOD INDEPENDENCE ACT, 2026
LOI DE 2026 VISANT À PROTÉGER
L'AUTONOMIE ALIMENTAIRE
DE L'ONTARIO

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

Bill 109, An Act to enact the Farmland Security Act, 2026 and to amend various Acts / Projet de loi 109, Loi édictant la Loi de 2026 visant à protéger l'autonomie alimentaire de l'Ontario et modifiant diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane to resume the debate.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to speak in the House and today to continue my lead on the Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act. The first 40 minutes of my speech previously were about what was actually in the bill. I would like to spend a bit of time on

something that was referenced with the bill, something that was part of the technical briefing, but wasn't actually in the bill, and that was the opportunity for increased agricultural production in northern Ontario. It's focused on the Greater Clay Belt. My farm is in the Lesser Clay Belt. But the principles are the same.

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I would like to make it very clear, on behalf of the official opposition, that there is vast opportunity in the Greater Clay Belt for agriculture, and in the Lesser Clay Belt, as well, and in a world where food production is going to be increasingly important, that could be a great benefit to Ontario. The one thing I would caution is that we are losing farmland rapidly in Ontario, and to simply say we'll clear land in the north to replace what we're losing in the south—that's a fool's trade. I'm very proud to be a farmer in northern Ontario, but if someone said, "I will trade my land for land in Oxford county"—one for one, or two for one, or three for one—I think I would pick Oxford county. There is an inherent climatic advantage to portions of southern Ontario. So let's make that clear. Having said that, there is huge opportunity.

There are some things that I think need to be put on the record, need to be thought about as we proceed.

Various ministers say there are 11 million acres available—that's a lot of land—and that's accurate. It's mostly crown land. It belongs to the people of Ontario. It's owned by the people.

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: I like to fly. They're making fun of my hand movements.

That land isn't sitting there idle now. I think that has to be put on the record. The majority of that land is being managed by forestry companies to supply their mills, to create jobs.

I would like to put one of those forestry companies on the record. Georgia-Pacific is an OSB manufacturer in Englehart; they also have a facility in Earlton—both of which I consider my hometowns. They have a big facility in Englehart—OSB, or oriented strand board, waferboard. They just announced a big expansion of that plant. I give credit to this government, because this government put some financing into it, but the company put a lot more into it. They're a big employer. They're aggressive. They manage much of those 11 million acres, so they are going to want to be at the table—and their fellow companies—to discuss the use of that land. There is ample opportunity for everyone.

At one point, the Minister of Northern Economic Development, at an estimates hearing, said, "Oh, well. That 11 million acres can go to agriculture, and the forestry companies can just go farther north or they can go to Temagami." Well, I don't think that was a very well-informed answer, and I don't think he will say that again, because it's not that simple.

Something else that isn't simple is—and we can look to South America. Brazil is another place that has a lot of agricultural opportunity. Sometimes you will see articles about how they're clearing the Brazilian rainforests—

"We're losing species." We could be doing the same thing with this. Because if you think about it, the forestry sector has to abide by very strict rules on species at risk: If there's a stick nest in a tree, they have to go around to protect birds; they have to keep in mind the moose population; woodland caribou is extremely contentious in the forestry sector as well. You can't just say we'll turn the agricultural bulldozers loose and forget about that.

Although Brazil is widely criticized for what is happening with their rainforest or with the Amazon basin, in Brazil, if you turn land to agriculture, you have to protect a minimum of 20%. A minimum of 20% of that land has to remain untouched. In some cases where it's ultra-sensitive, it's much higher—60%, 70%.

We don't hear anything about that in the government's briefings. Now, I hope we will, because I'm a farmer in northern Ontario. I operate on private land, and I am as guilty as every other farmer in northern Ontario. When we cleared land, because it was private land, we cleared from fence row to fence row because we want big fields—big fields are more economical. But that was private land; this is public land. This belongs to you, Speaker; it belongs to us; it belongs to the people in the gallery and everyone else in Ontario. They should have a say about how much of that land is actually cleared.

If the government is going to sell crown land to farmers or to investors—that's another issue; I'm going to touch on that in a second—there needs to be strict guidelines on how that land is cleared, how areas are protected, how wildlife is protected, and that has to be done in consultation with the First Nations. That is really, really important. Again, I want to stress there is room to do this. There is room to do this correctly, but we have to be really careful how we do it, and we're not.

I would like to make it real clear: The official opposition, and particularly myself as a farmer—I am not trying to slow this down. We want it done correctly the first time, right? Because we know in Timiskaming and the Little Clay Belt, it's much farther developed. We've made mistakes in the Little Clay Belt, and we should learn from these mistakes. Now, sometimes government doesn't like to learn from their mistakes, but farmers—and there are a few other farmers here and a few other business people—don't like making mistakes, but when we do make them, we like to learn from them and remember them so that we don't make them again.

One thing that we learned in the Little Clay Belt is that you cannot farm in northern Ontario successfully, profitably, without tile drainage. You need systematic tile drainage because there is no natural drainage. In many parts of the province, there is natural drainage. The rainfall or the groundwater comes up, and they have a gravel base and the water flows away. In northern Ontario, that doesn't happen. Where I am, there is 100 feet of clay—it was an old glacial lake—and unless you put in tiles—basically a systematic drainage system in your field to drain the water away or to keep the groundwater from flooding your field—you will not be able to farm profitably. Tile drainage is proven to work, and it's long-term infrastructure.

Before I was here, when I was president of the local federation of agriculture, we worked very hard to get the government to help fund long-term tile drainage infrastructure, and they still do. I give them and the previous Liberal government credit for that.

But the one thing that tile drainage does is it doesn't move more water than natural drainage, but it moves it much, much quicker. If you have a tile, a basin of 1,000 acres or 5,000 acres draining into a natural water course and it drains naturally and the snow melts naturally, it takes a long time and you have a little bit of a spring rush, but you don't have massive erosion.

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But with tile drainage, what normally would take a month or two months takes four days or five days. That's why we can get in the fields a month earlier. But that rush of water, unless you make sure that you have systems to control it and systems to manage erosion, can cause a lot of erosion downstream. We've learned that in Timiskaming. We've learned that the hard way, especially because when you don't have rock and you've got a river system and the natural gully goes to the river—but there's no rock, it's all clay and all of a sudden you take 12-inch pipes going full blast—they're like a water cannon, and we've learned that the hard way. So if the government is going to look at opening up this area, we need to make sure that the municipal drain system, the tile, is going to work.

That leads us to another problem: Your municipalities in northern Ontario, quite frankly, can't handle that. I have a municipality right now that has been bought up by two hedge funds, and instead of dealing with many farmers, they're dealing with two investment companies. What the investment companies do is they buy the farms, they tear down the buildings and they rent the land out—which is great for them, but there's no income anymore more for the municipality. That municipality has gone down from 500 residents to 100 residents, and because there's a minimal tax on farmland compared to the buildings, there is no income. The reeve comes to me, and I say, "What I would do is I would hand in the keys, because you're not going to be able to pay your bills."

As you go further north, there is not going to be a municipal infrastructure to work with municipal drains. It's a huge issue. It's a big, big issue. It also leads to the next issue: What type of farms are you going to have in northern Ontario? We have this going on in the Greater Clay Belt already. If you go to Matheson and many other areas, too, we have a large Mennonite population. They move from other areas because land is much more affordable, and they do a great job. At least the ones in Matheson, they build barns; they do a great job. But if you go a little bit farther—and that's the agriculture that people have in their mind, right? More people, families—but if you go a little bit farther, it's more large-scale investment-type agriculture, cash crops, like me: much bigger fields, but no people.

We have to question—and I'm not necessarily opposed to that model; agriculture now is much bigger. But the question you have to ask is: Who is going to pay for the

infrastructure? Because the way the model is now, the big corporate guys say, "Well, we don't need as much infrastructure as we used to." Well, if you take a class 10 combine—combines are measured in classes—these things are huge. You need bigger bridges and bigger roads than we have ever needed before. Who is going to pay for them? It's a really big question.

I'm also sometimes hearing, "Oh, but it's going to be great in northern Ontario because we will have the processing and you will be able to process the food there." That, quite frankly, is untrue, Speaker, because in the Little Clay Belt, we are building big grain terminals to ship the grain south. We had a robust dairy sector in the Little Clay Belt. We had one processing plant and it was also closed, and that milk is now shipped west, east or south.

So we're not going to get processing. When they tell you we're going to get processing—it hasn't happened yet. It's not going to happen. Processing happens where the people are. When they say, "Oh, the jobs. Your towns are going to be revitalized," those of you who are from rural Ontario think about—like, in southwestern Ontario, you have a mixed economy. You have some manufacturing—you have all of everything. But what we're talking about is, in those 11 million acres, you're going to have maybe less forestry because you're taking their land. You're going to have agriculture. And I'm pro-agriculture, but it's not going to be the same economy that you think of in the southwest. I know southwestern Ontario because my family is in Oxford. It's not going to be the same economy.

Is there huge potential there? Absolutely. Absolutely. But do we have to take the steps to make sure it's done correctly and that everyone actually benefits? A hundred per cent, even on little issues.

Now, on crown land, forestry manages it; they have a 50-year, 75-year harvest cycle. But in between, there are hunters on that land, there are snowmobilers on that land. Once it becomes agriculture, that's all gone, because the land now under forestry is public. It still belongs to everyone. But once it belongs to hedge funds, it's no longer public; it's private. And I'm not opposed to that, but I just want you to know what you're entering into. If you're going to sell public land to the private sector, be they big or small, you have to make sure the public interest is protected. I haven't been partisan yet. So far, this government is not really great at protecting the public interest.

I'm hoping you will take your time, that you will actually consult everyone, including the people who oppose you sometimes and not just one or two corporate investors who want access to that land. Why they want access is because they want to make money on it. They want to buy it for \$1,000, \$2,000 or \$3,000 an acre, clear it and then sell it to another corporate hedge fund for \$6,000 or \$7,000 an acre. That's what they want to do. Is that a bad business model? I'm not saying it is, but the government has to be aware of that.

We have to make sure that this is actually going to be good for the people of Ontario, good for agriculture and not just good for a few offices on Bay Street. It's very well that that could be the case. Why I'm standing here is we

want to work with you to make sure that we all realize that potential.

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

Hon. Mike Harris: Just this week, I had a lovely opportunity to be able to spend some time in the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane's riding. We had a great forestry announcement in Earlton and Englehart. I wanted to thank him for the work he does, obviously, in his community, and also the member for Mushkegowuk—James Bay in representing northeastern Ontario very well. We were there to take part in the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities conference. They were very excited about the economic potential that's going to be unlocked in northeastern Ontario, and a lot of that does centre around agriculture.

The member was talking a little bit about tile drainage and some of the different things that would need to be done and partnerships that we need built in regard to being able to make sure that we do have the best farmland available.

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I was wondering if he might be able to touch a little bit more on how he views some of those relationships, understanding some of the critical needs of northeastern Ontario municipalities and what it means to be able to develop those partnerships, of course, with the folks who are already there farming, and the people who may be looking to purchase those lands.

Mr. John Vanthof: I thank the minister for that question. I would like to thank the ministry for their investment in Georgia-Pacific. Georgia-Pacific is a cornerstone of forestry in northeastern Ontario and a huge employer in my riding.

I've spoken to Georgia-Pacific about the conflict between forestry and agriculture. And it's not a direct conflict, but there is a healthy competition for resources.

But the second part of his question on what is needed—we'll use tile drainage as an example. I'm going to be really farmer. We pay for tile drainage and, really, once the water leaves my farm, as long as it's not eroding my farm—I'm worried about my farm. But someone has to be worried about it when it leaves my farm, and sometimes that costs millions and millions of dollars. We don't have the infrastructure right now to handle that.

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

MPP Wayne Gates: Farming is the backbone of Ontario's economy. Agriculture is one of the most important industries in Niagara. Everyone thinks it's just grapes and wine; we have much, much more than that. Niagara has over two thirds of Ontario's tender fruit orchards. We grow grains, seed oils, garlic and soy. Niagara has 218,000 acres of farmland, and it's so important that we protect it and protect the jobs that it creates.

My question to my colleague is: We are losing 319 acres of prime farmland every day. Why do you think this PC government is not protecting the prime farmland we already have in Ontario?

Mr. John Vanthof: I would like to thank my colleague from Niagara Falls. He did a very good job of describing the importance of agriculture, even in an area like Niagara Falls—because not everyone would assume that Niagara Falls is an agricultural powerhouse, and it is.

One of the reasons why agricultural land is under so much pressure in many parts of the province is because towns and cities started as agricultural villages, and as they expand, they need someplace to grow. One municipality, regional area, that was doing very well at managing this was Waterloo. Waterloo was focusing—and the member from Waterloo can correct me—on building up and using the best way to save agricultural land. This government has decided that that's not good enough for them, and they've decided to sprawl. They have decided to bring back sprawl, and we are losing the most important resource that we have.

What I'm worried is the government is going to say—and I mentioned this in remarks—"Oh, we're clearing the land. We're clearing 600 acres a day in northern Ontario, so we're actually gaining agricultural land," and we're not gaining productive capacity. That's what we're not gaining.

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

Mr. Adil Shamji: I would like to thank the member for his thoughtful remarks. I know with his extensive background that when he rises to speak on many issues, but of course this one in particular, he speaks from a place of experience. We sincerely appreciate that here.

As I've heard from many farming communities, I've been led to understand that there's a little bit of a crisis. Many farms are concerned that there isn't a next generation that's interested in picking up and taking over the mantle as current farmers retire. And there are many reasons for that, including growing centralization of health care leading to less access, concerns around access to schools and that kind of thing.

There may well be many things to support in this legislation, but drawing on your experience, is there anything more that you might have preferred to have seen in this legislation to do a better job of protecting agri-foods and our agricultural sector?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you. That's a very good question. Overall, on the issues that this legislation is trying to address—I think they're fairly well covered, the issues that they're trying to address.

The issue regarding succession planning for agriculture: It's a tough one. It really is a tough one. Agriculture is becoming more centralized. In many cases, you need to get bigger, and it's a conflict—it's such a different lifestyle, because you need to be there all the time. So it's a tough one.

One part of this legislation that impacts this and that confuses me a little bit is the focus on not having any foreign investment into agri-food. Because if you look around, if there hadn't been foreign investment over the years in agriculture in Ontario—you look at all the Dutch names on mailboxes and the Italian names on green-

houses—I don't think we'd have an agricultural sector in Ontario.

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

MPP Paul Vickers: My question is to my member opposite. The area that we're talking about is your area, the Great Clay Belt and the Little Clay Belt. But we share a border with another province directly to our east. Would you say there are any examples on the other side of the Quebec border that maybe would help us make good decisions that would maybe show us examples of ways to do it, that would show us the ability and the potential growth in production of agriculture?

Mr. John Vanthof: I would like to thank the member from the government. Actually, I would consider him a friend—a true friend and colleague, and a fellow farmer.

There's a famous map of the Ontario side and the Quebec side of the Greater Clay Belt; the Quebec side is almost fully developed agriculturally and the Ontario side not. But anyone who knows about the forestry sector knows that a lot of fibre goes from Ontario to Quebec, so again, it's not that that land is not being used.

Why Quebec developed the way it did is, in Quebec, they massively subsidized some of their sectors. There was a massive beef subsidy for beef cow-calf, and that, among other things, made it profitable to farm there, and it wasn't profitable in Ontario. At the end of the day, there needs to be a profit. Otherwise, it will not work long-term.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A very quick question.

Ms. Catherine Fife: To the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane: Bill 109—you've outlined some of the good things that are in it. But one of the weaknesses is that we're one of the only jurisdictions in Canada without reliable data on foreign farmland ownership. Without it, we can't know the scale of the problem or design the right solution. So where do we go from here to make sure that farmland sovereignty is actually food sovereignty as well?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A very quick response.

Mr. John Vanthof: That's a very good question. The first thing we need to do is actually make sure we have that data.

I think what the government, and I think what we're all—we do not want investment from large foreign entities. We don't want other countries—and we'll give an example: China—buying huge tracks of our agricultural land. I get that. But we have to make sure that we actually know what's going on, because the way this legislation is written, it's almost like the minister or his or her designate has to decide on each piece of farmland whether the next owner is Canadian enough, and I don't understand how that's going to work.

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

Mr. Adil Shamji: I'm pleased to rise in the chamber this afternoon to discuss Bill 109, An Act to enact the Farmland Security Act, 2026 and to amend various Acts.

My delightful friend the member from Beaches—East York is imploring me to mention that I will be sharing my time with her. She is so keen to speak on this subject matter, and I can understand exactly why: because we are so proud of our agri-food sector and it deserves all of the support that it can get. It will certainly, over the next hour, be getting that support from myself, the member from Beaches—East York as well, and the Ontario Liberal caucus.

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The agri-food sector is the largest sector of Ontario's economy, representing \$50 billion of economic activity and over 10% of all jobs. Agri-food is constantly innovating and provides Ontario with numerous competitive advantages in world trade. We talk about making Ontario an energy superpower. Well, the energy output of Ontario's farms is, in fact, comparable to Ontario's nuclear fleet.

Like other industries, Ontario's agri-food is not only looking to explore every new opportunity to expand into new markets but also to expand value-added opportunities in its supply chain; for example, by reshoring processing capacity from pork to peaches. So efficient, responsive regulation is key to supporting growth. What we see in this relatively technical bill are measures to improve or enable regulation or to codify practices already in place.

We're happy to dive into policy details on behalf of stakeholders. What I want to tell all of the agricultural stakeholders watching this speech is that you have the attention of the Ontario Liberal caucus. We stand ready to support you in the way that only opposition MPPs can.

Before I begin to discuss the content of this bill, I want to comment on current procedures in this Legislature under this Conservative government. Second reading debate of Bill 109 started the day after the bill was tabled, first reading was on April 22 and debate began only one day later, on April 23. Government likes making it hard for the opposition to prepare for substantial debate. They like to push bills through, skipping committee stage, shortening legislative sessions, using their majority to thwart the opposition at every turn.

I think that we should put a couple of calendar days between first and second reading.

I hope the government breaks its traditions and has this bill go to committee stage. Too many substantial bills, like the recent budget bill, were skipped at committee stage, skipping detailed examination. It's part of a pattern that puts the interests of Ontarians at risk.

With all of those things being said, I would like to now dive into each of the schedules in the bill before us, beginning, of course, with schedule 1, which amends the Beef Cattle Marketing Act.

The Beef Farmers of Ontario represent 19,000 beef farmers advocating for the industry, providing market information and promoting Ontario beef. They normally collect \$7 a head from the sale of cattle, which goes towards funding their activities. One of the things that schedule 1 does is mandate that producers who process their own cattle must pay the \$7-a-head licence fee as if

they were selling the cattle. This would expand funding to the Beef Farmers of Ontario to increase marketing activities that would benefit the entire industry.

Schedule 1 grants exceptions for up to two cattle processed for personal consumption. We asked and were told by ministry officials that personal consumption does not include farm gate sales. The licence fee is currently \$7 a head. Ministry staff agreed that this exception involved a small amount of money. So you have to ask: Why create this exception for such a small amount of money—that is \$7 or \$14? How much extra work is involved in documenting this exception? Maybe there's a simple answer. Let's find out and get it on the record by bringing this bill to committee.

Next, let's address schedule 2, which amends the Farming and Food Production Protection Act. This schedule transfers the powers and duties of the Normal Farm Practices Protection Board to the new Agriculture and Agri-food Protection Tribunal.

When we asked some questions in the technical briefing as part of our regular due diligence, ministry officials responded that all adjudicators are currently filled and the total number of adjudicators is not expected to change. Some of you may remember that vacancies in adjudicator positions contributed to the large backlogs at the Landlord and Tenant Board in recent years under this government. Any current cases, currently in process, should feel no impact, and the changes should be completed by the end of 2026. These are the responses from the ministry in response to our queries. So based off of that, and assuming those were made in good faith, which we take at face value, this seems satisfactory and hopefully these things will be confirmed on the record at committee hearings.

Schedule 3 creates a new Farmland Security Act. The purpose of schedule 3 is to prevent foreigners or any so-called designated persons from acquiring Ontario farmland. Farmland includes land which has the potential to be farmed. Even though the new act will allow the minister to require information from farmland purchasers to make sure they are not a designated person, we have to acknowledge that Canada and Ontario have historically been bad at making beneficial ownership transparent.

Beneficial ownership refers to who ultimately owns the corporation which buys farmland. It's tricky because corporations can own or control other corporations through special legal structures designed to make it hard to trace who ultimately pulls the strings and controls the profits.

Ministry staff agreed that there would have to be a consultation on how to check beneficial ownership for purchases of farmland. Our Liberal critic believes that consultation should start at the committee stage, not after this legislation has been passed.

We know that checking beneficial ownership is not easy because, when reporters asked what the current level of foreign ownership is, the ministry could only say that it was a non-zero number and that they actually didn't know the answer. The ministry essentially replied by saying, "Don't worry about current ownership; this bill is forward-looking to avert risks," but they have no idea what the

current level of risk is at this moment in time. Does the government actually know how much farmland is foreign-owned? Certainly not as of the day that this bill was tabled. Perhaps by the time this bill goes to committee they will have tried to get the answer, or at least they will have gotten a better idea how hard digging up beneficial ownership will be.

This is yet another reason why I believe so firmly that Bill 109, while it has many supportable provisions, must go to committee to hear witnesses and to see if there are ways to improve the bill or potentially not.

What's not in schedule 3 is something to protect prime agricultural land. That's something that stopping foreign buyers does not really do.

This government must show its commitment to controlling urban sprawl. Ontario farmers know that we have to build up and not out and that once we pave over farmland it will be lost forever.

I again call on this government to do more to protect prime agricultural land and to protect the future of agriculture in Ontario. Certainly, its track record of trying to pave over the greenbelt and extend Highway 413 through sensitive environmental areas and prime agricultural land does not accomplish that.

Schedule 4 discusses the Food Safety and Quality Act. This schedule expands the act to oversee all milk and milk products from milk-producing species such as cows, sheep, goat and buffalo, and provides for more consistency in the food safety framework. It is intended, I believe, to be preparatory work for consultations on changes to regulations in food safety. It also allows Ontario to more fully enforce supply management, especially over different forms of milk products which can get imported, and it codifies current dairy supply chain practice.

The Ontario Liberal Caucus of course supports supply management and has indicated that support to the Carney government in regard to this policy position.

Schedule 5 addresses the Milk Act. And from our review, the changes in the Milk Act do appear consistent with the transfer of regulation to the Food Safety and Quality Act, 2001, as mentioned in schedule 4. However, we must check to see if all stakeholders are indeed happy with schedule 5 by, again, bringing it before committee hearings.

In schedule 6, this legislation, if passed, would amend the Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs Act. The changes here are needed to effect the changes in schedule 2. It extends tribunal decision timelines from 20 days to 30 days. Ministry officials have said delays are currently not an issue at the relevant tribunals. Perhaps at committee we can find out why this change would be beneficial.

1450

In schedule 7, we look at the Ontario Food Terminal Act. This schedule specifies that the Ontario Food Terminal Board is an agent of the crown and extends certain liability protections as a crown agency. Currently, OFTB is an operational enterprise under the Ministry of Agriculture, self-funded by user fees. At the current time, it does

not cost the taxpayer any money. Schedule 7 specifies that the board can create a capital fund. The board can already set aside money, and this just provides legal clarity.

The Ontario Food Terminal, I'm led to understand, is a wonderful place to visit. It performs the extremely valuable function of price discovery for the extremely variegated produce sector. For example, it gives a farmer the information to decide whether it's more profitable to deliver eight-inch zucchinis or 12-inch zucchinis. Every business thrives when market prices exist and are clear and reliable. That's what this wholesale market does for the economy of Ontario.

I hope, despite the Premier's past statements of wanting the food terminal to move, that his government gives its full support to the food terminal's desire to remain in its current location and to have the capacity to expand.

In schedule 8, the legislation seeks to amend the Protecting Farmers from Non-Payment Act. This schedule provides increased protections to producers by requiring written records of many types of transactions and allowing increased claims against financial protection boards in the case of dealer insolvency, for example, in relation to grain elevators experiencing a cash crunch. Farmers, for example grain farmers, can pay into these funds for their commodity to fund these claims.

These written records may be the practice in many cases, but this change provides legal clarity. Legal clarity and certainty is something which supports business growth, and it's something that Ontario Liberals will support.

Turning to schedule 9, this seeks, if passed, to amend the Veterinary Professionals Act. It would appear, on our read, that this schedule is intended to be enabling legislation. The Veterinary Professionals Act was intended to modernize laws covering veterinarians, but it is not yet in effect because the regulations haven't been completed. The technical briefing from the ministry indicated that this schedule contains necessary updates, which must be in place before regulatory consultations may proceed. I am not sure why this is the case for an Act which is only two years old, so it would be very useful to hear testimony about this at the committee stage.

To conclude my summary of the nine schedules and my reflections as well, the Ontario Liberal caucus will be voting for this bill at second reading because we agree with Bill 109 in principle. But we do call on this government to have respect for the Ontario Legislature, for the voters of Ontario and everyone in the agri-food sector.

We hope that this government will allow the bill to go to committee stage, to hear witnesses and to examine the bill in detail, including possible amendments to make it better. If given the opportunity, the Ontario Liberal caucus will be proud to support that. In fact, we will always stand ready to help the agri-food sector succeed and contribute to the prosperity of our province.

That being said, with so many of the provisions that are in this bill, as I think about and hear from farmers across this province, what I hear is growing uncertainty, growing concerns and fear about what the next generation of farmers can look forward to. Many farmers and their

communities are struggling to come up with succession plans. Many of them are seeing vitally needed social services evaporate from their communities so that they cannot access the health care that they deserve, so that their children cannot access the education that they deserve, at an elementary, secondary or even a post-secondary sector.

Of course, as this government fails to provide the funding and support for vitally needed infrastructure, both for municipal services and housing-enabling infrastructure as well, there's a growing fear that the housing that is necessary to support and encourage people to move into farming communities simply isn't there.

So while this is an important step to take in terms of protecting and supporting our agri-food sector—which is why our Ontario Liberal caucus will be supporting it—there remain so many other things to deliver the security and certainty that our agri-food and agricultural sector need and deserve.

With that, I would like to turn it over to my esteemed colleague from Beaches–East York, who will speak now.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member has said he is sharing his time. Therefore, I recognize the member for Beaches–East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's great to see you in the chair.

Good afternoon, everyone. I am thrilled to stand in the chamber, as always, to represent the wondrous people of beautiful Beaches–East York, and especially today, when I speak on a piece of legislation that is meant to strengthen the resilience of the agricultural sector and creates the circumstance for agribusiness to flourish. For that, I wholeheartedly thank the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness.

So, as my colleague has done, I will just go through the schedules. Schedule 1, Beef Cattle Marketing Act, adds statutes regarding custom processing, the slaughter and processing of cattle at a plant for a service charge where the producer retains ownership of the cattle and carcass. Custom processing, like the sale of cattle, would require a licence.

It mandates that producers who process their own cattle must pay a prescribed licence fee as if they were selling the cattle—exceptions for up to two cattle processed for personal consumption. Personal consumption does not include farm gate sales.

The licence fee is currently \$7 a head. Ministry staff agreed that this was a small amount of money. So you have to ask, why create this exception for such a small amount of money, \$7 or \$14?

It transfers the burden of paying licence fees from purchasers who deducted it into the purchase price to the seller/producer—

Interjections.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Sorry. I'm being very distracted by the Minister of Natural Resources.

Schedule—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Well, I didn't know we were critiquing each other's speeches. Why don't you come—

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

Stop the cross talk. The member has the floor. Please address your remarks through the Chair. The heckling from the other side can wait until questions and answers, after the remarks. Thank you.

I return to the member for Beaches–East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you. I didn't know we had a Toastmaster champion in the room. But I'll definitely be paying attention to his speeches in future.

Interjection.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Schedule 2—at least he's listening—Farming and Food Production Protection Act, 1998, transfers the powers and duties of the Normal Farm Practices Protection Board to the new Agriculture and Agri-Food Protection Tribunal and removes statutory requirements regarding what applications to the tribunal must contain.

Schedule 3, Farmland Security Act, creates a new act, defines designated persons as foreign nationals or any persons/corporations that the Lieutenant Governor in Council may prescribe in regulation and mandates that, subject to the regulations, a designated person shall not, directly or indirectly, purchase or otherwise acquire farmland or an interest in farmland in Ontario, nor shall someone make the purchase on their behalf. Farmland includes land which has the potential to be farmed, of course.

The minister can require information from farmland purchasers to ensure that they are not a designated person. The minister can appoint inspectors to investigate compliance with the act. The minister can order contravening landowners to sell their land. He can also issue orders prohibiting an upcoming purchase. Offences under the act warrant charges of up to \$500,000 for individuals and \$1 million for corporations.

Canada and Ontario have been historically bad at making beneficial ownership transparent. Ministry staff agreed that there would have to be a consultation—which is great—on how to check beneficial ownership for purchases of farmland. The critic believes that should probably start at committee stage.

1500

Schedule 4, Food Safety and Quality Act, 2001, expands the act to oversee all milk and milk products from all species, adds regulatory power to proscribe the approved laboratories that can test food and agricultural commodities, and updates rules regarding the delegation of powers under the act.

Schedule 5, Milk Act, makes the relevant changes to transfer the regulation of the quality of milk and milk products to the Food Safety and Quality Act, 2001, and sets out some increased regulatory powers of the Ontario Farm Products Marketing Commission and their power to inspect sites.

Schedule 6, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Act, renames the Agriculture, Food and Rural

Affairs Appeal Tribunal to the Agriculture and Agri-Food Protection Tribunal, as which also gains the powers of the Normal Farm Practices Protection Board through schedule 2, and extends tribunal decision timelines to 30 days, up from 20 days.

Schedule 7, Ontario Food Terminal Act, specifies that the Ontario Food Terminal Board is an agent of the crown and extends certain liability protections as a crown agency. It specifies that the board can create a capital fund, and a capital fund will help fund infrastructure updates for board facilities.

Schedule 8, Protecting Farmers from Non-Payment Act, bars dealers from buying and selling proscribed products without written agreements, which dealers must comply—and can be extended with regulation. Regulation can specify that certain products cannot require deferred payment for sale. It requires that for proscribed products, storage deals are required to have written agreements. It allows storage operators to apply for permits to store in new locations not originally licensed, with regulated conditions and licence fees. It provides that financial protection boards can have additional board members to ensure representation of industry groups. It adds circumstances where producers can make a claim for funds due to the nonpayment/insolvency of a dealer or storage operators. It provides that ungraded products must still be provided receipts upon collection from a producer or proscribed seller. Product graders must provide statements on the grading to the producer and keep records. Graded products are required to meet proscribed requirements before they can be purchased, advertised or sold.

Finally, schedule 9, Veterinary Professionals Act, 2024, adds a definition for “ancillary services,” meaning services provided as part of or separate from their practice of veterinary medicine, including boarding, grooming, funeral services and sales of food, supplies and other goods or services. It allows the ministry to set proscribed persons and locations where veterinary activity is allowed, regardless of accreditation. It expands investigation powers to former members of the veterinary college, instead of only current members. It allows the college registrar to cancel the licence of the member or former member in cases where false info was provided during issuance. And it removes complainants as parties to the college disciplinary hearing of a member.

As my colleague the MPP for Timiskaming–Cochrane so astutely pointed out, this is truly an agricultural bill. It is not an omnibus bill that sneaks unrelated schedules into it, in the hopes that their colleagues and constituents alike will fail to notice these provisions and will permit the bill to move forward without critique. These random schedules are often so egregious that they cannot stand alone. This government needs to flood the system with so much information to distract from their often unexplainable and unjustifiable proposals. The practice of omnibus bills often creates the circumstances that are in tension with one another. While we may be able to support one section of a bill, to support another would be a major error—often like a poison pill. In doing this, this government actually

prevents good legislation from moving forward. But this bill, Bill 109, Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act, 2026, is not that. So it is very, very refreshing, and I thank the government for tabling a bill that will allow for genuine debate, despite the rude heckling.

When a bill is cohesive and has vision, it invites debate that is more productive. It ensures that, as debaters, we are all on the same page. Our debates become a dialogue where we are able to respond to one another's questions and comments because we are not scrambling to debate a completely different topic than those before us because the bill had so many unrelated sections that we would be remiss to only focus on one.

What great bill to foster genuine debate. Everyone, no matter their political stripes, is committed to supporting farmers, farmland and agribusiness, especially when we have so many fine farmers amongst us.

This will surprise you: I have never farmed myself, but I did grow up in Collingwood and was fortunate to witness and understand the unique role that farms and farmers play in our province. In Collingwood, we had Meesters Farms; we had Currie's farms. They were farming for 100 years, and then, in 1957, they started a farm market, and they're still going today. Now, their children and grandchildren—the next generation, of course—are farming there.

They are very famous for butter tarts. I know that's different from farming, but they're baking in addition to their farming. They are famous for strawberries and all kinds of vegetables.

In high school, I picked asparagus on a farm. That was one of my many part-time jobs. And every year, my mother would drag out us children to pick strawberries. Then we would come home after baking in the sun and make strawberry jam and fight with my three brothers covered in red strawberry juice that we called "Mama Droop's strawberry jam." So I know a little bit about being on a farm; not much.

But then, because I care so much about farmers, I started a farmers' market in my former life in Toronto, East Lynn Park Farmers' Market. It is still running. We honour and support Ontario farmers and remind people in our community that farmers feed cities.

We also fed our farmers when they came in because we thought we should feed the people who feed us. Volunteers in the community provided a nice dinner for farmers before they had to drive all the way back home, sometimes hours away.

That is my experience. I know it's not as on the ground, but I am in awe of everything you do. I know you get up so early in the morning, which many of us could never do; I couldn't.

The job is brutal on your body. You're always checking the weather, the Farmers' Almanac. It requires fortitude of the mind, barely getting to bed before sunset and repeating it day in and day out. It's a tireless job. Crops and livestock never cease to need tending to and caring for, and I just want to say I respect you and all the farmers out there.

But the work is not solely limited to the actual act of farming work. It requires immense business knowledge:

being able to balance the resources put into their farmlands and then staff, if applicable; expecting yields and sales plans. It's really mental gymnastics in addition to the wear and tear on your body, all the while understanding that these best-case scenarios do not always pan out.

They have to be prepared for any number of things to go wrong. The pressure is immense, certainly to ensure that they themselves and their families remain secure, that their crops and livestock are healthy, but also to feed Ontario, because we know farmers provide an essential service. We need food to survive, and the agri-food business contributes almost \$51 billion to Ontario's GDP, employs almost one million people and constitutes one in nine jobs.

Importantly, the 2025 local food report published by the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness concluded that Ontario is the leading producer of food in Ontario, with 54% of food consumed in Ontario being Ontario-grown. How exciting is that?

When I was a Toronto city councillor, we were working on a little grown-in-Toronto label to go on things, because we do have some farms in Toronto, as you may or may not be aware, in Scarborough, in Downsview, and we are trying to really work on rooftop gardens and vertical gardening. However, it is all our responsibility here at the Legislature and also as consumers to protect that number and to continue to grow it.

1510

Buying local: I would like to take some time to stress the importance of buying local. Many people, neighbourhoods and organizations have long pushed for buying local, but the calls really came to a crescendo when our neighbour to the south announced a tariff scheme that would injure our economy and, ultimately, fundamentally change outlook and action on our waters, retail, agriculture and produce, manufacturing and more.

At the government and grassroots level, the importance of buying local cannot be overstated. In my own riding, we are extremely lucky to have a diverse array of independent grocers and shopkeepers, many that source or hand-make their products locally. And while many food recalls occur throughout the year, studies show that our locally grown food is often less sustainable to these contaminants, as the farm-to-table path is shorter. And we know the nutritional value with a closer commute is better for us from a health point of view as well.

I'm happy to see that this bill enshrines Ontario's commitment to upholding our high standard of food quality and safety in schedule 4 and 5. These sections expand the scope of the Food Safety and Quality Act, 2001, to regulate milk and milk products. This act controls licensing for a wide variety of activities related to food, sets quality and safety standards, rules for inspections and enforcement, and the results of offences.

Food is something that touches everyone's lives in one way or another. Consequently, the rules governing its quality and safety are something that should never be played with or diminished. I'm happy to see that this is not what is happening here.

As proud Ontarians, individually we certainly need to prioritize the nation-building act that is shopping local. But on the government side of things, we must enact policy to create the conditions that enable Ontario producers to continue to provide products for Ontarians, which I'm thrilled to see this bill taking strides to support this goal.

When agribusiness can thrive in Ontario without insurmountable barriers that would potentially deter them from serving Ontario—or make the costs necessary to break even and support the supply chain so expensive that Ontarians cannot afford the products by the time it gets to the consumers in the supply chain.

Food as a human right: We cannot talk about food, farmers or shopping local without discussing food as a human right. Canada and Ontario are not immune or excused from this calling. Across the country, food banks are seeing over two million visits in a single month. While Ontario saw over eight million visits to food banks, in Toronto, food banks saw an all-time high of 4.1 million visits—a 340% increase since 2019. Think about that. That is actually horrible. And it's all connected.

The United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights confirms an adequate standard of living for individuals and their families as a right. This adequate standard of living includes clothing, housing and, importantly, food. The covenant also recognizes the right to be free from hunger. To accomplish these goals, it tasks parties with improving methods of production, conservation and distribution of food by leveraging technical and scientific knowledge, sharing this knowledge and developing tangible plans to implement it.

Jurisdictions around the world recognize food as a human right, such as Switzerland. The United Nations declaration on the right to adequate food lays out a national strategy that regions may consider adopting to create a fulsome approach to food security. They suggest:

“(a) Its formulation and implementation should comply with human rights principles, such as accountability, transparency and participation;

“(b) It should be based on a systematic identification of policy measures and activities derived from the normative content of the right to adequate food and the corresponding state obligations;

“(c) It should give particular attention to preventing and eliminating discrimination in access to food or resources for food and to the needs of the marginalized population groups. This requires a systematic analysis of disaggregated data on the food insecurity, vulnerability and nutritional status of different groups in society;

“(d) It should address all aspects of the food system, including production, processing, distribution, marketing and consumption, as well as other relevant areas, such as health, water and sanitation, education, employment, social security, and access to information;

“(e) It should clearly allocate responsibility for implementing the necessary measures and lay down a precise time frame;

“(f) It should define institutional mechanisms including the coordination between relevant ministries and between the national and subnational levels of government;

“(g) It should also identify the resources available to meet the objectives and the most cost-effective way of using them, including in times of severe resource constraints;

“(h) It should identify steps to ensure that activities of non-state actors are in conformity with the right to food.

The fourth point clearly identifies that the whole food supply chain is essential in alleviating food insecurity and hunger. Farms, farmers, processors and distributors play an integral role in feeding Ontario. So it's something for us to think about—the right to food.

When every Ontarian can access and afford food, there is always a market for farmers to keep producing here in Ontario, for Ontarians. More grocery stores pop up and the existing grocery stores stock more food for their increased patrons.

The bottom line here is that agriculture and people's basic needs are inseparable. You cannot consider one without the other and the continued success of agribusiness begets a social good by promoting food security in Ontario.

The importance of environmental protections: Well, this is very interesting for all of you. We cannot talk about agriculture without touching on its interconnectedness to the environment. Agriculture takes place on the land, depends on the health of soil, availability of water and is extremely vulnerable to weather patterns. You've probably seen many articles on how climate change threatens farming:

“The increasing number of extreme heat days (over 30 degrees Celsius) will threaten crop and livestock producers; crops may fail due to heat stress, and livestock may fail to grow, reproduce, or even survive in such sweltering temperatures.” We know how hot it was last summer; I'm actually already worried about this summer. “These impacts have major implications for the production of poultry, red meat, eggs, and dairy products.

“Changing seasons, such as warmer summers and milder winters, will allow new pests and diseases to spread to Canadian farms. These pests may damage crops and harm livestock, which have never had to deal with such problems, and therefore lack adaptive responses.

“Variability in spring and fall temperatures can stress fruit trees, leading to blossom loss and a fall in fruit production.”

I could go on and on, as you know, about climate change, but I will spare you that today, because I did enough yesterday.

1520

Land use: I think that essential to this conversation, however—I would be remiss to not mention this—are Indigenous partnerships. Time and time again, we have heard and witnessed how Indigenous peoples' relations to the environment, to food systems, are intricate and go beyond a one-sided transaction. They stewarded the land and water and all its inhabitants successfully for centuries

prior to colonial settlers. And if we want any shot at sustainably innovating, feeding our communities and caring for the environment, Indigenous peoples must be asked not only to share their knowledge and partnership, but there's also the question of land ownership and treaty rights. No amount of time or words can erase the horrific actions of settler colonial powers. However, actions should recognize and respect treaty rights, as well as proactively and consistently engage in equal partnership with First Nations.

I think this brings up more conversations about consultation and partnerships. We need to ask ourselves, what industry, people, infrastructure and ecosystems are already on this land, and how do we go about navigating this? What happens after this land is used? Is the existing infrastructure adequate? Do we have the money, or where is the funding coming from to build it? Is there existing industry occurring on this land? Who is obligated to leave? How will they be compensated? Specifically, with the government's plan to expand in the north, while food may be produced, the processing is leaving to the south, so what economic benefits are we promising? With weakened consultation and protection guidelines, specific economic zones and stripping the Endangered Species Act, it is absolutely essential to engage in these considerations beforehand.

I want to make it clear: I am in no way, shape or form against this bill or slowing it down, but, as has been said countless times inside and outside this House, it is a lot harder to retroactively correct an issue—which you know because, basically, almost all your bills are correcting a previous bill, it seems. In some cases, a mistake creates irreparable damage. I am just urging this government to go about this the thoughtful way, the safe way, the correct way, so we get it right the first time.

Everyone should have received the letter from the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. They have a "request for a minister's zoning order (MZO) to maintain the lands in the city of Toronto as employment lands to protect the Ontario Food Terminal. ERO number 026-0387," if you would like to look it up—something to consider. I'm not sure who all has been down to the food terminal for a tour, but it is absolutely something to do.

In conclusion, I'm happy to support this bill, especially if those in agribusiness were consulted and feel that the amendments align with their priorities and needs. That is the main concern, always. There are so many strides towards a better, more food-independent and secure Ontario in this bill and also many starting points for how we can continue the work. I assert again that essential to this work is climate action. Without healthy soil, predictable—for the most part—weather and adequate access to clean water, we simply cannot grow, livestock cannot thrive and, of course, we cannot survive ourselves.

I hope that this bill's mention of drainage and the importance of climate-resilient infrastructure to support agriculture processes necessitates a greater discussion of climate action going beyond drainage—though very im-

portant—to understand how the fundamental existence of an agriculture industry depends on a healthy planet that is not plagued by wildfires that ravage fields, floods that wipe out soil nutrients and then droughts that dry out crops. I want nothing more than a safe and secure environment that is a home for agriculture to thrive. I just want it to be done right, done right the first time, and to truly benefit Ontarians according to their wants and needs.

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

Hon. Mike Harris: I'll take your advice, and I would love to participate in some of the debate here this afternoon. It's great to actually hear the Liberals talking about farmland here in the province because they chased so many good farming jobs away over 15 years, before this PC government was put into power.

I want to address a couple of things that were said here earlier. It's great to be called a Toastmaster. I'm not one; however, they do a great job. But what I would like to say is that one of the hallmarks of our Westminster Parliament here in Ontario, and any Westminster Parliament across the world, is that interjections are a very, very big part of the things that we do and I'm very happy that we are able to still, under control, have those little sidebar conversations here and be part of the greater Westminster Parliament.

To the member from Don Valley East: Earlier on in my political career—I know you're going to cut me off here soon—but I actually logged the second-most amount of debate time in our first four years here in Parliament. I would appreciate the member to understand that as you become a minister, which he probably—well, I don't know, maybe we'll give him some time—there are competing priorities.

But my question, Madam Speaker, is this: Liberals across Canada are trying to ban fertilizer from being used. Are you in favour of it or are you going to allow our farmers to do what they need to do to feed Ontarians?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member for Beaches–East York will come to order.

Response?

Mr. Adil Shamji: I sincerely appreciate the Minister of Natural Resources sharing a little about his history. I didn't know that he had such an extensive record of participating in debates. Congratulations for that.

I wonder if you would indulge me by allowing me to go a little bit further back into his history to the history of someone who has a very similar name and whose track record on fighting for the environment and the agri-food sector may not be as great as he is hoping that it could be.

This same individual, who has a very similar name, is well known to have reduced environmental oversight and rural public services, to have weakened protections around water and environmental management, to have cut inspection regulatory capacity, and to have accelerated consolidation toward larger industrial farms, ultimately going so far as to even preside over the Walkerton crisis as a result of his failures on the environment in the agri-food sector.

I appreciate all that he shared about his history and hope he appreciates my additions to that as well.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: We were doing so well.

The member from Beaches–East York mentioned it in her comments, that we were discussing an agricultural bill. I said that also in my opening 40 minutes, about how it's good to be able to discuss an industry that—we all know that the agri-food sector is actually the biggest employer in this province—the biggest—and it doesn't get talked about enough.

It's great to see the minister here. But the member from Beaches–East York talked about—and I found it interesting—starting a farmers' market. I'm a farmer. Some of us are better at producing than marketing, and I would like to hear her insights on how she started a farmers' market and how it's still going on.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much to the fine member, the respectful member, the hard-working farmer and the kind member from Timiskaming–Cochrane.

I started a farmers' market because I read a book by Barbara Kingsolver called *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*. In it, Barbara goes back to her grandparents' home, her hometown and her home farm, and decides to live off the farm for a year and try and eat everything in season and to be mindful of what that is. Because I'll tell you, most people don't know what's in season when because we can get it from all over the world any time, and we don't think about the cost of that.

It got me freaked out about food security, so I started a farmers' market. We love our farmers. It's been running for 15 years. I was known to run around the Danforth, a busy street, in a vegetable costume, reminding people to support Ontario farmers. I was a pea in a pod, a carrot. You know, you've got to make it fun—

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

1530

Question?

Hon. Mike Harris: I believe the member from Don Valley East was making reference to the former Premier of Ontario, Mike Harris, who held two very large back-to-back majority governments, and I can probably guarantee you that every single farmer in the province of Ontario voted for their PC members in their riding, not the Liberals.

So let's go back in history, if we want to have a little bit of a history lesson about agriculture here in Ontario. Under Kathleen Wynne, the former Premier of Ontario, windmills were put up across the province with zero consultation from the farmers in the areas and all of the folks who stood there and opposed them.

I can tell you, there was not a PC member in this House at the time who wanted to see that happen, but we all got re-elected and they were relegated to a third party—and, at that time, not even official party status.

So to the member from Beaches–East York, would she support having windmills put up across Ontario without consultation with farmers?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga. You know what? We have enough hot air in this chamber; we don't need wind turbines. What I don't understand—

Interjection.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: In this chamber, because we can use the energy ourselves with our hot air, especially from Kitchener–Conestoga.

What I don't understand is that when you finally get the members across from you to support a bill and all the compliments we just gave you—I guess you're not used to getting compliments in your life.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Through the Chair.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: But the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness—I raved about his great bill, Bill 109. I'm happy to support it and have a kumbaya moment, regardless of the insolence and rudeness and pathetic-ness of that member across the way.

Hon. Mike Harris: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Stop the clock. I recognize the minister on a point of order, though I was going to say something.

Hon. Mike Harris: Point of order, Madam Speaker: I believe the member from Beaches–East York has used some unparliamentary language, and I'm not sure if she should probably withdraw. Perhaps you may want to consult with the table.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the minister on his point of order. It is, of course, a valid point of order that all members should be using parliamentary language in this space. And also, let's bring it down a notch.

I will give the member an opportunity to withdraw.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Withdraw.

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

Questions?

Mr. John Vanthof: The member from Beaches–East York in her remarks mentioned the impact that climate change could have on agriculture. Actually, it is having an impact on agriculture, but in our part of the world, in northern Ontario, it's actually having a beneficial impact, because we can grow more crops.

But having said that, if one area is gaining, then other areas are—likely, it's becoming more precarious. I don't think that's actually in southern Ontario yet, but some places in the United States it is going to happen.

I know the member is very concerned about climate change. Does she think that the current government is doing enough to look at the possible impacts of climate change throughout North America?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much to the beautiful member from Timiskaming–Cochrane.

You know, usually when you want to take action on something, it's because you believe in it. This is the

problem with the dinosaurs across the way: that you have to believe in the climate emergency, and—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Stop the clock.

This is a parliamentary House and we're going to ensure that our language is parliamentary, as per the standing orders. We're not going to name-call today. I'm going to ask the member to, again, withdraw—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French):—and to continue.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: You have to believe in something. Some people in this House are living in the Dark Ages, and they don't believe that we are in a climate emergency, in spite of the many, many floods. There are flooding emergencies all over northern Ontario this spring. We had an inordinate amount of forest fires last summer. It will still happen. We have not invested in our forest fire firefighters. We have them as seasonal. We don't pay them enough.

We are not taking strong—as I always encourage the members across—brave and bold action to take care of our planet, but especially, in that planet, obviously, Ontario.

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

MPP Paul Vickers: I was looking for a nice quiet afternoon here in the House. It just hasn't quite turned out that way, but it is a lively debate and we do enjoy it. It makes for a quicker afternoon.

As Minister Jones previously described, the Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act is all about strengthening the province's agri-food sector. When we think about how we can best support that goal, some of the obvious work we can do is to make sure that the province's agriculture legislation continues to meet the needs of the sector. From time to time, it is important that we review legislation, especially statutes that have been in place for many years. As time passes, certain wording and procedures and legislation can become outdated. We revisit legislation to ensure that it aligns with our current practices and expectations.

Specifically, we review pieces of agriculture legislation with a goal of increasing efficiency and streamlining processes for farmers and agribusinesses, because anything we can do to reduce administrative burden on farmers and agribusinesses is welcome. These business operators are busy people, balancing multiple responsibilities and limiting their time. Trust me: Ask any farmer if they would rather be out in the field planting crops or in the barn milking the cows or looking after the cattle or doing paperwork. They will all agree that they would put in twice as many hours in the field. The more we can potentially save farmers time and energy by simplifying administrative and regulatory processes, the more they can then focus on running their businesses.

To streamline services, one of the proposals in the bill is to consolidate two separate adjudicative bodies that perform similar tasks into one. We are proposing to consolidate the Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Appeal

Tribunal and the Normal Farm Practices Protection Board into one new tribunal called the Agriculture and Agri-Food Protection Tribunal. This consolidation would be achieved by amending the Farming and Food Production Protection Act to transfer the Normal Farm Practices Protection Board's jurisdictions, powers and ongoing matters to the new Agriculture and Agri-Food Protection Tribunal.

The new tribunal would handle all agriculture disputes, reducing red tape for farmers, property owners and municipalities. Consolidating two separate adjudicative bodies into one would deliver a more streamlined client experience for these parties. Rural municipalities, farmers and property owners will benefit from more consistent service standards, improved digital tools, easier navigation and a single set of rules. Through this proposed action, we are also supporting Ontario's priority to reduce the number of provincial agencies and modernizing the delivery of adjudicative services.

Another proposal under the Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act is to update the Protecting Farmers from Non-Payment Act to support Ontario's financial protection programs. Financial protection programs may not be well known outside of the agri-food sector, but to farmers, they are important. In a nutshell, Ontario's financial protection programs help protect producers—who are sellers—from the financial risk of the dealers—who are the buyers—defaulting on payments. Financial protection programs also protect owners when a grain elevator operator who stores the grain on behalf of the farmer does not return the grain when requested.

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We are proposing amendments to the Protecting Farmers from Non-Payment Act that would expand the application of specific provisions such as regulating agreements between buyers and sellers to support the financial protection program.

Our proposed amendments would also update enforcement measures under the act, including revising the realization of security provisions and the addition of new regulation-making powers for administrative penalties. If passed, these changes would help to enhance clarity around the act's requirements, making compliance easier for regulated parties in the grain and beef cattle sectors. Again, this comes back to our commitment to support and strengthen Ontario agriculture. A direct way we can do this is to ensure that the Ontario legislation that impacts farmers and agribusinesses meets their needs.

In another effort to support the agri-food sector's future stability, we are proposing to amend the Ontario Food Terminal Act. The Ontario Food Terminal is the largest wholesale fruit and produce distribution centre in Canada, and it is a central hub of the province's agri-food sector. It was established in 1954. The terminal is home to a farmers' market area with 550 stalls, a warehouse unit area and central cold storage that is over 100,000 square feet in size. It helps support local farmers, local fruit and vegetable stores, independent and chain supermarkets, retailers, restaurants, food services, caterers, farmers' markets,

farm gate markets, florists, garden centres, landscapers, convenience stores and institutions. In short, it functions at the very connected centre of our food system in Ontario from its Etobicoke location. When you think of all the good things that grow in Ontario, you think of the Ontario Food Terminal.

The Ontario Food Terminal is operated by the Ontario Food Terminal Board under the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness. We are proposing to amend the Ontario Food Terminal Act to enable the terminal's board to establish a capital fund that could be used for upgrading infrastructure, including the farmers' market. In addition, we are proposing to amend the act to confirm the status of the board as a crown agency and add liability protection for the board members and the food terminal staff. The food terminal is in need of infrastructure updates, including the need for a new farmers' market. Clarifying that the terminal's board may establish a dedicated capital fund will assist it with making these kinds of long-term capital plans and investments. The capital fund would be a dedicated fund for capital improvements, and it would help the board with long-term capital decisions.

Unlike in legislation that governs similar public bodies, the Ontario Food Terminal Act is currently silent on the board's status as a crown agent. Similarly, the act does not currently contain a liability provision for the board members, and liability protection is commonly given to public agencies and their staff and those within government with powers, duties or functions under the act. We are proposing to amend the Ontario Food Terminal Act to specifically add liability protection to align with best practices for crown agents. These changes would bring the act in line with other comparable legislation that governs public bodies. The intent behind these proposed amendments is to ensure that the Ontario Food Terminal can continue to play its important role, plan for the future, plan for the necessary capital investments to the terminal and promote the stability of the local food system, operating successfully into the future.

Ontario is committed to strengthening the agriculture and food industry through strategic legislative changes that support growth and competitiveness across the sector. Ensuring the long-term growth and success of the Ontario Food Terminal and its board includes establishing them as a crown agency and investing in their future success with a capital fund to help them address current and future infrastructure needs.

In an additional measure to ensure that legislation meets the needs of the agrifood sector, we are proposing to amend the Beef Cattle Marketing Act. The Beef Cattle Marketing Act guides the establishment and standardization of procedures affecting the sale of cattle in Ontario. The act also establishes the industry organization Beef Farmers of Ontario and funds the group by mandating the collection of licensing fees when cattle are sold.

The Beef Farmers of Ontario represents the province's 19,000 beef farmers. These producers are committed to a sustainable and profitable beef sector, and they are incred-

ibly dedicated to the work they do. Their dedication is evidenced by the economic status of the beef sector in Ontario. It supports around 56,000 good-paying jobs and nearly \$3 billion in annual GDP. This is a significant contribution to our economy.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness works closely with the Beef Farmers of Ontario and they are a trusted partner. The Beef Farmers of Ontario have requested a change to how their organization's licence fees are collected. These licence fees are used to fund their organization's marketing, promotional and educational activities that benefit the entire industry. Currently, these licence fees are only collected when farmers sell live animals to buyers such as other farmers or processors. However, it is a common practice for beef farmers to process some or all of their own cattle or to have someone else do it for them and then sell the beef directly to consumers. When this is done, the Beef Farmers of Ontario licence fee isn't collected. This means that those farmers are not paying their fair share of licence fees despite benefiting from the promotional activities of Beef Farmers of Ontario. And the Beef Farmers of Ontario do an excellent job of promoting their own industry. As such, we are proposing to update the Beef Cattle Marketing Act to expand licensing and fee collection to producers and transactions that are not currently captured under the legislation. In short, if passed, this proposed update to the act would expand licence fee collection to include those sales I've described.

In another proposed change to the Beef Cattle Marketing Act, we also proposed to remove requirements for buyers to register with the ministry if they purchase cattle based on carcass weight. Currently, there is a requirement for beef processing plants to register with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness. These proposed changes and subsequent amendments to regulation under the act would ensure licence fees are paid for all cattle, regardless of whether they are sold but with room for exemptions. The fee changes would improve equity in the licence fee collection process, and the latter proposed amendment to remove requirements for buyers to register with the ministry would reduce administrative burden for processors, as they would no longer be required to apply for a listing of their plant.

Planned follow-up amendments to the Beef Cattle Marketing Act regulations could result in cost savings for businesses, particularly for processors. Again, these proposed changes support our overall goal to enhance fairness, clarity and reduce administrative burden for farmers.

Additional proposed amendments under the Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act would, if passed, expand the definition of regulated product to more broadly include milk products in the Milk Act. In Canada, all milk entering the production chain is priced accordingly to its end use, such as whether it is used for cheese or ice cream or fluid milk.

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Our government recognizes the importance of the dairy industry in the agri-food sector and in Ontario. Our dairy

farmers and the industry value chain they belong to are big parts of the great story associated with Ontario's overall agri-food sector. Our government calculations suggest that almost 115,000 direct jobs and close to \$7 billion in annual GDP can be attributed to the dairy industry value chain. We are proud of our commitment to support the strength of our dairy sector and of our determination to protect it.

That is why we are proposing to update the definition of a regulated product under the Milk Act to include all milk products, including ingredients. In the future, this will ensure all dairy processors are subject to the same end-use pricing obligations, whether they make their products with fresh milk or by combining ingredients. If passed, these proposed amendments would enable future amendments to regulations to give the Dairy Farmers of Ontario authority over the production and marketing of intermediary milk products, as well as the authority to enforce equivalent pricing obligations for all processors making a dairy product. Consistently applied end-use pricing obligations ensure that all dairy processors are billed equitably for their milk products, based on the same pricing structure.

The purpose of the proposed amendments to the Milk Act is to help ensure that all processing entities are billed equitably for their milk components, based on the same pricing structure. The amendments aim to strengthen the supply management system by supporting a fair and equitable dairy industry.

I am proud to speak to the measures we are proposing to support the competitiveness of Ontario's farmers and food producers, increase our province's self-reliance and unlock the sector's greater economic potential.

It's important that we remember how much we rely on food. Basically, food is what we're made of. If we don't have food, shelter and water, we don't have much. So it's important that we get everything right as much as we possibly can. It's important that we realize the potential of Ontario as a food-producing province—not only in the north, but in the south—and can keep continuing the great things we are doing.

I will conclude my remarks. I've been part of the agriculture industry for over 40 years, and I certainly do appreciate having the ability to come here and speak to the House about the agriculture and food-producing province that we belong to.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: I listened very intently to my colleague, and his remarks were very thoughtful. He knows agriculture very well, and I commend him for it.

Under this bill, the government is making regulations to limit foreign investment, which, I said in my opening remarks, we favour in principle. I would just like the member to outline exactly, in his opinion, as a farmer and as a legislator, what exactly is—who are you targeting with that limit on foreign investment?

MPP Paul Vickers: Thank you for that question from the honourable member here beside me.

The biggest issue right now is, we really don't know how much foreign ownership is happening here in Ontario. But the important thing to remember is—let's get ahead of the ball. We don't want to go another 20 years and all of a sudden realize that maybe we should have done something now to prevent problems in the future.

I think the issue of landownership over the years has changed a great deal. When your family came over from Holland, I think in the 1950s, they came over as a single entity, looking for a place to produce, to live and to make a living. Now, it's very much different. There are large corporations that realize the value of ownership, of land and the ability to produce food because, really, food—everybody needs it. The one thing that is recession-proof is food. I think that's what's attracting people from other countries. Other countries maybe haven't done as good a job of what we have, looking after our farmland and having a market, one of the largest markets within a couple of hundred miles. It's a very different beast looking at land now compared to what it was back earlier on.

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

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound for his remarks this afternoon. We are so fortunate to have him as a member of our caucus and of our government with his expertise that he brings to the table on items regarding agriculture from his life as a dairy farmer out in Meaford. It's very, very much appreciated, his comments today.

I represent one of the largest food-producing, farming communities in the province, in Wellington-Halton Hills. Protecting our farmland is really one of the top priorities for our community. People in my community want real action and not just rhetoric. Other provinces are already making rules that limit foreign ownership. Ontario is now taking steps through this bill to do the same.

With consultations coming up, can the member please explain how the ministry will work with farmers and communities like mine to make sure these rules protect local farm families and strengthen Ontario's food supply for the future?

MPP Paul Vickers: I'd like to thank my counterpart from Wellington-Halton Hills. He does live in one of the food baskets of Ontario. Wellington county has a great dairy industry and beef industry, and it also grows a tremendous amount of crops.

I guess the biggest thing to remember is that we need to go out and find out what everybody else is thinking about this question that we have. What I think the plan is, is to go out and consult over the summertime and look for answers. We don't have all the answers here in the House—not the NDP, not the Liberals, not the Progressive Conservatives. I think the main thing is to remember that we need to protect the farmland as much as we possibly can.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: I appreciated the last answer as well because I think that's one of the things we want to dig

down on. In my previous question, the member said that we as Ontarians and in the farm community don't really know what the status of foreign ownership is of land right now. I think that's the first thing that we need to ascertain. I'm glad the minister—the member, and hopefully the minister and deputy minister—agree that we need to consult more so we actually know what we're trying to do. Because this could, if it's done incorrectly, be a massive source of red tape. I don't think the ministry or the government wants to create that.

Could you, once again, say how you envision that we're going to find out who actually owns the farmland and how it's changing hands right now?

MPP Paul Vickers: Thank you for the question. I will guarantee you, we do not want to bring any more red tape to the farming and the agriculture industry. Like I said before, any farmer knows that they would rather put twice as many hours out in the field or in the barns than to spend it behind a computer or writing out forms. I think it's important that we do take it across the province and have the ability to ask as many people as we possibly can.

We're still looking into different ways of trying to come up with those numbers and how much foreign ownership is out there. There are ways—when you buy property here in Ontario, you have to get a lawyer from Ontario to process the land deeds. There is the ability to do it, it's just maybe taking a bit of time to actually put all those numbers together and make sure that we have the correct number. There is the possibility to do it through the land transfer.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I want to say, I'm 100% fully supportive and excited about this bill. Farming in Essex county contributes \$3 billion a year in gross domestic product and 80% of Essex county is farmland. I think this is an excellent bill because we need to make sure that farmland does not come under the control of people who will alienate the farmland for purposes that are not appropriate for Ontario or for Canada.

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The way I envision this operating—and this is just my view—is, you don't sell a piece of farmland every year. It's actually extremely rare that you would sell a piece of farmland. Usually, it just rolls over to somebody else in your family. So there's going to be no red tape because you don't sell a farm every year; you sell a farm maybe once every 40 years. It will only come up once in a very long time, and at that time, someone will present a document to the registrar at the registry office to evidence the ownership of the purchaser. That's a suggestion that I will make. I throw it out for comment.

MPP Paul Vickers: Thank you to my member from Essex. Again, that's a beautiful country down there. It's a little flatter, a little bit more diverse crops that they grow than we have up in Grey county, but we do have the ski hills close at hand.

Some of your comments about the land transfer and the ability for people to be able to bring more land together quicker is that there's some very, very large farms that are

domestically owned, family-owned, from people that have, for generation after generation, continued to expand.

A lot of these farms will own 10,000 acres in one swipe of the pen. If a farmer wants to sell that, they can sell. If you get the right person, you can sell large chunks of land very quickly and very easily with one transaction. That's why it's important for us to try and get ahead of it and make sure that we have the numbers to back it up and the ability to track it and make good decisions.

I think we're going down the right path. It's better to do it earlier and plan as opposed to doing it late and wishing you had done something else.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A very quick question from the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'm following up on that answer; I appreciated the question and the answer. The member said, "If some farms are worth"—farms in Ontario have sold for \$100 million. What's going to be important is, what is Canadian enough? Because you could very well have a numbered company. How much horsepower are you going to be able to put in defining that out and how long are you going to delay that? Because it's not that easy to sell a farm, right? So you're going to need something very robust to make that decision.

Quite frankly, are you going to say no to a \$100-million sale if it's not Canadian enough? What is Canadian enough? Those are the things we need to ascertain. Would you agree with me?

MPP Paul Vickers: I do agree with you. Just to try and give a very quick example, which is hard in such a short period of time, down in Australia, a foreign country came in and was buying all the skim milk powder from their dairy farmers. They kept driving the price up and up and up, and they kind of kept bringing them in. There was a false idea that the price of milk was never going to go down, and then, at the very last moment, that country completely decided not to buy any more milk. That put those farmers in a terrible spot—

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

MPP Alexa Gilmour: It's an honour to rise today on behalf of the people of Parkdale—High Park to speak to Bill 109, the Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act, 2026.

I want to begin genuinely by saying something that doesn't come easily in this House: This bill is worth debating, and not because it's perfect—there's some very good aspects to it but it's not perfect—but because this bill is focused. It's an agricultural bill about agricultural things, and for that alone, I want to commend the minister.

When the legislation stays in its lane, when it doesn't bury a poison pill in a schedule that no one expected, then we can have a real conversation, as I've seen happening today and as this bill has been discussed. So I commend the minister, first and foremost, for that.

This was also the case recently with Bill 101, the Putting Student Achievement First Act, which, for all its significant problems, also stayed focused on education.

And I just want to take this opportunity to thank the dozens of Swansea parents who signed petitions opposing the government's power grab there, the stripping of power from our elected school board trustees. These are the voices of our students, families and communities and they spoke out about Bill 101. For all its problems, the bill was focused and so is this, because Ontarians deserve real, focused debate from their Legislature, unlike the omnibus bills that we've seen.

With Bill 109, I just want to say off the top, I have been on a learning curve. I am not a farmer. I am mostly a city girl and have learned a lot from colleagues like the member from Timiskaming, from the researchers, and have really appreciated ever more deeply the food and agricultural sector as a result of this bill.

I want to say that New Democrats support the broad intent of the bill. We support protecting Ontario's farmland. We support dairy farmers and beef producers and the supply management system that keeps food on the tables of families—like the families I hear from every week in Parkdale–High Park, families that are already stretched thin by grocery bills that have risen over 30% since this government came into power.

But, Speaker, this bill also raises some serious questions around how best to protect Ontario's farmland, and transparency is only one piece of this. It's a big piece. Another is identifying where the biggest threat to Ontario farmland is actually coming from, because if this government is serious about Ontario's food independence, then I think we need to be honest about where that real threat is. And I'm afraid, in researching this bill, that I feel that the threat is not from who this minister says it is.

I want to start by saying that the schedules dealing with beef cattle marketing, the merger of the Normal Farm Practices Protection Board, the dairy and milk updates, the protection for farmers from non-payment—what I learned about farming was that these are practical. These are reasonable improvements. The farm sector has asked for them directly, the industry supports them and this is legislation working as it should.

Similarly, schedule 3, the Farmland Security Act—I was learning that's where things get a little more complicated. The goal of preventing foreign corporations from buying up Ontario's farmland, letting it go fallow—that's a legitimate concern, but I wanted to ask the minister directly: Where is the evidence of this? Where is the data on this? Ontario is one of the only jurisdictions in Canada that does not have reliable, publicly available data on who actually owns the farmland, and that was surprising to me. How can we design the right solutions when we can't actually measure the scale of the problem?

Then there was also the language of "may." This bill is constructed almost entirely around discretionary language: "the minister may decide," "the minister may require," "designated persons may apply."

Speaker, I was thinking about our land that we can't get back once we've rezoned it or redeveloped it. This land is worth hundreds of millions of dollars, but it produces so much of our food, and these decisions need to be transpar-

ent. They have to be subject to scrutiny. They have to be subject to scrutiny by all of us and they must not be exempt from freedom-of-information requests, which—and I note this with some very extreme concerns—made ministry decisions much easier to hide from Ontarians the very week that this bill was introduced. The government here passed a bill preventing us from seeing so much of what's happening behind closed doors through freedom of information. So we will certainly be watching this bill as it goes through committee—and I hope it will—because the intent is sound, I have learned, but the mechanisms need work.

Before I turn to the government's broader record, which I really feel I want to do, I wanted to say something about supply management because I learned again a little bit more about supply management in researching this bill and how the changes to the Milk Act in schedules 4 and 5 touch on a system that I don't think is super well understood outside of farming communities. Having learned a little bit more about it, I think it does deserve a moment.

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Supply management is, quite simply, one of Canada's most successful food security policies. It pools costs, it stabilizes prices, it ensures that when there is a shortage of products—like eggs in the United States, as there has been—then there are no shortages here. It's really sort of a local food movement before the local food movement became jargon or a slogan. And it's a system that is interconnected in ways that certainly are not always visible on the surface.

So the one thing that I notice where there might be a caution in this is when we open up something like the Milk Act, we want to make sure that we're not moving something upstream that causes a flood downstream—so proceeding with care, with caution, taking the time it needs in committee to review.

But Speaker, here's where I think we need to have the harder conversation: This bill is called Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act, yet Ontario loses 319 acres of farmland every single day—not to foreign corporations, not to overseas investors buying up land to let it go fallow—319 acres lost to urban sprawl, to highways through prime agricultural land, zoning decisions that enrich well-connected insiders.

And who is responsible for this? It's not a mysterious foreign buyer; it's this government. The Auditor General has said so repeatedly, in her 2021 report on land use planning, in her special 2023 special report on the greenbelt. Each of these reports tells the same story: that it is this government's land use policies that have been systemically destroying the farmland that it now claims to protect.

Speaker, if this bill were actually titled accurately, it might read "protecting Ontario's food independence, except from this government."

I want to look at a recent example that was raised by this very bill, and that is the Ontario Food Terminal. This is Canada's largest fruit and vegetable produce distribution hub—5.6 million pounds of food that changes hands

every single day; 5,000 people go to work there in the morning before the rest of us are awake. There are farmers, there are restaurateurs, there are grocery store owners, there are food wholesalers, there are florists, there are caterers. There are people—not just in Toronto, not just in the province of Ontario but throughout Canada and even in the US—dependent on this wonderful, wonderful food hub. And it's very, very good—I want to commend the minister again—to see the stabilizing support and the capital fund that will help to expand the terminal, including the upgrades, including the support for the outdoor market. All of that is critical for the food terminal at this time.

Now, the food terminal itself is critical to our public infrastructure and to food security, and you can't replace it once it's gone. And yet, recently, the Ontario Food Terminal was under threat. The developer Fiera Real Estate wanted to build condominium units on the land adjacent. And you know that you can't have a 24-hour food distribution operation right next to a residential tower. It just doesn't work. The noise, the traffic, the early-morning cacophony—it's incompatible. But the question I have is, how did we get there? Well, in 2024, the government abruptly removed the concept of provincially significant employment zones from the growth plan, from the provincial policy statement. This designation would not only have protected employment lands but also the supply chain routes to ensure that the employment lands could function as part of a larger system.

And the city of Toronto, for its part, has asked and put forward an official plan amendment, number 804, which would have provided a clearer, more predictable framework for protecting those employment lands. They formally requested that the minister approve it under section 26 of the Planning Act, but it's still sitting on the minister's desk.

In the face of this threat, the ministry has decided to issue an MZO to protect the terminal. Now, the government has been using these MZO as a wrecking ball against employment lands, farmland protections, handing windfalls of well-connected developers lots of land. Now it's picking up an MZO like a fire extinguisher to save a crown food agency from the very fire it helped start.

This is what the government's land use policies have produced: a system where public food infrastructure is so vulnerable that even a provincially significant food hub cannot assume it's safe without direct provincial intervention. And this is not unique to our food terminal. We're seeing that in the city of Toronto, many of the employment lands are under threat.

Speaker, I'm going to end my time here by saying that while this bill is a step, and the New Democratic Party will be watching to see what happens as it goes into committee, we also want to ask the hard questions. We're going to be standing up for the farmers, for the workers, the communities and the food infrastructure that makes Ontario food independence possible.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: The honourable member brought up the issue of how we find out who owns the land. There's a very practical way of doing that. At the land registry office, you can go in, you can order a report and the report will give you the owner of the land. Sometimes that can be tricky because it might be a numbered company. Then, you've got to take the number and you've got to go over to another department, and you've got to ask for a sub-search of the corporation, and that will give you the head address and the directors. And even then, it's tricky to find out who owns the corporation because it doesn't disclose the shares.

However, this legislation does empower the registrar to have the authority to request information. Might that be of interest to the member and to the people who are concerned about this issue, which is the preservation of land in Ontario?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I want to thank the member from Essex for continuing my learning journey in this world of agriculture. I appreciate that very much.

My understanding is that there are some best practices that are in other provinces, in other spaces, that we could be incorporating. I think that is something that I would like to see being done here, and something I've been hearing as I did some research with other farmers in the area.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Parkdale–High Park on your presentation on how this bill affects the food terminal in your area.

In the last few years, there has been a lot of debate about the impact of farmland and how much of it is under threat. We're losing 319 acres a day. A lot of it is being converted into subdivisions.

I was wondering if you could speak to some of the issues around farmland loss in Ontario and whether this bill is going to address that.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I want to thank the member from University–Rosedale for the question.

I think that this is a key piece, right? We can't get the farmland back. We have seen already that one of the biggest threats to that farmland is this government's very policies. I am very concerned that this bill does not go far enough to protect that land, to preserve that land. And with a government that is under investigation by the RCMP for the greenbelt swap, this isn't a government that's serious about protecting our farmland, our food security, or concerned with the grocery prices—which I will note have gone up over 30% since this government took office.

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

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

I want to ask about our updates to the Milk Act in this legislation and her thoughts on that. Right now, a loophole allows certain processors to bypass the pricing structures that the rest of the industry follows, creating an unfair competitive disadvantage for our local producers, while

simultaneously circumventing our supply management system.

I just want to ask if the member opposite stands with our dairy farmers in their call for a level playing field and will support that change in this legislation?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Response? I recognize the member for Parkdale–High Park. 1620

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you for recognizing me, Speaker.

I want to thank the member from Wellington–Halton Hills for the question. This has been an exciting part of this bill, for me personally—learning about the Milk Act, learning about the ways in which it has been functioning very well, and that farmers have been asking for the changes to it.

I think the piece that I'm most concerned about with this particular bill is that we move at a cautious enough rate, so that when we change something to the Milk Act, something upstream doesn't sort of change something downstream, and that there's a proceeding with care—because you can have unintended consequences that I'm just wanting to make sure that we are cautious about.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question? I recognize the member for Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you so much, Speaker. You're doing a great job in the chair, by the way.

Thank you for your remarks.

I have a rural component in my riding, but, certainly, I live in the developed part of it. I've learned over the course of time that rural Ontarians face a lot of, potentially, regulation—the Drainage Act, the drainage tribunal, the Drainage Referee, the court of revision—just for the whole side of drainage.

Part of this bill includes the amalgamation of some of the tribunals into the new Agriculture and Agri-Food Protection Tribunal, so it's a single port of appeal for cases where there's some conflict.

I wanted to ask the member opposite how she feels about streamlining some of these bodies so it's clear who does what and you just have a single path to follow in case of a need for change.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you so much for the question.

Again, in my experience that is limited but that has been a deep dive—as deep as I could get—there seem to be some really good pieces to that. I hope that this goes to committee, where things can be finessed more.

Like you, I live in a very developed part, where food comes—and I experience, in our riding, the food prices going up. We want to make sure that our farmers are well taken care of out there so that that food can get to each and every one of us.

I thank you for the question. I hope that it will go to committee, where it can be further honed.

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

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: To the member: Thank you for your remarks. As you know, farmers grow

more than 200 different crops, but with those crops—they are constantly under attack by invasive pests and evolving diseases, and these things can wipe out an entire crop. So we truly can't afford to be reactive when it comes to plant health. We really need something that's science-based—to have a really good understanding of how we can help our farmers.

That being the case, our plan does focus on early detection and resilience, to keep our agri-food sector competitive globally.

My question is, do you agree that there's an urgent need for these invasive species—to address this problem, to help our farmers?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I want to thank the member from Newmarket–Aurora. I do agree that there's an urgent need to address the issues that the member has spoken about.

I think that there's, in the entire supply management, lots of needs to address the issues. The piece that I would want to remind folks of again is—one aspect is the farming piece. The other piece is protecting the hubs, like the food terminal. That was recently under threat. It had to be protected with an MZO. There are better ways to protect it. The city of Toronto is asking for protection of all of its employment lands—to not have these cases coming up one at a time, but reviewing them every five years. That's sitting on the housing minister's desk. I would hope that that becomes the next thing that the government looks at after this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A very quick back and forth. Question?

Ms. Jessica Bell: It's very impressive to learn that the Ontario Food Terminal is one of the largest food terminals in North America, certainly the largest in Canada. And it is concerning that, every 18 months or so, a threat comes up that puts it in jeopardy.

What can we do? What can the Conservative government do to protect the Ontario Food Terminal?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you so much for that question. Speaker, the city of Toronto has already spoken out numerous times on this. They are asking for the government to rule through—I believe 804 is the document that the city is asking for—that got the province to determine that these lands, employment lands, are protected. They're also asking that they be reviewed every five years, as they used to be, and not coming up. So that's one of the ways that we can protect the Ontario Food Terminal.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: As always, it's a privilege to stand in this chamber on behalf of the residents of Don Valley West, and today to debate Bill 109, the Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act. I know that my colleagues from Beaches–East York and Don Valley East have already spoken about the bill and have talked about our support for that, but it's an honour to be able to provide a few comments on this incredibly important file.

As I have said before in this chamber, my parents both grew up on farms, so there's a long farming history in my family. I visited and spent many happy summers at my grandparents' farm. I even got to help bale hay. I'm not even sure we do that anymore with all the automation, but back then we would haul those bales of hay and I did my best.

I was also the agriculture critic for a time. That was a great pleasure and honour, to get to meet some of the members of the farming and agricultural industry, because they do work very hard to put food on our tables and I know they love what they do and I know it's really important and meaningful work. So I want to thank them for that.

Agriculture, agribusiness, makes up over \$50 billion. People don't realize how important agriculture is, not just in terms of feeding us but in terms of our economy here in Ontario. We're very fortunate to have a strong agricultural sector.

The agriculture sector—actually, agribusiness sector—employs more people than any other individual sector in this province. So it's a good reminder, especially for members who represent, like myself, urban ridings, to remember that and recognize the contribution that they make—as I say, not only to put food on our tables but to our economy, to employing people here in our province.

We know that when the agricultural sector grows, when it's strong, that is good for our province. It's good for Ontario. And when it suffers, likewise, we all suffer. That certainly is one of the things that I do think about as I have the chance, like many members do, to visit different parts of our province. You see the prime farmland that we have disappearing. We know that under this government, it's over 300 acres a day, and you don't need to drive very far to see that, Speaker. It is actually very concerning to me personally, as I say, given that my family were farmers.

I know the challenges of families who can't afford to pass on the farm to their children. One of my uncles really wanted to be able to buy my grandparents' farm and he just couldn't afford it. That was really their retirement nest egg, so they couldn't afford to give it to him when they were ready to retire. So I understand the challenges that families face.

I also know from talking to the OFA that they really believe in protecting farmland. And so, again, to the objectives of this bill around doing that, they are sound, and I would actually want the government to go even further in doing that.

We've got the Housing Affordability Task Force that said, "You don't need to go into the greenbelt to build enough houses." The OFA—I would talk to members, when I was the agriculture critic, who would say, "Please, talk about how density in towns and cities is actually good for farmers." That's an important thing you can do as a member in an urban riding, and I certainly believe that.

1630

I just want to kind of set that context, that there is actually a lot more that we could do. Recently, myself and other members from the government side, the opposition

and an independent member as well, got to meet with a delegation from the Czech Republic. They talked about agriculture in their in their country and the importance of it. They also talked about how farmland is actually protected. It is only in a rare circumstance that farmland is allowed to be turned into housing, as an example, because they know that it's precious. It's precious for their population. It's precious for their sovereignty. We have cases in Ontario where farmers may not want to sell their farmland, but, as I said, for reasons like I just explained, they might feel the need to. Of course, the people often calling at their door are developers—if they're close to urban areas, even small towns—because they know that that land can be valued as development land.

Speaker, the only people who can stop that is government. Government can put in rules that would actually further protect farmland, so that it's not just protecting it from, as in this bill, the bad actor, I'll say, kind of foreign nationals who want to do that. I don't want to paint them all with a bad brush at all, but there's so much more we could do here in Ontario.

When farmland is valued for development purposes, it's very hard to protect it as farmland. If it were protected as farmland, it would not have the value of development property. So I think that's something that we absolutely would want the government to go further on.

I want to talk a little bit about a point that my colleague from Don Valley East made earlier, that this bill will be even better if it has expert witnesses testifying at committee. As we all know, that is the purpose of having committee hearings, so that the public and other experts can come and provide their insights and their feedback. I would say that typically, Speaker, it really is intended to make bills better. Yes, sometimes they're offering criticism, but quite often they're bringing forward solutions and recommendations.

We know that this government has a real appetite for skipping committee. We know—I think in this session alone—that of the first 23 bills introduced, 19 were time-allocated and skipped the committee stage. And, Speaker, you can talk about expediency and getting things done and trying to get things done, but the government has sat fewer days. So when they talk about not having time or trying to get things done more quickly, that doesn't mean you don't want it to be done effectively. And sometimes, rushing things means you don't get something done effectively.

I really do hope that this bill does get to committee, gets a thorough review and benefits from the experts across our province. Because again, there are many, and I think it would be a real shame to not allow them to provide their meaningful input and advice on a piece of legislation as important as protecting Ontario farmland.

Speaker, let me come back to the economics. The agriculture and agri-food sector represents 10% of all jobs in Ontario, so we need to make sure that this bill is done right. Let me get into a little bit around some of the schedules in here.

The Beef Farmers of Ontario, representing 19,000 beef farmers—and my grandfather was one of them—collect

\$7 per head from the sale of cattle to help fund advocacy and research activities. Schedule 1 amends the Beef Cattle Marketing Act and mandates that producers who process their own cattle must pay a \$7-per-head licence fee as if they were selling the cattle. This can be a real benefit to the Beef Farmers of Ontario, allowing them to increase marketing activities etc. and benefiting the entire industry. Schedule 1 grants some exceptions for up to two cattle processed for personal consumption.

I have fond memories of—I'm trying to remember the name of the butcher near Mitchell. Someone is going to help me out over here, maybe. Anyone? No. These guys are from up north. There was a little butcher in Perth county between Stratford and London, and we would go pick up literally half a cow to feed our family of six. My parents would put that in the freezer. I know the importance of that processing capacity, the ability and capacity for farmers to be able to process their cattle and get it to market, again, recognizing that they might do this; they might have some cattle that they process for personal consumption for their family.

When our agriculture critic, the member for Kingston and the Islands, asked ministry officials if this includes farm gate sales, they were told it does not. Ministry staff did agree that this exemption involves a small amount of money—you know, \$14—but the exception seems like a good amount of work for such a small sum of money. I would like to know a little more about what the thinking was behind this. Again, I believe that discussing this kind of thing at committee would likely benefit the bill, which would benefit farmers and benefit all of us who consume their products.

Moving to schedule 3, we see the government taking steps to prevent foreign nationals or any so-called designated person from acquiring Ontario farmland. When we think about this, we should keep in mind that both Ontario and Canada—as I talked about—have actually had challenges around making beneficial ownership transparent. I've talked about this before, Speaker, in terms of numbered companies and things, and we know that we still have a long way to go in that regard.

Beneficial ownership is a term that relates to who ultimately owns the corporation, who benefits from the corporation. Corporations can own or control other corporations through legal structures designed to make it hard to trace who has the final say, the final benefit, the beneficial owner. The ministry agrees that there will have to be some consultation or checking beneficial ownership for farmland purchases. I do hope that they take that very seriously because, as I say, it can be difficult to track the beneficial owner.

We know that it's challenging because when journalists asked the ministry what the current levels of foreign ownership are, all they could say was that it's not zero. It's not zero. They're not sure how much, Speaker. The minister replied by saying that we should not be concerned about the current foreign ownership levels and that this bill is forward-looking. Kind of funny, Speaker, isn't it? The freedom-of-information changes are anything but forward-

looking; it's all about protecting the Premier's phone bill—very retroactive. But this bill is apparently forward-looking.

If the ministry believes that consultation will be necessary to check beneficial ownership for purchases, then let's start with that at committee. Let's make sure we give it due time, because this is not a simple matter. Give legal experts the opportunity to provide input into how this could actually be done effectively to meet that goal of this bill.

I want to also come back to farmland. As I said, about 319 acres of prime farmland are disappearing every day. The attempt to stop foreign nationals from buying this farmland we hope will prevent that kind of thing. As I said, there's so much more that could be done, that we can do right now and we could have been doing.

It's kind of interesting to me that this bill is appearing at this time. We have just a few weeks left in this session, and I don't know if it will get through—hopefully, as I say—committee and get improved. But it's been going on for eight years, Speaker. The urban sprawl, paving over our farmland, has been going on for eight years. This government was going to go further. They were going to go into the greenbelt and pave over farmland.

They're doing it with Highway 413, paving over prime farmland to save seconds. We know that when they talk about saving 30 minutes, it's the rare person that drives from the farthest east point of the 407 to the very farthest west. That person might save 30 minutes. Most people, Speaker, it's going to save them 30 seconds. And yet, this government says they're proceeding with Highway 413. We don't know the cost. We don't know how many acres of land it will destroy. We don't know what's happening with environmental assessment and species at risk. The Premier kind of waved a hand: "Oh, who cares about a few—what was it? Was it caterpillars or turtles or snakes or something?" He's like, "Oh, who cares about that."

1640

Again, I'm not trying to pick on that one situation, but we know that these things are broader, right? One species affects another, affects another, affects another. And so, we believe on this side of the House that we need to make sure that we are protecting farmland not just from, as I say, foreign nationals but from all of the urban sprawl that this government has allowed. It's continuing as we speak, Speaker.

There's been a lot of talk today about the Ontario Food Terminal. The schedule specifies that the board can create a capital fund, and while the food terminal was already able to set aside money, this now, we hope, will provide some legal clarity. I hope that is the true intent of that schedule, so that they can ensure that the Ontario Food Terminal continues to run efficiently as a central marketplace for fresh fruits and vegetables. We know that every morning local grocers go down there and they pick the produce that we all end up buying in our grocery stores. So we want to make sure that it is protected, Speaker, and while it may be on, again, land that's prime for development, we need a reliable food source here to feed the four

million people in the GTA. It's a very important asset and it needs to be protected, and we want to make sure that that happens. If that's the intent, then that certainly has my full support.

I'd like to move to schedule 8, which amends the Protecting Farmers from Non-Payment Act, which, again, provides increased protections to producers by requiring written records of many types of transactions and allows increased claims against financial protection boards in the case of dealer insolvency. It's certainly common practice to include written records. Again, we don't have many written records coming from the government. We know that the freedom-of-information laws have gutted a lot of that, so it's interesting to see that they recognize, actually, the value of written records in providing legal clarity. That certainly is the right move.

We finally saw some documents this week about the Premier's luxury private jet—still lots more questions on that, Speaker—and we will continue to look for further documentation that allows, as they call it, the paper trail. Let's see the paper trail—and to give the public the answers that they deserve because, again, this government borrowed \$28.92 million, taxpayer money, to buy a luxury private jet for the Premier so he could fly around like a billionaire. And so we need that written documentation for sure.

Speaker, again, we're happy to see that this legislation will give some protections to farmers. Hopefully it will enhance market confidence, provide some legal clarity and create conditions for the agricultural sector to continue to grow and to be strong.

One thing that we had talked about on this side of the House was accelerating the implementation of the full funding for the Risk Management Program, which I know is also very important to farmers. Again, when you look at spending \$30 million on a jet, that \$30 million would have been another third of the way on getting the farmers the protection that they have been asking for.

So while I appreciate the intent of this bill and will support it, there are certainly some large questions that remain. I think it really raises the question about what else this government can do to further protect the farmland that we all rely on, to further support the agricultural sector and the farmers who work so hard and want to supply food to people here in Ontario, across Canada, around the world, but they do need some support. We think about the slogan that this government is using—really, to me, it's about pretending to protect Ontario, but they could really protect Ontario if they protected Ontario farmland. For that reason, I will be supporting this bill.

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

MPP Paul Vickers: I would like to ask my member from Don Valley West a question. She talked about consulting and making sure that everybody's ideas get asked and get listened to.

I want to ask a question. One of the reasons why I got into politics was the windmills through the Dundalk highlands and the Shelburne area, where thousands and

thousands of acres of land were taken up not just by the windmill itself, because the windmill is just a pedestal and then a cement pad, but it was all the access roads and all the roads it takes to get into all these different windmills. There was no consultation at all at that point, and thousands of acres of farmland got taken up.

Would you be willing to say that maybe the provincial government at the time made a mistake by implementing the Green Energy Act?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I thank the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for the question. Like him, I wasn't here at that time.

This government talks about being forward-looking. I hope they are forward looking at what they can do to implement green energy in this province.

We know that a mix of energy sources is really important. I have watched this government actually spend hundreds of millions of dollars ripping out the EV infrastructure that was in place. This government that says they want EVs is the one that cancelled the EV rebates, and the sales of EVs fell dramatically after they did that.

So I certainly am not here to take responsibility or to comment on the mistakes of any and all governments. We've talked about the Walkerton water crisis. All governments make mistakes. I think this government needs to focus on what it can do to protect farmland, as I say, from urban sprawl, not just from foreign nationals.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: I listened very intently to the presentation; I appreciated it.

The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, in one of his answers to my question, talked about a very good issue, that, actually, a foreign-owned processor caused the collapse of an agriculture sector. Shouldn't we also be looking at who owns the processing sector in this province? Perhaps protecting just the farmland is actually not looking far. If you're really serious, should we be looking at the sector? Because in the issue that he brought up, it was the processor that caused the collapse, not who owned the farmland.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane for the question. I know he knows a lot about this, and I respect his points of view on farming and farmland and on many things.

Absolutely, I think we need to be revisiting lots of structures and industries across our province related to foreign ownership. We have talked about buying Canadian, buying Ontario, and those things are absolutely worth consideration.

I think the unfortunate part is that this government doesn't seem to have a strategy around those things. Are we going to keep letting the processing be up to foreign-owned corporations? Are we going to support our local industry here? I know there are co-operatives here that are willing and ready to actually create processing capacity. What kind of support have they got from this government?

There's a lot more this government can do to support our farming sector, and I hope that this bill is the beginning of that because it certainly hasn't been happening to date.

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

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I want to thank my honourable colleague for her presentation today. Earlier, she made mention about her family's connection to the farming industry. I wonder if she would like to elaborate on that and speak a little bit more about how her family experience in this industry has shaped her view on this bill.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to my great colleague from Don Valley North for that question. Yes, who doesn't like to speak about their family? I'm very proud of my family's farming history.

1650

I was actually just speaking earlier today about my paternal grandfather who went to Guelph agricultural college. He could only afford a year because he was on his own at the age of 16. But he dreamed of being a farmer, and so he went to Guelph agricultural college for a year. He was in the armed forces. He taught people how to fly Gipsy Moth planes during World War II, so he was a veteran.

When he wanted to buy his first farm—he already had a few children by then; he eventually had eight—he went to the banks, and he couldn't get a loan. And so, what did he do? He actually got together—again, no experience in business—with some local neighbours and farmers and helped to create the Mitchell credit union.

So, I'm very proud of my family's history in farming and thank the member from Don Valley North for the chance to talk about it.

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

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Thank you to the member for Don Valley West for your presentation. I appreciate you talking about your family's history in farming. Obviously, I come from a very rural riding, so a lot of the elements of this bill will be very important for my community.

But coming from a more urban riding, I was wondering which parts of this bill do you think are strongest, and which parts do you think your residents need to know about because it will most affect them?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member for Bay of Quinte for the question.

Look, as I said, my residents understand that farmland is really important. They know that the food that they eat—much of it comes from Ontario farmers and farmland, so certainly protecting Ontario farmland is really important.

But I can't tell you how many hundreds of emails I got demanding that this government protect farmland. They all know how many acres of farmland are being lost every day, so protecting farmland is absolutely something that we need to do. This bill doesn't go far enough to do that.

I'm sure I will continue to get emails from my constituents about the need to protect farmland and, as I say, while this bill does a little bit of that related to foreign-owned

nationals, this government does not have a good history in protecting farmland.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: In the member's remarks, she talked about protecting farmland extensively. One thing she mentioned is we're losing over 300 acres a day now, and no one really knows who owns it. So no one knows who owns it, but still allowing the land to be paved over—is that actually going to save any land? That actually has to be answered.

Whether it's a Canadian or a foreign national, if there's no protection for the land, do we need to go a step further than actually just knowing who owns the land?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member for Timiskaming-Cochrane for his question, and yes, absolutely. Again, knowing who owns the land is one part of it—or who wants to buy it.

We know that getting records on who wants to buy land in this province is kind of tricky. We know that the RCMP are actually investigating this government related to the sale of land, including farmland, in this province. So it is absolutely critical that we know not only who from another country, but who here in Canada, wants to buy that farmland and what they want to do with it.

Again, I will say that it is only the government that can step in and do what needs to be done to protect farmland. I hope that one day they have the courage to do it, because they certainly haven't done it so far. This is a small step. But, again, as the member pointed out, 319 acres a day are disappearing under this government's watch, and that has to stop.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A very quick question from the member from Don Valley North.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: I wanted to ask my honourable colleague: Do you think this bill goes far enough to protect farmers?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to my colleague from Don Valley North for the question.

No, absolutely it doesn't go far enough to protect farmers. Farmers, as I say, have been talking about the Risk Management Program. The honourable colleague from Kingston and the Islands and I called on this government to accelerate the rollout of the additional funding. This government has yet to do that, but they had enough money to buy the Premier a jet.

I hope that all the farmers write to the Premier and say, "Why did you have enough money to buy yourself a jet and you wouldn't accelerate the implementation of the Risk Management Program?"

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's an honour today to rise to debate Bill 109, Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act. I want to thank the minister for bringing this act forward.

I'm going to restrict my comments primarily to the two sections of the bill that have received the most public

notice: the provisions to restrict foreign ownership of farmland and the expansion of opening farmland in the Clay Belt in northeastern Ontario.

Speaker, I think it won't come as any surprise to anybody in this House that Ontario's food independence is near and dear to my heart. As many of you know, I grew up on a grain and cattle farm, and I've started a number of small businesses and non-profit organizations to promote Ontario's food and farmers. I also have the honour of representing Guelph, home to Canada's food university and headquarters to many of Ontario's agri-food organizations. So I understand how important the agri-food sector is to Ontario's economy, our way of life and our food security.

And I believe now more than ever, at a time when our sovereignty and our economy are under threat, we have to work across party and jurisdictional lines to defend Ontario's food independence, our food security, our food sovereignty and our agri-food economy.

Throughout most of my career, I've been making the case that food security is national security, that a country that cannot feed itself cannot defend itself. And so, I want to acknowledge and appreciate the Minister of Agriculture saying this in reference to the debate on this particular bill and in public comments more recently when farmers come to Queen's Park. For over a decade, I've been calling on the past government and current government to look into ways to restrict foreign ownership of farmland in Ontario, and I applaud the government for doing that in Bill 109.

I also want to recognize the importance of the Clay Belt in northeastern Ontario as an important agricultural region. I know the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane understands this better than anyone in this House. While I support the expansion of agriculture in northeastern Ontario and expanding opportunities for the agri-food sector in the Clay Belt, I think the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane would agree, and I hope the minister would agree, that we need to approach this responsibly.

Expansion must be done in a way that respects Indigenous rights, protects the biological and ecological diversity of the wetlands, forests, waterways and wildlife habitat in the region, and respects existing businesses operating in the area.

So while I support Bill 109, I also want to be honest with the people of Ontario: The biggest threat to our farmland is not foreign ownership, it's actually the loss of farmland in this province, which threatens our food independence.

I want to take the time to quote a lengthy quote from Ontario Farmland Trust, the organization that's done more than any organization in the province of Ontario to protect farmland. I think as this bill moves forward, it's important for their words to be read into the record.

"From what we've seen so far, the focus on restricting foreign ownership does not appear to address the primary pressures currently affecting farmland in Ontario. The extent of foreign ownership is not well understood, but past estimates have suggested it is relatively low (around

1%). While that may be changing, we haven't seen recent data indicating that it is a leading driver of farmland loss or affordability challenges.

"By contrast, there are more immediate and significant pressures at play. Farmland is increasingly being treated as an investment asset, with land being acquired by speculators and developers. While data here is also limited, anecdotal evidence suggests this is a much more prevalent trend. It is not uncommon to see farms marketed explicitly as 'investment opportunities,' including within protected areas like the greenbelt.

"Affordability is a major and growing issue. The average price of farmland in southern Ontario has increased significantly from approximately \$8,400 per acre in 2015 to around \$23,400 per acre in 2025. This has serious implications for new and young farmers trying to enter the sector or for farmers trying to expand their operation.

1700

"Related to this, access and tenure are also key concerns. Approximately 28% of farmland in Ontario is rented, with much higher rates in regions like Peel (53%), York (51%), Halton (49%), and Brant (41%). While we know renting plays an important role, ownership remains critical for farmers to build equity and access financing they need to invest in their operations. These regions with high rates of rental are also primarily in the GTA and are likely much higher than the rest of the province due to land speculation. This means the farmers renting from speculators will likely lose access to their land once the zoning is approved for development.

"Looking ahead, there are also broader structural challenges" to farmers accessing land, especially when they retire. "Without interventions to improve affordability and access to land, it will be very difficult for the next generation to take over" their family "operations.

"On the language in this bill, it's also worth noting the emphasis on 'local ownership' rather than 'farmer ownership.' While the minister has spoken about farmland being owned by Ontario farmers, the current framing and proposed measures do not appear to meaningfully advance that outcome or address affordability. 'Local ownership' in this case can also mean land speculators and developers from Ontario.

"With respect to the Clay Belt, investment in northern Ontario agriculture is positive in principle, but it comes with real challenges such as significant infrastructure needs"—for example, tile drainage—"a shorter and cooler growing season, distance from markets and services, and the complexities of working with predominantly crown land. The success of any such initiative will depend heavily on the details, including whether farmers are offered secure, long-term, and affordable tenure arrangements.

"More broadly, if the goal is to build a more competitive, resilient, and self-reliant agri-food sector, there is a strong case for strengthening protections and improving access to farmland in southern Ontario, where the conditions for agricultural production are most favourable,

where over 50% of Canada's class 1 soils reside, and where development pressure is the highest."

Speaker, I believe this is important as we consider this bill moving forward. We know that southern Ontario has some of the best farmland anywhere in the world. And across the province of Ontario, we have the best farmers in the world. Ontario farmers grow more than 200 crops on 49,600 farms across this province. Ontario's agriculture sector contributes \$52 billion to Ontario's economy and employs over 875,000 people. That's one in nine jobs in the province of Ontario in the agri-food sector, by far the highest of any sector in our economy.

All of that is at risk because we're losing 319 acres of farmland each and every day. Speaker, that's the equivalent of losing nine family farms a week. We're losing it to urban sprawl, major highway projects, aggregate mining and other developments.

As a matter of fact, in the past 35 years Ontario has lost 2.8 million acres, or 18%, of our farmland to non-agricultural uses. Studies estimate that 76% of this farmland is lost primarily to low-density sprawl from urban boundary expansion to facilitate very expensive housing development. This is especially concerning because only 5% of Ontario's land mass is suitable for growing food, and less than 1%—0.5%—is prime farmland. And most of that—as a matter of fact, over half of Canada's prime farmland is in southern Ontario.

So, Speaker, I want to introduce you to Bill 21, which is on the order paper, a bill that I put forward with the member from Haldimand–Norfolk. I believe Bill 109 and Bill 21 complement each other and, as this bill moves forward, I would invite the government—if this bill goes to committee—to just steal Bill 21 and incorporate it into this bill so we can really protect farmland.

What would that enable the bill to do? Well, it would create a food belt to protect farmland in this province. It would ensure that we have a task force led by agricultural experts, farmers, soil scientists, planners and food and agricultural organizations to protect farmland in this province.

If the government is serious about food independence—and I want to work across party lines; all four parties getting behind food independence—we need to ensure strong farmland protections across the province, especially in southern Ontario, where most of our prime agricultural land is located. Because, Speaker, food security is national security. Without farmland, there are no farms, there's no food, there's no future.

I want to close, in my final minute, by saying that we're entering into significant trade negotiations, especially with our neighbours to the south, and I'm confident that all four parties in this House support making the agri-food sector central to those trade negotiations. And there are provisions in this bill that will help enable that happening, but if it is going to happen, we need leadership in this province to continually be putting agri-food front and centre.

Billions are being spent in the auto sector, and I want to tell you, the largest employer in my province is an automotive plant. By far, the largest employer in my province

is the automotive sector. We need to prioritize the automotive sector. But, my gosh, if we're going to talk about saving one in nine jobs in Ontario, we also have to prioritize the agri-food sector. I'm hoping that we can all call on the federal government to defend the agri-food sector in the trade negotiations we're about ready to enter into, because so much of Ontario's economy and so many of our jobs depend on it.

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

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to the member for his comments. I wanted to ask him about the Ontario Food Terminal that's addressed in this bill. Right now, there's not a clear authority to establish a dedicated capital fund for major repairs and its long-term resilience. The proposed changes would allow the food terminal to plan and remain a world-class facility for years to come. Could you just speak to that and your thoughts on that part of the bill?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate my neighbour from Wellington–Halton Hills asking that question because the Ontario Food Terminal is a crown jewel in Ontario. It is critical, critical infrastructure to supporting local food and farmers. And it's a critical infrastructure to supporting so many green grocers throughout Ontario and across Canada.

Any efforts to make it easier for the food terminal to capitalize its operations and make sure those operations are on a stronger financial footing, I absolutely support. I support this section of the bill. I think it's an important part of building resiliency in our local food distribution networks.

I would also say to the government, my gosh, work with the city of Toronto to make sure that land is protected for the food terminal now, tomorrow and forever.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank the member from Guelph for his presentation. I think one of the focuses in this bill is to look at who owns, who purchases or sells farmland. I think we all can agree that we should have a better handle on that.

But perhaps one of the weaknesses of this bill is, at the end of the day, it doesn't really matter who owns it if there's no government control, or very little, on what is done with it. Whether it's paved over by selling by a foreign owner or paved over by selling to a domestic developer, does that really, in the end, help save farmland?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane's question here. Absolutely, it matters who owns that land and how that land is protected. That's exactly why I'm going to continue to fight and I'm going to continue to invite this government to join us in creating a food belt to permanently protect farmland in this province.

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If we lose it to foreign ownership or we lose it to land speculators who want to pave it over, either way we lose it. Once you lose it, you lose it forever, and when you lose it, Ontario's \$52-billion food and farming economy is at

risk; one in nine agri-food jobs are at risk; our food security and our food sovereignty is at risk. So I would encourage the government, as this bill moves forward, to work to ensure that we have strong protections for farmland across this province, regardless of who owns it.

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member from Guelph for his remarks. I want to zero in on something that his community knows very well: veterinary practice. It's becoming more and more elusive for those in agriculture to find someone, especially close by, to perform the veterinary services that are needed, especially for livestock. With the schedule 9 updates that are here, we're enabling flexible, mobile and innovative ways to deliver care exactly where it's needed most. I want to see if the member opposite would agree that this schedule opens up a lot of opportunity for farmers throughout the province.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I want to thank the member from Windsor for the question. I absolutely support modernizing provisions around the veterinary services act. I want to go a bit further than that—and I want to compliment the government on something—because we know there's a shortage of veterinarians in this province. I worked with a number of members on the opposite side to make sure the funding was in place for the University of Guelph to expand our veterinary college, the number of positions there, and to do a partnership with Lakehead University in Thunder Bay because we know there's especially a shortage of large-animal veterinarians in the north.

To me, that's the example of how we can work across party lines to get things done to benefit Ontarians and to ensure that we have access to veterinary services in this province. I would encourage the government to expand it even more, because it is harder to get into veterinary school right now than it is to get into medical school because there are so few placements.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question? The member for Windsor—Tecumseh—no, Timiskaming—Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: Oh, I felt really southern there for a second—felt good.

One of the things that the member from Guelph mentioned in his remarks and I would ask him to expand on—and coming from northern Ontario, the focus on agricultural expansion in northern Ontario—the extra costs of infrastructure, municipal drainage—and in a place where there are no municipalities to actually organize that. There's no one to clean the roads; there's no one. Could you expand on some of the some of the roadblocks you could perceive? Thank you.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Yes—

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I get so excited to answer these questions that I'm not waiting for you; I apologize.

I appreciate the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane's question. If we're going to truly expand agricultural operations in the Clay Belt, the government is going to

have to match that with funding for infrastructure, drainage in particular, but not just drainage. There's going to have to be processing infrastructure; there's going to have to be road and highway infrastructure. That infrastructure is going to have to be properly maintained. There's going to be infrastructure for storage and post-harvest handling. We have to make sure there's going to be enough electricity capacity. We have people in southern Ontario on farms complaining that they don't have enough access to grid capacity for their farming operations. It's going to even be a bigger challenge in northeastern Ontario.

If we're truly going to do this and we're going to do it right, we have to make sure the infrastructure is in place, but we also have to make sure—and I want to reiterate what I said in my remarks—that as we do this, we have to respect Indigenous rights. We have to respect the biodiversity and the ecology of the area, and the existing businesses who operate there as well, Speaker.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I want to thank the member from Guelph for his remarks. I always learn something when I'm listening to him.

I wonder if he could take a moment to expand on his farm belt idea. I know that there are a number of challenges financially etc. for governments, for provinces, for states to think about how to protect that farmland and the financial costs that can come with that.

I wonder if he could talk a little bit about some of the mechanisms that he has seen that work well in other jurisdictions and whether or not they could work here in Ontario.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the question from the member from Don Valley West. I think one of the reasons it's so important to create a food belt to permanently protect farmland in Ontario is not only to protect that farmland for the farmers who farm it and contribute so much to our economy but also to protect the next generation of farming.

Most young new farmers can't afford to get into the business because farmland is so expensive. And the reason farmland, especially in southern Ontario, is so expensive is it's primarily being driven as a speculative asset. How we drive speculation out of that market, whether it's foreign ownership or domestic ownership, is to protect that farmland so it cannot be converted into subdivisions.

What is driving up the cost of farmland to unsustainable and unaffordable rates for farmers right now is we have far too many people buying that land because they want to build houses and not actually grow food.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A very quick question.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Just following up on that question regarding the food belt: I'm not quite understanding how taking more land out is supply and demand. We're talking about limiting even more the available land. So what's going to happen to the land that's not in this proposed food belt and the cost of that land?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member from Wellington–Halton Hills. The best way to drive speculation out of the farmland market is to permanently protect it so it will be used for farming forever, because then the market will price that land at the market rate that you could make a living farming the land, and that's not happening right now.

One of the reasons the food belt is designed to be developed by a task force led by farmers is so the boundaries of the food belt can be determined in a way that best supports the agri-food sector, which should be and is led by farmers in this province.

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

Mr. Jones, Chatham–Kent–Leamington, has moved second reading of Bill 109, An Act to enact the Farmland Security Act, 2026 and to amend various Acts. Is it the pleasure of the house at the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Interjection: No.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): In that case, I recognize the minister.

Hon. Trevor Jones: If we could refer the bill to the Standing Committee on the Interior, please.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The bill is therefore referred to the Standing Committee on the Interior. Is that agreed? Okay.

Orders of the day?

Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to see the clock at 6. Is it agreed? Agreed.

In that case, it is now time for private members' public business.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

NON-EMERGENCY LINE

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Solicitor General should explore the feasibility of standardizing a province-wide three-digit phone number to consolidate all non-emergency calls across the province and explore this initiative's viability to prevent the overuse of non-emergency calls made to 911.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Pursuant to standing order 100, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

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Mr. Sheref Sabawy: It is an honour to put forward my motion for a new three-digit phone number. I am proposing a standardized three-digit, non-emergency phone

number that would, if passed, alleviate 911 from non-urgent calls that should better be directed elsewhere. This is an initiative that we have been working on for a long time. I'm very excited to discuss this motion today, and I hope my colleagues will support this proposal.

Speaker, let me start by telling a story. Last week, we installed a new phone system in my constituency office. The existing land lines were old and obsolete. The talented IT department at the Legislative Assembly installed new phones that are connected to Microsoft Teams, allowing us better control over voice mails, call transfers, and other features. After many years on an old system, the new phones allow my staff and I to be more efficient in the delivery of our services. The old phones had been holding us back. This provides an example of how government services can be more effective if we implement new and innovative technologies.

As an IT specialist and professor, I have been in the world of networking and routing for many decades. I was an early adopter of VoIP technologies in the 1990s. And I have witnessed the transition from an analog to a digital age.

We know that governments are slow adopters of technology. But when it comes to public safety, we cannot afford to wait. We must ensure that our public services are innovative and modern to ensure efficiency and good delivery of services.

That's why, when we look at 911 services, we need to take action. We know that 911 services are critical. Any unnecessary delay for 911 is dangerous.

The idea for this motion arose because of a simple but significant problem: The 911 phone number is overburdened by non-emergency phone calls. Speaker, 911 is for emergencies only. Unfortunately, too many calls are being made to 911 for reasons that are not an emergency.

On average, in major urban centres like Toronto, Ottawa and Peel, more than 40% of all incoming 911 calls are non-emergencies. This includes non-priority or non-urgent police matters, non-police matters, calls for municipal or social services.

For each phone call that comes to 911, emergency dispatch services must process the call to determine its priority. Therefore, non-emergencies are a substantial drain on 911 operators' time. Every minute wasted is a minute not available for true emergencies.

For example, in 2019, Toronto police received 1,900,000 calls to 911, and 800,000 of those calls were illegitimate phone calls to 911.

To identify emergencies from non-emergencies, dispatchers must answer all calls and spend time on the phone verifying the call. If each call took an estimated three minutes, this means that approximately two million man-power hours and millions of dollars are wasted every year because of non-emergency calls.

We must address the problem of 911 being overburdened.

Almost all police departments in Ontario have a non-emergency phone number. Each region has a 10-digit regular phone number. For example, in Peel region, the

phone number is 905-453-3311. However, these numbers are long, complicated and not easy to remember. Additionally, each region has a different phone number. If someone is outside their home region and wishes to call the non-emergency police number, they probably don't know it. This makes the process of calling the police very complicated and confusing. Many people are calling 911 instead of non-emergency numbers because they don't know who else to call; they can't remember.

Speaker, we need to alleviate the burden on 911 in as many ways as possible. Today, I'm proposing a standardized, three-digit non-emergency phone number. This would be simple, easy to remember and standardized province-wide. No matter where you travel in Ontario, you would be able to contact police with just three digits on your phone's dial pad. The advantages are clear: If Ontarians can remember the non-emergency number, they will use it instead of 911. Therefore, 911 would be for emergencies only, saving time and resources for dispatchers and first responders.

Here's how the three digits would work. For example, we can suggest a number like 922, per se—911 for first priority, 922 for second priority. In co-operation with partners—who might include the federal Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, CRTC, telecommunications providers like Rogers, Bell and Telus, and local police departments—the Solicitor General would explore the feasibility of standardizing a province-wide three-digit phone number.

We don't yet know which phone number will be chosen; that decision will be made in consultation with the CRTC and telecommunication providers. A suggestion could be 922 as a non-emergency number. Regardless, if implemented, a phone call to those three digits would be routed to the nearest police department's existing 10-digit non-emergency phone number. Calls would be routed automatically based on geographical region. This would use the same telephone routing technologies as similar services like 911. In Ontario, we already have three-digit numbers for many services; for example, 911 for emergencies, 311 for municipal services, 811 for telehealth, and 988 for the suicide prevention line.

The good news about the three-digit number is that it would be effectively no cost for the provincial government. The infrastructure for non-emergency call centres already exists at most police departments across the province. Therefore, provincial taxpayers would not be on the hook for any infrastructure charges or changes. The only change necessary would be to reroute the call. Telecommunication providers already provide this service for other phone numbers. Local municipalities could also choose to advertise the new phone number, but this would be their own decision. The technology and infrastructure, including call centres, already exist to implement a three-digit non-emergency phone number; we just need to work with our partners to get it done.

Toronto police implemented a pilot project in August 2025. Now, Toronto residents on mobile phones can dial *877 to be redirected to the police's non-emergency call

centre. In the first four months, this new number, not fully known, already received over 11,000 phone calls. Speaker, this proves that Ontarians have a need that can be resolved by a three-digit non-emergency phone number.

My goal is to expand this project beyond Toronto and ensure that other municipalities also are able to benefit from this service. We have received public support from municipalities, including the mayors of Mississauga and Brampton. They want to explore whether this service could benefit their residents. Today's motion would begin the process of exploring the province-wide implementation of a non-emergency number.

Speaker, our government made a commitment last year to protect Ontario by cleaning up our streets. We have invested tremendous resources into improved policing, bail reform, correctional facilities, the justice system, first responders, medical services and hospitals. Our government is committed to supporting emergency services and making sure that Ontarians are safe and secure in their communities.

1730

We know that first responders, including police, fire, medical and emergency services, work hard, and they put their lives at risk to serve their community. We must continue supporting them. But none of this investment matters if 911 is backlogged by calls that waste dispatchers' time. That's why we must do everything we can to also support our 911 dispatchers, who work very hard to keep us safe.

We recently implemented Next Generation 9-1-1 in Ontario. I'm happy to say that last year Peel police were the first region in Ontario to completely implement the new NG9-1-1. This is a transformative digital technology that makes it easier for call centres to manage calls and increase the amount of data available to dispatchers and first responders.

Today's motion complements this progress and builds upon Next Generation 9-1-1 to support emergency dispatch services. We must continue to be innovative to ensure that our services are benefiting from technologies.

Speaker, I want to thank many people who supported us going through this here today. I want to thank the Premier and the Solicitor General for supporting this motion, for being willing to explore the feasibility of this project and for their consistent hard work protecting Ontarians.

I want to thank the Toronto Police Service, in particular, Superintendent Gregory Watts, Deputy Chief Peter Yuen, Monica Di Tollo, Sarah Mardus and Beverly Romeo-Beehler. They took this idea, implemented it, piloted it and then provided us with critical data on the pilot project success.

Our appreciation extends to Peel Regional Police, including Chief Nish, Deputy Chief Anthony Odoardi, Superintendent Mark Noble and Patricia Hewitson. And—

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

Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to speak in the House, and today to speak on the motion brought forward by the member from Mississauga—Erin Mills to create a provincially standard non-emergency number.

I listened intently to the member's remarks. He obviously is representing his community, and he consulted widely, talked about how this number could take, I believe, some of the pressure off 911, and he wants to make a province-wide number.

You know what? He's representing his community, and I fully commend the member. For that, we will support this motion. But I also have to represent my community. When the member said we cannot afford to wait—in large portions of this province, there is no 911, portions of this province where people live, where I live—northern Ontario—where you say, where the government says, "It's going to be a game-changer: the mining sector, the Ring of Fire." We can't afford to wait for a three-digit non-emergency number, but we seem to be able to wait for 911 in large portions of this province.

We have put forward legislation—the member for Nickel Belt—several times to have 911 actually province-wide.

We can't afford to wait.

If you want to go to my home, it's 1-800—I can't even remember—that's posted on my fridge.

We can't afford to wait.

There are two Ontarios: the Ontario that has the luxury of talking about a non-emergency number to supplement 911, and the Ontario where 911 is, "Well, sucks to be you."

When you're travelling large portions of the Trans-Canada Highway in northern Ontario, it doesn't matter that there's no 911 because there's no cellphone service either.

I apologize for getting so wound up. I commend the member; I really do. You're representing an issue, a problem that you see that is plaguing your Ontario. But when we put forward legislation to bring 911 to other parts of Ontario, the government that claims to protect Ontario—it seems you can afford to wait, for us.

You're all excited about getting—we just talked about agricultural land in northern Ontario. We talk about minerals from northern Ontario. We talk about all kinds of things from northern Ontario, but you don't seem to be in too big a hurry to provide equivalent service to the people of northern Ontario.

Forgive me for being so wound up, but we hear this time and time and time again: "We'll get to you. This next boom is going to be a game-changer. We'll get to you." You know what—911 didn't get to us.

Again, we are not opposed to this. I live here for quite a bit of the time. I get that there are huge issues in the densely populated areas of the south. I get that. I don't think that many of your government understand the issues that people in the north face.

When someone comes to visit and they think that they're in trouble and they're at a cottage or they're at a

home and they dial 911 and there's nothing—nothing—we can't afford to wait.

You have to understand how that gets so raw, when we know, where we're from, that everyone is perfectly happy waiting—perfectly happy. Your Trans-Canada Highway? You're 10 times more likely to die on the Trans-Canada Highway than you are in Brampton. So you would think that we have actually more need for 911, but—can't afford to wait.

The member said, "No matter where you travel in Ontario, you should be able to have this non-emergency number." I believe that the member would agree with me that it should also be, no matter where you travel in Ontario, in North America, that you have 911. It is universally known, universally accepted, but not universal in this province.

Now, some of you may be thinking, "Well, yeah, the member, this guy, he must be some place where there's like four polar bears and an orca." And even if there are only four polar bears and an orca, that's not what we're talking about. We're not talking about that; we're talking about populated areas that are proud parts of this province, that add greatly to the GDP, that the government spends millions of dollars advertising—millions, yet, for some reason, can't seem to be bothered. They can't seem to be bothered to actually implement a service like 911. It's just an afterthought.

That is, for many cases, for the majority—this majority government, and majority governments, and minority before—it has been like this for a long time; 911 didn't happen yesterday. It's not that this House has never heard this tirade before. It's been brought up many times. We've had private members' bills put forward many times. Do you know what doesn't happen—911.

1740

And then we got a promise: enhanced 911. I believe the members mentioned something about enhanced 911—really happy for those people who have it. We'd be happy if we had the original 911.

How is it that hard? How is it that hard? Hopefully you see why we take everything with a grain of salt when we hear how the next great plan from the government is going to change our lives in the north.

Northerners are very proud, and it is one of the greatest places in the province to live. I'm so proud to be from where I am, and we welcome you. You can prosper in northern Ontario. You can have a great life in northern Ontario. But for some reason, many services—unfortunately 911, for large parts of it—seem to be optional. It's a maybe: "Maybe if something happens to you, maybe you can get help."

I get that 911, in an area like this with so many people, can get backlogged. We've all heard—there's sometimes stuff on social media—the craziest 911 calls, "lost my cat" or whatever. But at least you can get 911. So many times, the member from Nickel Belt has put this forward.

Again, we support this motion. We support the intent. We are proud Ontarians and believe that all Ontarians should have the best services that they can get, and this

would, we think, be an improvement. But before we start talking about province-wide improvements, how about we provide province-wide basic services?

I would challenge anyone in this House to tell me that 911 should not be available to everyone in this province. Should it be optional? No. It should be available to everyone. So I hope that the Solicitor General's support for this motion includes the actual momentum to the Solicitor General, to the government, to actually follow through, carry through and make 911 available to everyone in this province, not just those in the highly populated parts of Ontario. It's time that the people of the north stop being treated like a colony.

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

MPP Andrea Hazell: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm very happy to be here before we close at 7.

I rise today in support of motion number 68. This motion asks the Solicitor General to explore the feasibility of creating a province-wide, three-digit phone number for non-emergency calls to reduce the overuse of 911.

Non-emergency calls to 911 are a real problem. When emergency lines are tied up with calls that should have gone somewhere else, it actually puts pressure on dispatchers, police, fire, paramedics and people waiting for urgent help.

Right now, we've got several numbers in Ontario, and we are adding another number to all the several numbers that we already have. We've got 911, which is for our global emergency number in Ontario, that everyone knows what it's used for. We've got 211 that connects people to community and social services. Then 311 exists in some municipalities for local services. Here comes 811; it's for non-urgent health advice. And then 988 is for mental health crisis support. I know, in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood, we are still trying to learn what the 988 number is for. And then police services also have their own non-emergency numbers.

Before the province adds another number, it really needs to explain to us in this House what gap this new number is filling. Is it replacing the police non-emergency lines? Is it replacing 311? Is it redirecting people to 211, 811 or 988? Is it a line for just non-emergency issues, or is it simply another referral line?

Speaker, these are the details that determine the cost, and I think they're doing a feasibility cost on this. But we didn't see a feasibility cost on the land grab for Billy Bishop airport.

Before we do all of this, we always have to take into consideration the staffing, the training, the technology and the level of responsibility placed on municipalities. This government needs to make sure—and I know they haven't thought about this—that this number works all across Ontario. Ontario is not just Toronto. Scarborough went backwards when we were joined and called Toronto. So now, because what is happening in Toronto is really happening in Scarborough, I just want to put that on the record.

We do not want this number to just impact Toronto. It has to work in the north, something that this government forgets about—like Thunder Bay, Timmins, Kenora, Windsor, Kingston, rural townships; I would just cover it by saying all the northern communities—but also in the Indigenous communities. We don't talk a lot about the Indigenous communities in this House. And so to the members that are always bringing up the Indigenous communities, my heart is with them, always.

In Scarborough–Guildwood, we have already seen how service navigation can break down. Concerns have been raised about the 311 line, the non-emergency line, because there is a lack of public awareness for that line that we call 311.

Speaker, what about seniors? What about people with disabilities? It's more than just putting this in a motion, bringing it up and just asking all of us to vote for it. And you know how it's catchy? It's catchy because the way they put it is, "We don't want the 911 line to be overflooded, so we are putting in another number so we can decrease the calls that are going to 911." We get it, because we're not stupid people. Like, we get it.

The government should also learn from the 988 number. When the mental health crisis line was launched, it was not just a phone number. It required so much training with responders, national coordination, service planning, partnerships, public education and dedicated funding. Speaker, those same principles apply here. The number is only the front door; what matters is the delivery and how effective it is at helping Ontarians understand this number.

1750

If the public does not understand when to use 911 calls, it will still be flooded with emergency calls if we do not fully understand what the impact of this new line would bring to Ontarians. Public education has to be part of this. People need to know when to call 911, when to call 211, when to call 311 and when to call 988. And then the new number that's being added—they're going to have to know when to call that number as well.

If the goal is to make services easier to reach, then the system has to be designed for the people who face the most barriers. Accessibility needs to be built in from the start. A province-wide number has to work for seniors, people with disabilities, people who are hard of hearing, people who do not speak English or French as a first language and people without reliable Internet access. Actually, I just heard the member speak about reliable Internet access.

Speaker, reducing pressure on 911 is not only about redirecting calls; it is also about making sure the services people need actually exist and can respond. So while I support exploring the idea of the motion, there is serious work that needs to be done. It should identify the cost, the staffing model, the governance structure, the role of municipalities, the impact on dispatch, the relationship with existing numbers and the public education strategy.

I want to share a story before I stop that I think this government has not truly thought out this, and I want to add it to their strategy and their feasibility study.

I was at STC about a month ago and my staff had an emergency episode. We called 911. She actually collapsed in my arms; I was there to catch her. The staff at STC called 911, and we're panicking because she's out cold. We're waiting for the ambulance, and the ambulance is taking a while. The paramedics came and they started to work on her. When the ambulance came, do you know why they were delayed? It was not because of a 911 call, but because of gridlock and congestion on the roads in Scarborough.

While they introduce an emergency number, think about all the emergency vehicles on the road, that we see on the highway, that go into the curb and cut back into traffic and go back in the curb. It's really scary, and these are the things that we have to think about when we are talking about calling 911 and looking after the emergency state of the entire Ontario.

Speaker, as I close, the goal is simple: to protect 911 for emergencies and make it easier for Ontarians to access non-emergency help. So, yes, I support this motion, but to me, it's just a motion. It's deeper than that. It's really deeper than that. And if you can't fix the quality of life in emergencies with the people of Ontario, that addition of that number and your feasibility study is just going in the wrong direction.

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

MPP Paul Vickers: I rise today in support of establishing a three-digit non-emergency line in Ontario to help relieve the pressure on our 911 operators, front-line police services and emergency dispatch systems.

This is a practical and important step that would help ensure emergency response resources remain available for those who need them most.

On a regular basis, in my riding, 911 operators receive calls that are not emergencies. These range from noise complaints, parking issues and non-violent disputes to general information requests. While these calls are important, they do tie up the phone lines intended for emergency and life-threatening situations. When dispatchers are overwhelmed with non-emergency calls, it slows down response time and creates unnecessary strain on our police, paramedic, firefighters and dispatch staff.

I recall on one occasion when working on my farm near Meaford, I mistakenly dialled 911 when attempting to make a call and I felt terrible knowing that I took up valuable time from someone that could have been facing a true crisis. Remembering that occasion, I realized that if a simple three-digit non-emergency line had been available, it likely would have been the number that came to my mind in the first place.

Many individuals such as seniors, newcomers or young people may not know to contact a non-emergency line for non-urgent assistance. Some might hesitate to contact police because they worry about wasting time. A simple province-wide number would eliminate these issues and help direct calls to the right places at the right times.

This motion is not about discouraging people from asking for help. It is about ensuring each situation receives the proper level of response and keeping our emergency lines open for emergencies. This proposal will provide emergency services with the tools that they need to do the important work of protecting the people of Ontario. Residents deserve access to the right people at a time of need, and this motion would provide that access.

For these reasons, Madam Speaker, I am proud to support this motion.

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

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I am honoured to rise today to speak in support of the three-digit non-emergency phone number private members' motion.

First, I want to extend my sincere thank you to my colleague and my friend the member for Mississauga—Erin Mills for his leadership in sponsoring this important piece of legislation.

Every second, somewhere in our province, a phone rings in a 911 dispatch centre. For the person on the other end, it might be a heart attack, the worst day of their life, a house fire or violent crime, but for many others, that call is placed simply because they don't know where else to turn and they are calling out of confusion. Today, we have the opportunity to clear that confusion and ensure that when a true emergency strikes, the line is open.

Speaker, the proposal before us is straightforward: the creation of a standardized, province-wide three-digit non-emergency number—for example, let's call it 922. This is not about building a new bureaucracy or spending millions on infrastructure. The service already exists. Every police department has a non-emergency line. The problem is that these numbers are 10 digits long, localized and nearly impossible to remember in a moment of stress under crisis. By implementing three digits, we create a universal front door for police services.

Why is this important? We must look at it through the lens of our always-stretched emergency system. Right now, our 911 system is overwhelmed by non-emergency issues. I could tell so many stories in Markham—Thornhill, my riding. It's making it harder for them to do their real job: getting help to people in crisis as fast as possible. This leads to longer wait times and operator burnout.

When people treat 911 like a customer service hotline, the quality of help for emergency services goes down. Think of this three-digit number as a direct line for basic help. It allows our 911 operators to focus on what they were trained to do: save lives.

1800

This motion is particularly vital for our diverse communities, such as my riding of Markham—Thornhill, the most ethnically diverse riding in Ontario, according to the census. For new Canadians to Ontario, navigating different 10-digit area codes for different regions is a barrier to safety. For a senior citizen who may be confused or experiencing a minor issue, remembering long numbers can be difficult. When we make the system easier, we

make their lives easier. We ensure that every resident, regardless of their native language or their technical ability, can access the appropriate level of care without fear.

Speaker, safety is a shared responsibility. By passing this motion, we are giving our citizens a tool to be responsible—to choose the right channel for their needs. Let's ensure that for every Ontarian, help is only three digits away, no matter the scale of the problem.

I humbly encourage all members of this House to support the three-digit, non-emergency phone number private member's motion.

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

MPP Bill Rosenberg: I want to speak about MPP Sabawy's proposal that will strengthen Ontario's emergency response system by creating a standardized, province-wide three-digit number for non-emergency phone calls. This proposal is simple, it is proven, and it directly supports our goal of protecting Ontario by improving the efficiency of our emergency services.

Right now, too many Ontarians call 911 for situations that are not emergencies. Speaker, 35% to 45% of daily 911 calls fall into this category. These calls tie up dispatchers, delay real emergencies, and create unnecessary strain on police services.

MPP Sabawy's proposal addresses this problem directly. It calls for the creation of a single, easy-to-remember three-digit phone number that would redirect non-emergency calls to the appropriate local police service without going through 911 dispatch.

The advantages of this proposal are significant and immediate. It would reduce pressure on 911 and improve emergency response times.

At the end of the day, 911 must remain for emergencies only. A province-wide three-digit, non-emergency number will help ensure that, while still connecting people to the services they need.

I urge all members to support this motion and help us build a safer, more responsive Ontario.

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

I return to the member, who has this time plus two for his reply.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I will use the rest of the time to thank and extend my appreciation to Peel Regional Police, including Chief Nish, Deputy Chief Anthony Odoardi, Superintendent Mark Noble, and Patricia Hewitson; also, to Ottawa police and the city of Ottawa, Commissioner Steve Garde, and Beth Gooding.

I would also like to appreciate the other many stakeholders who expressed their interest and support for this motion, including Mayor Patrick Brown, Mayor Carolyn Parrish, and the councils of the city of Mississauga and the city of Brampton.

I would like to say that I heard our colleagues' debate on the bill. First of all, I would like to clarify that the bill is not solving all the issues; it's addressing a specific issue, which is the overwhelming use of 911. So that's address-

ing part of the problem, not all of the problem. I hear you, I understand you and I appreciate very much the need. I definitely would expect and I would appreciate to have the service extended everywhere.

Not any government other than this government tried to help the north and develop the north. Putting back the northern train to service the north, putting projects in the north, implementing more health care, more Internet, high-speed Internet in the north everywhere—and things will come, but as I mentioned, we need, as much as possible, to address an imminent problem we have now.

My colleague from the Liberal side, I appreciate her need and talk about Scarborough, and I would like to say something about the service which we are trying to create: It's better than some of the voices which wanted to fine the people who use 911 if it's not an emergency use. This is discouraging people from reaching out to the police. We want to encourage people to report to the police what they see and if there's any situation. This also will help these kinds of services like neighbourhood watch services, which is basically, if I know easily that I can report something I've seen—it's not an emergency, but I noticed something, I observed something, I see some danger—I can report it and I will have a number I can easily remember. Even if I'm walking and see something, I will call the three digits, and I will get to the localized non-emergency. Thank you.

Speaker, I would like also to thank all the members who took the time today to speak on this important topic of public safety.

We know that nothing is more important than the safety of our loved ones. In an increasingly uncertain world, residents are trusting our government to protect Ontario by cleaning up our streets and keeping communities safe. That's exactly what we are doing. We are investing in police, in law enforcement, in emergency services, and we are expanding the number of police officers by building a new police college and eliminating the tuition fees for the Basic Constable Training Program. Last year, Peel Regional Police accomplished their goal of recruiting 300 new police officers.

In addition, we are building more jails and implementing stricter bail enforcement to keep criminals off the streets. We are cracking down on violent crime such as auto theft, carjackings, robberies and home invasions. These crimes have no place in Ontario, and we are putting resources into policing and justice to stop criminals.

Therefore, Speaker, today's motion is just one part of our strategy to protect Ontario. A standardized three-digit non-emergency phone number would help complement existing action by freeing law enforcement to prioritize the real emergencies. Our goal is to continue improving 911 dispatch services to ensure faster response times. The three-digit non-emergency phone number will make a meaningful difference.

I am looking forward to working with the Solicitor General and with other stakeholders to make this a reality.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Mr. Sabawy has moved private members' notice of motion number 68.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, this House stands adjourned until Monday, May 25, at 9 a.m.

I hope everyone has a safe and happy constituency week.

The House adjourned at 1809.

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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	
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Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
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Darouze, George (PC)	Carleton	
Denault, Billy (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Dixon, Jess (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Dowie, Andrew (PC)	Windsor—Tecumseh	
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
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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

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Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	
Firin, Mohamed (PC)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
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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	
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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)	Kiwiwinoong	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
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McGregor, Hon. / L'hon. Graham (PC)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiques et du Multiculturalisme
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McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York	

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