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Jeudi
16 avril 2026

Speaker: Honourable Donna Skelly
Clerk: Trevor Day

Présidente : L'honorable Donna Skelly
Greffier : Trevor Day

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 16 April 2026

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 16 avril 2026

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers / Prières.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PUTTING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT FIRST ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 DONNANT LA PRIORITÉ À LA RÉUSSITE DES ÉLÈVES

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 15, 2026, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

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

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

MPP Lise Vaugeois: From 1998: “The sound and fury of the latest proxy battle between our provincial government and public education in this province has, among other things, provided a useful smokescreen for the Harris government’s attack on the economic foundations of the education system.”

Do folks remember the notorious education minister John Snobelen, who made headlines in 1995 when he was caught saying the government should create a crisis in education to generate support for change? It wasn’t meant to be public—oops—but just like the greenbelt video with Ford’s developer buddies, the Snobelen video revealed what was behind the government’s decisions, and it wasn’t the well-being of students.

In the same era, does anyone remember how the Conservatives ran a campaign designed to incite contempt for teachers, all while cutting financial support for virtually every aspect of education?

They revived the “attack the teachers” mantra in 2018 with their snitch line, but apparently it didn’t work.

This brings us to the game plan we’re seeing today. First, the Conservatives needed to create a really good crisis in education—and I don’t mean the outrage the minister has been stoking to justify appointing failed Conservative candidates as wildly overpaid supervisors or to justify knee-capping democratically elected trustees. No, I mean the actual crisis in education that this government set out to accomplish in 2018 by removing, piece by piece, the funding from education until we were down \$6.3 billion, leaving teachers with more and more struggling

students, fewer resources, fewer staff, larger class sizes, an irresponsible transportation formula, and huge gaps in support for special-needs students.

And parents, when you are wondering how these ministers can claim to be giving what they call “historic” funding—it’s called magic with numbers, and it is exactly the same tactic they used in 1995: Don’t include increased enrolment numbers, don’t include inflation, and, bingo, you can say you increased funding. It’s a classic illusionist’s trick.

I’ve been around for a while. I taught in teacher education in the one-year, the two-year programs, and the online COVID year. There are undoubtedly things that can be improved, but this is not the intention of this bill. The intention, as in bill after bill introduced by this government, is to gut our democracy and centralize power in themselves.

So let’s be clear: Nothing in this bill will improve outcomes for students or ensure that they have smaller class sizes, special education, mental health supports—there’s nothing there—or even basic resources like pencils in classrooms. And this credit card for teachers—give your heads a shake. Teachers need cash on hand because the boards have been starved of the money they need to buy supplies. It’s a gimmick.

Rather than putting student achievement first, the bill vastly expands the minister’s powers, creates a new layer of bureaucracy, but limits the advocacy and support that parents currently receive from trustees.

The bill is designed to discourage good people from running for trustee, and the minister has already said he will appoint people where there are no trustees elected. This is not an accident, because the goal, as in everything else this government does, is to put themselves and their buddies in charge; like changing the rules to appoint judges because you don’t like their rulings. You put in people in who are beholden to you—not accountable to students, teachers or parents, but beholden only to you.

The priorities in this bill tell you everything: Class sizes are mentioned zero times, while the supervisors imposed on the TDSB are forcing even larger, unsustainable class sizes. Classrooms are mentioned zero times in the bill. Mental health: zero. Special education: zero. Student achievement: three times—grand. But liability, 43 times. Why is the minister so obsessed with giving himself and his supervisors immunity if his goal is student achievement?

I want to take a moment to talk about all the wonderful trustees in the four boards—French public and Catholic, English public and Catholic—in my region. The members of those boards, those trustees, are everywhere kids are,

observing classrooms, talking with students, meeting with parents. They take the role very seriously. They've done a lot of governance and development. At one school the trustees found a way to create a music room for students that the board would never have been able to pay for themselves. Trustees are called day and night by parents. The pay is only \$16,000 a year; not much for a full-time, 24/7 role.

Are all trustees perfect? Do they all do justice to the responsibilities they have been elected to fulfill? Well, let me ask: Do the elected officials in this government all behave responsibly? We just have to look at the financial abuses right here between the greenbelt, Skills Development Fund, pet vanity projects of the Premier—the largest, most expensive government in the history of Ontario. There is a problem with people in this House making themselves God, continually changing the laws to avoid accountability.

Well, the current Conservatives, with this ideologically driven Minister of Education, are following exactly the same game plan: Eliminate the climate surveys and don't find out how students are feeling, like ditching hallway medicine records, hiding phone records, or having 47 clauses protecting themselves from liability. Information and accountability are strictly forbidden.

A minister who wants to decide what will be read and not read; wants to get subscriptions for pre-packaged lesson plans, produced by whom? Bill Gates? Disney? Apple? The right-wing Fraser Institute? This is a minister and a government that is obsessed with the righteousness of their own ideology.

Remember that statement that we all must be proud of Canadian history? Let's think about that. What is appropriate is neither pride nor shame. What is appropriate is awareness of the full story. I recommend that the minister visit room 228 and look at the river of children's shoes representing the many Indigenous children who never made it home.

Our students right now learn about Canadian history in its breadth; neither pride nor shame, but thoughtful consideration and awareness. This bill is about power. It's about ideology. It's about eliminating critical thinking, eliminating democracy. And it's also about breaking the system so badly, parents with money will send their kids to private schools where they will have class sizes of no more than 15 students.

0910

I know this because my nephew was a troubled kid in his youth, and he wasn't doing well in school, and because his parents had the money, he went to a private school with 15 kids in the class, and he blossomed. He continues to do very well. Why? Because the resources were there to support him. Every student deserves to have those kinds of resources.

We know your endgame, and it is diametrically opposed to well-funded, creative and thoughtful public education.

As I said earlier, I have been a professor in teacher education programs. I'm certainly aware of the kinds of

challenges that teachers face. I'm aware of the challenges that trustees face. I am aware of the heart and soul that teachers put into everything they do. I'm also aware of the heart and soul of the trustees that put everything they have into looking into the well-being and supporting the well-being of our students.

There may be problems in some boards. I don't see those problems being solved with supervisors making almost \$400,000 that could be going to support students, but it's not. Instead, it's supporting failed Conservative candidates making really bad decisions. We talk about laying off 600 teachers, and yet at the same time, you're talking about, "We need more teachers." There's a big contradiction in there, and I must say it's clear that nobody has thought through what the transition will look like when you have students in the middle of a two-year program and now you're going to switch to a one-year program so the students who are already in education programs are paying a lot more. How is that going to go?

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Everything that this government has done could be described as a smash and grab. We've seen this government try and take the greenbelt from the people of the province, \$8 billion worth of value. Ontario Place: They gave a for-profit foreign spa a 100-year lease. Skills Development Fund: hundreds of millions of dollars went to insiders, including \$10 million to a strip club buddy of this government, and the Premier's family dentist also received money from the Skills Development Fund.

So you can understand why when this government gives themselves the power over land acquisitions when it comes to school boards that people think this is business as usual. The real estate holdings of school boards across the province are very vast and very expensive and very attractive to insiders and developers of this government.

Without providing any clear evidence as to why they are doing this, why they need this power, do you think people are right to suspect that this has everything to do with the land and real estate holdings of the—

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

Response?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I want to thank my colleague from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas for the question.

It's an important question, because we have seen this repeatedly. We know that there were favours that had to be paid back after the greenbelt scandal was cancelled. We see the same thing; we see this happening with school properties in prime real estate. We see this happening with the conservation authorities that are being amalgamated in order to make it easier to sell off prime real estate—again, to their buddies.

So, yes, it's a very serious concern. Frankly, it's appalling. We keep seeing the same story again and again. We see power being heaped onto the government without any accountability whatsoever.

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: Bill 101, along with many other things it's doing, is modernizing the education system and simplifying the child care registration. What we're trying to do through this is assign the Ontario education number at birth as part of ServiceOntario's newborn bundle rather than when they enrol at the time of school—which, in other words, will replace 140,000 manual OEN assignments each year, helping the parents, reducing the red tape, supporting them so that they don't have to do it again and the child care wait-list can be seamless.

What is your opinion about all these things which we're doing through this bill?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: The government wants to register children when they're born. Parents want to register their children when they take them to school. I just don't see how this is adding anything to the quality of education that students are actually receiving. I would much rather see the government stop pretending that it's giving money when it has actually removed an enormous amount of money and actually support students and teachers so that the teachers can do the jobs they are so committed to doing.

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

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

She had mentioned that about 50 times there's legal protections in this bill for the government and that students are mentioned three times. Also in the bill, if you're looking for mental health, which students need, or smaller class sizes, or special education—those three things are not mentioned even one time in this bill. Those should be tenets of trying to create a better education system.

I'm wondering for this—for my colleague: Do you think the reason that legal protections are here so often is because of what's happened with the greenbelt scandal and the Premier trying to shield his phone records by bringing in freedom-of-information laws that prevent people from seeing what they're doing?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I want to thank my colleague from Sudbury for the question.

It's a pattern we've seen again and again. As I recall, there is built into the Ontario Place bill protection from actually being sued for malfeasance. We see it with the changes to the FOI—hiding evidence, hiding the workings of this government from the public.

We see it in this bill with 47 mentions of protecting the government and their supervisors from liability from, essentially, being held responsible for their actions. It is unacceptable. It's actually incredibly embarrassing and it's incredible that the government keeps trying to pull the same stunt.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you to the member for Thunder Bay–Superior North for highlighting some of the important “lacunes” in this bill.

I don't know if you're like me, but every time the Minister of Education tables a bill, I get hopeful. I get hopeful that maybe we're going to be addressing the real

issues, the real strain on our education system, but yet I remained disappointed.

Can you tell us what you would have liked to see in this education bill that is important for the people in Thunder Bay–Superior North when it comes to fixing our education system?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I want to thank the member for her question.

First of all, fix the transportation formula so that students in the north can get to school safely. Provide adequate funding so that teachers actually have the supplies that they need, that they can be purchased in bulk from the board. Make sure there are enough teachers that the class sizes are smaller, that there are enough EAs in the classroom. And frankly, make sure that the French-language system is protected as it is supposed to be—constitutionally—but it is at risk in the writing of this bill.

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

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you, Speaker, and good morning. Thank you to the member opposite for her remarks earlier.

My question is about supporting teachers with consistent, high-quality learning resources. Right now, teachers across the province of Ontario spend hours sourcing their own material online, on sites like Instagram, TikTok, when we already have the Trillium List for textbooks.

You know, we're looking to have teachers keep full flexibility to supplement the curriculum, but giving them a reliable, high-quality base to start with. Having those consistent resources across school boards for all teachers helps to ensure that students are getting consistent learning materials and curriculum all across the province of Ontario.

So my question for the member opposite is, do you support consistent, high-quality learning resources for teachers in the classroom across the province of Ontario?

0920

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Of course we need good-quality resources for teachers. At the moment, they're going to get this gift card so that they can get pencils and paper—remarkable. The question is, who is going to design those resources and who is funding it?

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

MPP Jamie West: I believe that the cut to the education since 2018 is \$6.4 billion. I do know that there's \$150 million less in this budget. That money isn't being spent on increased class sizes. Instead, it's being spent on supervisors who make \$400,000 a year, who aren't accountable to the public, who don't answer questions and who don't seem to be improving anything. Can you help me understand how this is working well for our students who are in larger classrooms?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Well, I'll say it is not working for our students. In fact, it is doing the opposite. It has created another massively expensive layer of bureaucracy. Parents get no information from these supervisors. In fact, they have actually banned live broadcasts of the disability

meetings that are so important to those parents. It's a lot of money for zero accountability, and it's money that is not going into classrooms. It's not going to support teachers. It's not going to support parents. It's not going to support students with special needs. It's going to reward insiders—people who, I guess, needed new jobs after they failed in running for office. It's been very, very distressing, sitting through this, watching the histrionics. Am I allowed to say that?

Interjection: No.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: No? I can withdraw it.

But the drama is created around, frankly, crises of the government's making. They have been working on this strategy for years, and we can see it echoed in the strategy of the Harris government of 1988. It is exactly the same song and dance to justify cutting funding to education.

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

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: I'm happy to rise and talk about something that affects every family, every community and the future of our province, and that is public education.

Ontario's education Bill 101 is being presented as a solution, a way to improve accountability, fix governance issues and ensure better outcomes for students. Let me be clear: We all want strong schools, we all want students to succeed and we all want accountability, but wanting those things does not mean that this bill delivers them. Because when we look closely—not at the slogans but at the structure—we see something else entirely. We see a shift: a shift in power, a shift in voice and a shift in who gets to participate in deciding the future of education in Ontario.

Let's start with the most fundamental concern, and that is the erosion of local democracy. For generations, school boards in Ontario have been governed by elected trustees, people chosen by their communities to represent local needs, local values and local priorities. Bill 101 doesn't completely eliminate trustees; it doesn't need to. Instead, it reduces their authority, caps their numbers, restricts their budgets and limits their ability to make meaningful decisions. In other words, it keeps the appearance of democracy while quietly removing its power.

We have to ask ourselves: What is the point of electing representatives if they no longer have the authority to represent us? Democracy is not just about voting. It's about influence, it's about accountability and it's about having a voice that actually matters, and this bill weakens that voice.

Secondly, this bill centralizes power in the hands of the provincial government. Under Bill 101, decision-making authority shifts away from locally elected boards and towards the Ministry of Education and appointed officials. New leadership structures, CEOs and chief education officers, will oversee operations and student outcomes. On paper, this could sound efficient, professional, streamlined, but here's the problem: These individuals are not elected. They are not directly accountable to parents, to communities or to voters. They are accountable upwards to the province, and that changes everything, because

when decisions are made far from the communities that they affect, those decisions often fail to reflect the realities on the ground.

A rural school board does not face the same challenges as an urban one might. A northern community does not have the same needs as downtown Toronto. A one-size-fits-all approach may be efficient, but it is rarely effective. Education is not something that can be governed entirely from a central office. It requires local knowledge, local input, local trust, and this bill risks replacing all of that with centralized control.

Third, there are serious concerns about accountability. The government argues that this bill improves accountability, that it ensures boards are better managed and more fiscally responsible. But again, accountability to whom? Under the current system, trustees answer to voters, and if they fail, they can be voted out. Under the proposed system, key decision-makers answer to the province only. And if something goes wrong, if policies fail, if resources are misallocated, who is held responsible? That line of accountability becomes blurred, and when accountability is unclear, trust erodes. Parents begin to feel disconnected, communities feel unheard and confidence in the system declines. Accountability should move closer to the people, not further away.

Fourth, this bill risks over-standardizing education. Bill 101 introduces greater provincial control over curriculum materials, testing and classroom expectations. Standardization can have benefits—it can create consistency; it can ensure minimum standards are met—but too much standardization comes at a cost. It limits flexibility, it reduces innovation and it ignores the diversity of student needs across this province. Teachers know their students, schools understand their communities, boards recognize regional differences and when decisions are imposed from the top down, that expertise, that knowledge is sidelined, and education becomes less responsive, less adaptable, less human. We should be empowering educators, not Restricting them.

Fifth, there's a risk of unintended consequences for student outcomes. The bill is called the Putting Student Achievement First Act, but nowhere is that promise guaranteed. Because improving student achievement is not just about governance structures; it's about class sizes, teacher support, mental health resources, infrastructure, community engagement. If we focus too heavily on control and compliance, we risk neglecting the factors that actually drive success in the classroom. Students don't benefit from power shifts; they benefit from support, stability and investment, and many are asking: Is this bill addressing the real challenges that students face, or is it focusing on administrative control instead?

The government has pointed to cases of financial mismanagement and governance issues with some school boards, and yes, those issues should be taken seriously. But we must ask: Are we solving specific problems or applying sweeping changes to address isolated cases? When broad policies are built on narrow problems, they often go too far. It's like using a sledgehammer when a

scalpel would do. Reform is necessary, but reform must be proportional. Otherwise, instead of improving the system, we would end up destroying it. Well, then, maybe that is the ultimate goal.

0930

There are concerns about long-term precedent that we must also think about. Policies like this don't just affect today; they shape tomorrow. If we normalize the idea that local governance can be overridden, centralized and reduced whenever problems arise, what comes next—changes to the municipal governance so that this government appoints municipal officers instead of electing them by the people? That's the next step, and we are already there.

This is not just about education; it's about the balance of power in our province. When that balance shifts, once it's gone, it's not easy to restore.

So what should we be asking ourselves instead? How do we strengthen school boards without silencing them? How do we support students by investing in what actually matters? What do we need? We need targeted oversight when it's needed, transparent financial practices, stronger collaboration between boards and the province and real investments in classrooms.

Education is not just another policy area; it is the foundation of our future. Bill 101 may be presented as a step forward, but we must ask whether it moves us forward in the right way, because progress is not just about change; it's about good change, change that strengthens our institutions, not weakens them. Ontario students deserve nothing less.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: I have a question for the member for Kanata–Carleton. It has to do with a part of the bill that modernizes teacher education. We're modernizing teacher education programs, saving aspiring teachers up to \$3,000 in tuition costs and reducing the time needed to launch a successful teaching career.

Added to that is the classroom practicum, the hands-on learning that prepares teachers for real classrooms. It's being maintained, and we're quadrupling the associate teacher honorarium, the \$635 to expand and strengthen placement opportunities.

My hope, Speaker, is that these changes, particularly because they deliver on commitments that all major parties have campaigned on—my hope will be that the member from Kanata–Carleton will stand in their place and support Bill 101.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Thank you to my honourable colleague. I believe that that particular thing about teacher education was in the Liberal Party platform in the last election. That was part of our platform.

I think that whatever we do to make the role of teachers—if we can prepare them better, if they can get—I do agree that in-classroom experience is really important. They do need more of that in their curriculum, let's say. So that part of the bill, I have absolutely no trouble with.

Again, it comes back to the centralizing of power, the removal of accountability. Those are the things that worry me in this bill.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to the member for her comments.

The government plans to limit the number and scope of school board trustees in favour of creating CEO and chief of education roles, and this bill will change school board bargaining for English boards, taking it away from trustee associations and giving it to government-appointed CEOs. What dangers do you see in that change?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: I thank my honourable colleague for the question.

Again, it comes down to accountability. Because trustees were elected, if they start to do things that make the electorate unhappy, they can always be removed in the next election. But with this—being appointed—there is no accountability. They're accountable only to the Minister of Education but not to the community as a whole, and that's a dangerous precedent.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you to my colleague for her remarks pointing out that the government is not focusing on the right priorities when it comes to the education system.

We talk about education a lot in here, because everybody cares and everybody hears from parents in their riding, from schools. I go in schools very often. It looks like right now we might not be able to do as much because there seems to be some restriction around attending graduations, which I think is a shame.

But on the point of what the priorities should be—like I said before, I always get hopeful when I see an education bill. But we talk about priorities. What should the government be focusing on when we're bringing about change to our education system?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Thank you to my honourable colleague for the question.

It comes back to smaller class sizes, because we know, when we're integrating students in an integrated classroom, there will be some students that will need a little bit of extra support. So make those class sizes smaller.

Secondly, make sure that that specialized support is there. And we've also seen the crisis of violence in schools. That requires—more mental health support, I would imagine, is the right way to go there.

We need more people in schools in order to make sure that education is progressing the way we need it to progress.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: I'm pleased to stand and give some comments on Bill 101.

This bill gives the minister increased power over schools and boards, including books, grades and exams, school budgets, board communications, land acquisition

and building projects, as well as trustee pay and expenses. It seriously reduces the powers of trustees and school boards in English-language boards—public and Catholic—to represent their communities, instead giving power to a new business-oriented chief executive officer who can overrule democratically elected and accountable trustees.

The government plans to limit the number and scope of school board trustees in favour of creating CEO and chief of education roles. This bill changes school board bargaining for English boards, taking it away from trustee associations and handing it to the Council of Ontario Directors of Education, which will now be made up of the new government-appointed CEOs—a troubling trend that we're seeing all over the municipal sector.

Nothing in this bill will improve outcomes for students or ensure they have smaller class sizes, special education and mental health supports—as we are always hearing in our community are desperately needed—or even basic resources like pencils in classrooms.

Rather than putting student achievement first, this bill is all about putting the Minister of Education first. It vastly expands his powers and creates a new layer of bureaucracy but limits the advocacy and support that parents receive.

This government is more focused on controlling classrooms than improving them. Bill 101 gives the minister power over grades, textbooks and school operations. That kind of top-down control undermines educators and distracts from the urgent need to reduce class sizes and improve learning conditions.

Also in the bill, there are 57 clauses regarding protection of the minister, cabinet and the minister's appointees against legal cases, but only one clause in the bill on student achievement.

It eliminates the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. OCUFA says this removes any measure of accountability or transparency in the post-secondary sector, giving the government the power to interfere without consulting experts or engaging with fact-based evidence. It also gives the ministry of colleges and universities the power to police free speech on campus.

0940

In addition to giving the minister more power, it seems to be designed to discourage good people from running for trustee, and the minister has already said he will appoint people where there are no trustees elected.

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, ETFO, who I have the pleasure of working with in my community, says, "The proposed legislation removes trustees from the central bargaining tables and shifts local bargaining away from trustees to ... CEOs. This upends decades of established labour relations and eliminates a core democratic safeguard. Trustees have been central-table partners since 2014, when the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act created Ontario's two-tier bargaining model, and have held a statutory role in local bargaining since 1975 under Bill 100. That's decades of democratic responsibility and oversight now put at risk by" this "government. ETFO will review the legislation to deter-

mine how these changes may impact central and local bargaining further"—so, having workers' rights under attack here, Madam Speaker.

The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association said, "Catholic teachers are deeply concerned by" the Minister of Education's "anti-democratic plan to centralize control at Queen's Park, reduce the role of locally elected school board trustees, and disrupt the collective bargaining process. If implemented, the government's proposed legislation would remove critical education experience and local voices from the ... table."

We've heard the minister stand up and say that he is working on behalf of teachers. These are teachers and their unions who are saying their voices are being removed from the system.

"School board trustees are elected and can be held accountable by their ... communities. The minister has made clear that the government's new chief executive officer position will be accountable to Queen's Park alone—and not to local parents.

"This silences our families and local communities"—and I have heard that in my community and I'm sure my colleagues are hearing it in communities all over Ontario—"the very people who keep our schools strong. At the bargaining table, by replacing trustees with CEOs, the government is removing critical education experience and expertise, as well as local voices, limiting the ability of parents to advocate for the resources students deserve."

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association says, "Over the past several months, we have seen troubling decisions made in supervised boards without public consultation—decisions such as changing school bell times, lifting class size caps, eliminating programs, closing schools, and reducing supports for students in high-needs communities and those with special education needs. These decisions are being made by highly paid individuals—making as much as \$350,000 a year—accountable only to the Minister of Education, not to local communities.

"In early March, groups representing all levels of the education sector called on" this minister "to consult with them on the rumoured governance changes. No consultations occurred. We continue to call on the minister to provide a clear and transparent plan to return the supervised" school "boards to stable, locally accountable governance. There is still no publicly available list of goals or tasks that the supervised boards need to achieve in order for supervision to be concluded. Students, families, and staff deserve to understand how decisions impacting their classrooms are being made and how local voices will be restored."

This government is doing nothing to address the staffing crisis, hurting students every day. Ontario schools are dealing with teacher shortages and fewer one-on-one supports for students. Instead of hiring more caring adults, the Premier is focused on yet another power grab.

Families are already paying more out of pocket because of cuts, and this bill offers no relief. When supports like mental health services, special education and nutrition

programs fall short, parents are forced to fill the gap. Centralizing control won't put more supports in classrooms. Too many students are falling behind because they don't have the special education and mental health resources they need and deserve.

Bill 101 ignores the crisis in school infrastructure. Students are learning in schools with leaking roofs, aging buildings and massive repair backlogs. Instead of fixing school, this government is instead focused on consolidating power.

This is a terrible bill that everyone except this government is opposed to. It clearly requires sober second thought, and I move to adjourn this debate.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Mr. Burch has moved the adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading debate adjourned.

PUTTING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT FIRST ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 DONNANT LA PRIORITÉ À LA RÉUSSITE DES ÉLÈVES

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 16, 2026, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

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

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member for Niagara Centre, where we left off, was debating the bill, so I return to the member for Niagara Centre.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you, Speaker—I think.

In Niagara, in my neck of the woods, severe underfunding has led to extreme understaffing in both the District School Board of Niagara and the Niagara Catholic District School Board. As a result, student needs are going unmet and incidents of violence have increased—and that's been reported very much in the local newspaper. That's according to a survey of education workers by the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Ontario School Board Council of Unions. The survey included more than 12,000 respondents from across Ontario, with more than 700 from Niagara-area school boards.

Interjection.

Mr. Jeff Burch: And I now move adjournment of the House, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Based on the guidance of the table that no member may move adjournment of the House during morning debate—

Mr. Jeff Burch: I tried.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I acknowledge the request of the member and will rule that out of order.

I return to the member who still has the floor, the member for Niagara Centre.

Interjection: What's going on in Niagara?

Mr. Jeff Burch: There's lots going on in Niagara, Speaker.

One of the things that's going on in Niagara is that school offices are over-burdened by increasing demands, cleaning is neglected and necessary repairs are often delayed or left incomplete. These are some of the challenges that schools are facing, and instead this government is attacking democratic rights in our region. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): And thank you. That is time.

Questions?

M^{me} France Gélinas: We all know that the pandemic was hard on everyone, including on our kids in school. We have seen a rise in the number of kids who face mental health challenges. I'm really happy that stigma has changed. Families do reach out when their kids need mental health care.

Unfortunately, in my neck of the woods, they will be put on 18-month wait-lists before they can see anyone, which means that a lot of kids with sometimes serious mental health issues attend our school every day. This is something that needs to be addressed urgently.

Do you see this in the bill as an emergency that is getting the attention that it needs?

0950

Mr. Jeff Burch: I thank my friend from Nickel Belt for the question. It's a question that hits close to home. My wife, Linda, is the volunteer coordinator at Pathstone, the children's mental health agency in Niagara. Of course, we've seen increased wait-lists. My son was actually in grades 7 and 8 during the pandemic, so it's a very good question. There's nothing in this bill that address that. Those are the things that we believe the government should be focused on rather than taking democratic control out of school boards.

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

MPP George Darouze: We're going to move the question from Niagara to York. At York Catholic District School Board, trustees burned through seven different directors of education in just nine years, hiring and firing senior leadership at will, holding board operations hostage to political games.

Bill 101 ends that revolving door by requiring ministerial approval before a CEO can be terminated, ensuring qualified professionals—not warring trustees—lead the day-to-day operation of multi-billion-dollar organizations responsible for the education of our children.

The question is, why does the member opposite want to preserve a system where trustees can fire seven leaders in nine years and call it good governance?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to the member for the question. Look, there are all kinds of attacks going on against local democracy, and this is one of them. I mean, the member can point to all of the scandals that he wants; this government itself is not without scandals. If we were going to appoint people instead of electing them, there would be no members left in the government side.

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

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Four trustees at the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board went on a \$45,000 trip to Italy under the guise of purchasing artwork for a new high school in Brantford—a trip the trustees themselves authorized after quietly rewriting their own expense policy days earlier to allow business class flights and luxury hotels, colleagues. After legal fees managed the fallout, the total cost to taxpayers ballooned to \$190,000—money that was supposed to go to students in Brantford classrooms.

Bill 101 finally puts an end to this kind of abuse by capping trustee honoraria at \$10,000, eliminating discretionary expense accounts and giving the minister the tools to hold trustees accountable.

How can the member opposite stand in this House and vote against legislation that would prevent another \$190,000 junket to Italy on the backs of Ontario students?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to the member for the question. I'm going to repeat the answer from my last question. You know, Vegas—massages in Vegas—I mean, do you want me to list all of the things that your government has done? It doesn't justify taking away democracy just because there's corruption. You address the corruption; you don't take away democracy and start appointing people and engaging in even more corruption.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: There was some discussion yesterday on this bill about constitutionality. I wanted to make the point that there is compliance with constitutional rights in this legislation. In order to underscore that, in schedule 2 of the bill, in paragraph 17.3—it's kind of a legal issue—it specifically says this act “does not apply with respect to an application for judicial review” or “a claim for constitutional remedy....”

I believe that it provides the constitutional safeguards—which, even if it weren't stated, would still be there anyway.

I just invite the member to comment on that in any way he chooses to do so.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I honestly have no idea what the member just asked. But the bill doesn't address the staffing shortage. It doesn't address what's happening with students in classrooms. It doesn't address, as my friend from Nickel Belt pointed out, the terrible situation with children's mental health in the province. It doesn't address any of the problems, and trying to confuse things with legal mumbo jumbo doesn't make this bill any better.

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

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to my colleague on this debate. There has been a lot of conversation today about being fiscally prudent. I want to point out that our debt today in Ontario under the Conservative government is \$485 billion. That's a 50.15% increase from when they took office. The deficit is \$13.8 billion. That is almost 77% higher than last year.

You would think that this has ballooned because we're investing more and more into students, into our children

for education. But the reality is, there has been a \$6.35 billion cut to education, increased class sizes and reduced supports for students. There has been an increase of about \$400,000 for these appointed supervisors, who don't seem to be helping the students. And we do know that the Premier's office now has a payroll of \$8 million for the 50 people working for the Premier.

I'm just wondering, do you think that children in the classrooms would be better off if there were 50 people working for them?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to my friend for the question. One of the things we try and teach kids is to lead by example. We have a government that doesn't lead by example. As was pointed out, this is just typical: get rid of some elected people and hire high-priced middle-management bureaucratic people. We see it in our health care system with middle management people, we see it in our education system, and we see it in our municipal system.

They're attacking municipal councillors across the province and appointing people, while they've down-loaded—from 2019 to 2026, it's gone from \$3.5 billion to \$5.5 billion in provincial responsibilities onto municipalities. So they can't even do their job anymore as municipalities because they're trying to pay for things that this government is responsible for.

I guess the message is that they should lead by example.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question? I recognize the member for Ottawa—Vanier, quickly.

Mme Lucille Collard: Again, I think the government's got their priorities wrong. I think that what's in this bill doesn't address the needs in our education system, and there's so much we could do and so many things we should be doing to help our kids succeed in our classrooms and have a better education.

I got into the education system because I couldn't believe how many portables there were in our schools—the schools my kids were going to—and I really wanted that to change. What would you like to see in this bill to help the kids at school?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A very quick response from the member from Niagara Centre.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I completely agree. Thank you to the member for the question. As I mentioned in my speech, students are learning in schools with leaky roofs, aging buildings, massive repair backlogs. Those are the things that this government should be focused on, not on messing around with internal structures and getting rid of democratically elected people and appointing their cronies at \$300,000 or \$400,000 a year. That's what we want to see on this side of the House. But in all of these areas, whether it's school boards or municipalities, this government just wants to install their own friends and cronies in these jobs, pay them \$200,000 or \$300,000 and ignore the real problems.

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: Madam Speaker, before I start my remarks, I will be sharing my time with the chief government whip, the member from Perth–Wellington.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to talk about Bill 101, the Putting Student Achievement First Act, 2026. This bill is jointly proposed by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security.

If you look at the heart of this bill, as you know, the government is making historic investments in education that put students, parents and teachers first. These investments are focused on improving outcomes in the classroom and ensuring the success for our students. Parents and caregivers should be confident that these resources are reaching the classroom and these resources are directed to support student achievement and educators who are preparing students for a stronger and prosperous Ontario.

1000

Madam Speaker, I'll be talking more about what is proposed by the Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security. As we all know, colleges and universities play a critical role in Ontario's success. They prepare workers for in-demand jobs and institutions make sure the needs of learners and employers are taken care of.

What we are doing in this bill is, we are proposing changes that condense teacher education programs to 12 months over three consecutive semesters, as opposed to the current model of four semesters over two years. Another thing we'll be trying to do through this bill is establishing a new minimum length of practicum. As we all know, with work-integrated learning, over and over the data shows that when you have the learning as part of the work, you learn more and you learn faster and you stay longer and you contribute more. Across the country, as we know, practicums range from 70 days to 120. Teachers, faculties, students and school boards have been clear that in order to best prepare for a successful teaching career, our teacher candidates need as much time as possible in the classroom.

These changes would apply across the system to all 14 publicly assisted and three private faculties of education, to both English and French, saving students up to \$3,000—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I apologize to the member for interrupting him. I have stopped the clock.

Could side conversations please consider the fact that there is a member speaking that I am unable to hear—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): — who has the floor and I will be happy to hear him continue his speech.

I will return to the member from Mississauga–Malton, with apologies for the interruption.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciated that.

Madam Speaker, I was talking about that these changes would reduce the financial barrier to launching a successful teaching career by saving students up to \$3,000 in tuition.

As we all know, teachers are essential to Ontario's future. What we're doing through the bill is modernizing teacher education, investing in capacity, shortening time to entry and expanding responsible pathways.

Our government is ensuring that more qualified educators can enter classrooms sooner, without sacrificing quality. This approach saves candidates time and reduces cost. It trains them for successful careers and good-paying, in-demand jobs, and it ensures that students across Ontario have access to well-prepared teachers. As a whole, this approach will strengthen our education system, support families and build the workforce Ontario needs to remain competitive in the years ahead.

I urge everyone and I look forward to continuing this work with the Ministry of Education and our partners across the sector. It is time to stand up for our students and educators and support Bill 101.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member said he was sharing his time, and I recognize the member for Perth–Wellington.

Mr. Matthew Rae: It's great to rise this morning on a very foggy Thursday morning to talk about a very important piece of legislation, colleagues: Bill 101, education 101 in the province of Ontario, and this important piece of legislation that the Minister of Education has brought forward to strengthen our great education system across Ontario and bring transparency, accountability and modernization, colleagues, to our education system.

I know that some of you in this place will know that I did have the pleasure of serving as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education—

Interjection.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to the member from Whitby for that round of applause—when the member from King–Vaughan was the Minister of Education, and I know that when we were there, I found it perplexing that we still have an education system that was designed for a one-room school. Our education system was set up in the late 19th century, more or less when our country was forming and our province was being created. It was designed for a system where it was obviously classroom learning, a professor or a teacher at the front.

Obviously, education and technology have evolved since the late 19th century. I know the three previous Ministers of Education under this Premier have brought forward a plethora of initiatives, whether it's around curriculum development, whether it's around mental health supports in classrooms. Colleagues, I know it's been talked about a lot by some of the opposition members.

I remember when I was in the Ministry of Education, serving as a parliamentary assistant, I was pleased to work with the then Minister of Education from King–Vaughan on increasing the mental health supports to our students in the schools. Now it's obviously higher, but at that time,

four years ago now, we increased it to \$125 million annually in mental health supports for students in our schools.

I also remind colleagues around the support that we provide our primary care expansion. I meet with a lot of my family health teams. I have, I think, the most family health teams or primary care interdisciplinary teams in the province. They actually look at hiring child psychologists and other medical experts to work with our local school boards in that as well, ensuring they're then in our health care system and getting those additional supports in school, but outside of school as well. So a lot of government investment may not directly be focused on the Ministry of Education, but is supporting our students and children in their communities and across all communities.

Speaker, I know—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Don't worry, Speaker. I can talk over them.

Interjection: She can't hear you.

Mr. Matthew Rae: She can't hear me? This is the closest a member can be to the Speaker. She's probably telling me to quiet down.

Interjection: She has you in her sightline, too.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Yes.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Speaker, I had the pleasure of hosting the current Minister of Education from Markham–Stouffville last week in my riding. We had the opportunity to tour a local school being built. The Drayton Catholic elementary school will open in September 2027. It is the first new elementary school in my riding in a few years, with over 200 student spaces. But more importantly, there are also 64 child care spaces. That's important because it's in a portion of my riding that doesn't have any licensed child care providers.

We're making this \$20-million investment in the community of Mapleton and Drayton. It was great to have the Minister of Education out there last week, as I mentioned, touring the site. Obviously, with the rain we've been having in Perth–Wellington, it was a muddy site. But seeing that progress—they've already start putting up the walls around the child care, and I know many people in my community have appreciated that.

I bring that up, Speaker, because this bill will allow the minister to ensure that we get more schools built quickly across the province of Ontario. I think of the Near North board, which encompasses North Bay and Parry Sound, where they literally built half a school and then they walked away from that. That's not acceptable, and that's why we're bringing forward this piece of legislation: to ensure accountability and transparency on making big capital decisions.

As I mentioned, the elementary school in the community of Drayton is a \$20-million build now. Obviously, high schools, which are larger, are even more. So it's vital to ensure that our capital budget, well over \$16 billion in the Ministry of Education, is spent in a transparent and accountable way. This is the taxpayers' money, as the

Premier likes to remind us in our caucus, and I know that's a focus of our government members. It's ensuring that we spend that money in an appropriate manner.

Colleagues, I know potentially later today, potentially next week, my colleagues across the way will have an opportunity to vote for this piece of legislation, and they have a decision to make. Will they stand with the trustees that take junkets to Italy and buy Italian art, or will they stand with the hard-working people in Perth–Wellington, Essex and Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, and vote with us to ensure that we continue to support Ontario?

I move this question now be put.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): There having been nine hours of debate and 27 members having participated, Mr. Rae has moved that the question be now put. I am satisfied that there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House.

It is the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

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

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Orders of the day.

Hon. Steve Clark: No business.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): There being no further business, this House stand in recess until 1015.

The House recessed from 1010 to 1015.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

VAISAKHI

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: Speaker, April is Sikh Heritage Month, a time to recognize and celebrate the history, culture and contributions of Sikh Canadians who have helped shape Ontario and our great country of Canada for the better.

It's a privilege to rise in the House today to extend warm wishes to Sikhs across Ontario and around the world celebrating Vaisakhi. Vaisakhi marks the creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh Ji in 1699—a defining moment that established a community grounded in equality, courage and selfless service. Khalsa Sajna Divas reminds us of the responsibility to stand for justice, to serve others and to contribute to the greater good. This spirit will be on full display at the Khalsa Day parades taking place in Toronto on April 26 and in Etobicoke on May 3, where hundreds of thousands will come together in celebration of faith, community and service.

On behalf of this House, I would like to wish everyone celebrating a happy Vaisakhi and a happy Khalsa Sajna Divas. Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh.

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN WEEK

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: This week, we are proud to mark the second annual Orthodox Christian Week in Ontario—a moment that carries deep meaning for so many families and communities across our great province.

Once again, I want to thank all the members of Ontario's Legislature who unanimously supported my bill to establish an annual Orthodox Christian Week in Ontario. Most of all, I want to thank Orthodox Christians across our great province for coming together to make this a reality for us all.

Ontario's diversity is its strength, and for over a century, Orthodox Christians have been arriving here and strengthening the communities they live in, contributing enormously to the social, cultural and economic life of our province.

Like so many other faiths and cultures in Ontario, Orthodox Christians are now formally honoured and recognized each year.

This Friday, religious leadership from Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox dioceses across Ontario will gather to celebrate here at Queen's Park in unity and shared purpose. I would like to recognize and deeply thank this year's hosts, the Georgian Orthodox Church and the Armenian Apostolic Church of Canada.

Happy Easter, and happy Orthodox Christian Week.

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: National Volunteer Week is here, and I want to take some time to thank amazing volunteers in Kanata–Carleton—those who volunteer at the Kanata Food Cupboard, Chrysalis House, the Western Ottawa Community Resource Centre, and all of the amazing community association volunteers who work so hard to make their communities better. They make such a big difference.

The Kanata Greenspace Protection Coalition is a group of Kanata residents concerned about losing their green space and the potential that uncontrolled development could poison the watershed. They showed up in cold, damp weather to rally together and to share their concerns.

And let me talk about two high school students I'm meeting tomorrow. Seb and Tianshu are collecting petition signatures, and they want to discuss their concerns about the changes to OSAP and the devastating consequences these changes will have on those wanting to pursue post-secondary education.

When I think of these two students and all these other volunteers, I am reminded of Margaret Mead's words: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

I am so grateful to you all.

CARLETON STUDENTS AND CONSTITUENCY OFFICE

MPP George Darouze: I rise today to recognize a special group of guests who joined us at Queen's Park on April 1: a number of outstanding students from Carleton University. As Matthew Cairney, Benjamin Scharf, Lauren Weldon-Vaughn, James McLaren, Evan Lecours, Daisy Hagens and Colin McKay walked the halls of the Legislature, I was reminded that they are not only students today, but the leaders, innovators and decision-makers of tomorrow. Ontario's future is bright because of them. I would like to thank you, Speaker, as well as many of our ministers and colleagues who took the time to speak with the students and make it an informative trip.

I would also like to take a moment to recognize my hard-working constituency office staff from Carleton, who were also invited to Queen's Park that day. Whether the House is in session or not, they are in Carleton supporting residents, solving problems and ensuring that constituents receive the assistance they need. The team includes Stephanie Nelson, Jane DiRaimo, Candice Coates, Ethan Smith and Owen Murdoch, who work closely with my EA here in Queen's Park, Katherine Tsekareas.

1020

To the students and the Carleton constituency team, thank you for your commitment to learning and your service to our community.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, London now leads the country with 9.1% unemployment, the highest in Canada. This is a devastating blow for workers in our community, and it should be a wake-up call for this government to finally address the jobs disaster that is unfolding in southwestern Ontario.

Behind this statistic are real people: workers in health care, manufacturing and education who have lost good, stable jobs; recent grads who can't find employment; students whose co-ops and internships are being cancelled. This not only hurts young people, workers and their family; it hurts our economy. And it leaves Londoners without access to the skilled workers they rely on.

At a time when cost-of-living pressures are higher than ever, fear of job loss just adds another layer of anxiety for workers struggling to get by in a community where poverty continues to deepen, where 2,000 Londoners are chronically homeless, 7,000 are on year-long wait-lists for social housing, and food bank usage is at an all-time high.

Instead of a real plan to protect London workers and create good stable jobs, this government's solution is to waste taxpayer dollars on a downtown Toronto luxury spa and fantasy projects that no one asked for and that will do nothing to help our city. Londoners cannot afford more government inaction while their livelihoods and hopes for the future disappear.

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: This past February, I was honoured to hold my third annual non-profit appreciation event in Newmarket.

Firstly, I would like to thank my dear colleague and friend the MPP from Richmond Hill, Daisy Wai, for her leadership in bringing Bill 9, non-profit appreciation week, to fruition—a bill that received unanimous support from all provincial parliamentarians in 2021. I cannot think of a better way to ensure that the work that non-profit organizations do every single day is indeed recognized.

It is important to recognize individuals and organizations who make our community stronger, kinder and more vibrant every single day. I was pleased to welcome more than 40 of our local non-profit organizations from various sectors: those who hold beautiful community events that bring us all together, like York Pride, 108 Health Promotion, TCMA, Hindu Sanatan Kendra of York-Simcoe Region, Senior Iranian Multicultural Association and more; to those who provide essential services for people at various stages in life—Newmarket Soccer Club, CHATS, the ABLE Network, Communauté du Trille blanc, Community Living Central York—and to all those who stand beside those who are facing the most challenging moments.

Their dedication is nothing short of extraordinary. They nourish the spirit of our community. This is why we take a moment to celebrate them and thank them.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr. John Vanthof: As we sit here, once again, Highway 11/17, the 17 portion by Upsala is closed—again, a multi-vehicle accident. I'm sure I convey for everyone in the House our hope that no one is seriously injured.

But this happens time and time and time again. On Tuesday, April 21, we will be discussing or debating an NDP motion to actually make Highway 11/17 an issue of provincial significance. Because it is the Trans-Canada Highway, and it's continually blocked, and people continually lose their lives needlessly.

This shouldn't be a partisan issue, and this isn't a partisan motion. It's a motion where we all we can work together to try and solve this issue on behalf of the country. It's not just about pavement. It's not just about maintenance standards. It's not just about driver training. It's a very complicated issue, but all those issues have something to do with it. But the fact remains that Highway 11/17 is the Trans-Canada Highway through this province, and we should be ashamed in Ontario of what's happening on that stretch of road and why the rest of the country can make it work and we can't.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Earlier this month, I was proud to join the Minister of Health and the Minister of Long-Term

Care and the acting Minister of Infrastructure at the Queensway Health Centre in Etobicoke–Lakeshore for the official opening of the first MRI machine. With a provincial investment of \$800,000, it will support an additional 3,000 scans this year. There are now five MRI machines across the Trillium Health Partners network, providing access to timely diagnostics and care for patients in both Mississauga and Etobicoke.

Earlier this week, I joined the Ministers of Labour and Red Tape Reduction at Cinespace Studios in Etobicoke–Lakeshore, a major production hub for high-profile series like *Law and Order Toronto* and *Cry Wolf*. We announced an important new measure to improve the oversight of talent agents and a ban on employers charging employees for required uniforms to ensure that workers can't be forced to pay out of their pocket.

Speaker, these were two very different announcements, but they share a common purpose: removing barriers, whether it's an MRI wait time list or out-of-pocket costs just to go to work. From investing in better access to care to putting more money back in workers' pockets, we're taking action in our hospitals and in our workplaces to support people where it matters most, to make life easier and more affordable for people in Etobicoke, in Mississauga and across this province of Ontario.

RURAL ONTARIO

Mr. Matthew Rae: It's a pleasure to rise this morning to share some great news for the riding of Perth–Wellington about some significant investments that our government has been making in rural Ontario.

I know budget 2026 had a lot of great initiatives, whether it comes to infrastructure expansion, health care funding and a variety of other supports for our businesses impacted by the US tariffs. And I know it's great to be able to share with my colleagues in this place that just over a year ago—in that time period—working together with communities in Perth–Wellington, my office and I have been able to secure over \$62 million in infrastructure funding for communities across Perth–Wellington.

Speaker, this goes to important projects that build roads, bridges, roundabouts, but also, more importantly, waste water infrastructure. Because at the end of a pipe is a new home—a home that a family can move into and can rent or own. I know it's important that we continue to do that, so it's great to see that in this provincial budget—\$4 billion for the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program.

Health care was a key component of the provincial budget as well, and I'm pleased to share with this place that since the last provincial election in 2025—again, working with local health care workers—we've been able to secure 51 million net new dollars in health care funding for Perth–Wellington.

We are not done as a government, and we'll continue to invest in rural Ontario.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

MPP Alexa Gilmour: In the members' gallery today is Michael Compeau. Michael was a high school educator. Now retired, he is an artist growing in fame in Ontario. His art is inspired by nature, and I am inspired by his art. Welcome to your House, Michael.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Today's page captain is Manuthi, and I'm happy to welcome her grandmother Chandra; father, Nirosh; mother, Savithri; and younger sister Tenaya to Queen's Park. Welcome to the Ontario Legislature.

MPP Jamie West: I would like to welcome a proud member of IBEW and candidate for Pickering city council, Jamie Nye, and also his campaign manager, Virginia Vidal, to the Legislature today. Welcome to the House.

Hon. Mike Harris: If you will indulge me for a minute, it's a very, very special day in our house: It's my daughter Gemma's 10th birthday. She's watching live right now, so do you think we might be able to do a happy birthday for Gemma, Madam Speaker?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I think so. Kill the clock.

1030

Singing of Happy Birthday.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Introduction of visitors?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Speaker, in the gallery today we have a blue-shirted individual. He is a business student from McMaster University. He's Andrew Leardi, my son.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Welcome to Queen's Park.

I recognize the member from Scarborough–Agincourt.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Madam Speaker, thank you very much. I am not sure if it's an appropriate time, but you can direct me. I wish my mother a happy 90th birthday. She is healthy, living on her own, and she is a self-sufficient lady.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): With the number of birthdays, I guess spring fever really is a thing.

OPPOSITION DAY MOTIONS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Yesterday, the leader of the official opposition and the member for Toronto–St. Paul's each filed notices of opposition day motions for consideration next week. I have selected the notice standing in the name of the leader of the official opposition to be debated. The third party's notice will be removed from the orders and notices paper.

QUESTION PERIOD

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, Speaker. A couple of weeks ago I met with members of Manitoba's NDP government cabinet, including Finance Minister Sala. It was refreshing to meet with a government that is truly putting

working people first and committed to transparency and accountability.

One of the ways that they're doing that is by cracking down on predatory pricing. Companies in Manitoba, whether it's online or in stores, cannot change prices for people based on individual algorithms. In Manitoba that means that companies can't spy on you, steal your data and charge you higher prices. Unfortunately, they can still do that in Ontario.

So my question to the Premier is, will your government follow the lead of the NDP government in Manitoba and end predatory pricing here at home?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement.

Hon. Stephen Crawford: It's great to be able to speak here in the House.

It's great that the member opposite was in Manitoba. My question to her would be, actually, if I'm not mistaken, the leader of the NDP in Manitoba, the provincial Premier, spoke, as did the leader of the NDP opposition in Alberta, against the leader of the federal NDP. Is that something you would be willing to do in terms of where you're at?

So with that, let me say, Speaker, we have some of the strongest consumer protection laws in Canada right here in Ontario. We don't just have rules, we enforce them. We conduct inspections, we carry out investigations, we issue compliance orders, we lay charges and we hold bad actors accountable.

Speaker, we are aware of concerns being raised around practices like algorithmic pricing, and we're paying close attention. But let me be very clear: If a business is misleading consumers, if they're making false claims, if they're charging a price that is out of line—

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: That is bizarre. This should be an easy one, right? Just say yes. The NDP is doing it in Manitoba. The NDP is calling for it all across the country.

This Premier was afraid of Chinese spy cars but he's totally comfortable, apparently, with his tech buddies spying on everyday people and gouging them, by the way, at the grocery store, online or in the store. And groceries have never been more expensive.

Will this Premier do the right thing for once and end predatory pricing in Ontario?

Hon. Stephen Crawford: Listen, this is a government that has been focused on supporting consumers with issues and measures we've introduced year after year supporting consumers in Ontario, which the opposition has voted against time and time again.

Speaker, one of the highest contributors to the high cost of groceries is the gas tax and the carbon tax. We supported a 10-cent reduction in the gas tax, Speaker; the opposition voted against that. We scrapped licence plate sticker fees for eight million people, saving over \$200 a year per vehicle in the province. We dropped tolls on the 412 and the 418. We dropped tuition for university and college

students by 10% eight years ago—eight years ago. If we had not done that, it would be 20% higher today.

We also brought in the one-pass transportation cost, which saves consumers about \$1,200 a year. The LIFT tax credit—I could go on.

I'll answer more in the supplementary, Speaker.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I certainly hope we'll do better than that.

Look, we are in a cost-of-living crisis. This has been the defining issue of this government, after eight long years, and they have taken no action at all. Baby formula has gone up 81% since this Premier took office. Gas has been at \$2 a litre in many regions. Groceries are up more than 30% since this government was elected. People are being squeezed everywhere they turn and now we find out that big tech companies are spying on us and they are using our personal information to jack up prices.

It is time to once and for all give people in this province a break. Will the Premier do the right thing and ban predatory pricing in Ontario?

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Madam Speaker, it's great to rise again in the House to answer a question, so thank you for that question to the member opposite.

I think the member from Oakville answered the question extremely well with regard to predatory pricing, but I often wonder—we just went through Easter; do you remember Saul of Tarsus, who, on the road to Damascus, had a conversion? I'm just wondering: Are we witnessing a conversion that the opposition is now starting to think about affordability?

Madam Speaker, we capped the gas tax four years ago. They did not support it; they didn't vote for it. Now, Madam Speaker, perhaps a conversion is going to happen, because in the budget, we have the HST rebate, helping families buy a new home. We've got a tax cut for small businesses, helping families and small independent workers.

This is the time for their conversion. Vote for the budget. Vote for affordability.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: There's a finance minister who just tabled a budget that doesn't even mention groceries or affordability. Give me a break.

There you go, Speaker: We have a Premier and a government that are not willing to protect other people's private information, but they are willing to change the law to hide the Premier's receipts.

My question to the Premier: The courts have ordered the Premier of this province to release his phone records, and now he is changing freedom-of-information laws to shield his secret text messages from public access. I know that we're going to hear some of the same, tired, scripted responses from this government, but we are all getting pretty tired of it. We've seen too many backroom deals and

too many insider appointments to take this government at their word. What is the Premier hiding in those phone records?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery.

Hon. Stephen Crawford: Again, this is legislation that has been sitting on the books since 1988. That's almost 40 years ago. This legislation that was sitting on the books did not contemplate smartphones; it did not contemplate artificial intelligence, computers. The world we live in, the way we communicate, is very, very different.

Our government is focused on results: results for the people of Ontario and the results they will have—results we've been delivering on. They have open accessibility to all of government decision-making. Over 95% of what is available right now—and that includes all decisions, all public service records—is fully transparent and will continue to be.

We will continue to deliver the results for the people of Ontario. Most importantly, they will have—

Interjection.

Hon. Stephen Crawford: Sorry. Thank you, Speaker.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, back to the Premier: I want to remind folks here about Dr. Brooks Fallis. He was the medical director of critical care in the William Osler hospital and he is one of the complainants in the case to reveal the Premier's phone records. And there's a very good reason why.

In 2021, Dr. Fallis was very suddenly fired from his job after what he believes was undue influence from the Premier. The hospital network was extending his contract, but then suddenly they're firing him, apparently because of his outspoken public statements, which I remember—we all remember here—criticized this province.

1040

Is the Premier hiding his phone records because they would reveal calls and texts between the Premier and executives at William Osler?

Hon. Stephen Crawford: Again, as I reiterated, over 95% of what is available—and that includes government decision-making, most importantly. The people will hold our government to account by the decisions we make. We put legislation through the House. We have legislation currently through the House. People have full accountability. You may vote for or against it.

We will put this forward. We are in alignment with other jurisdictions not only in Canada but throughout the Westminster democracy, where cabinet confidentiality is essential. We are going to continue on that process, modernizing an outdated system, ensuring at the same time that the people have access to all government decision-making, and cabinet confidentiality will remain as such.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: It's always with this government about protecting the king, isn't it? Ontarians are seeing through this. If it wasn't clear enough already that the

Premier is hiding something, then it is pretty cut and dry right now because he is changing the laws of this province to do so.

We all know that these changes to the FOI laws are really about the Premier using his position to silence dissent, to shut down criticism, and now he is changing the law to hide the evidence.

When you weaken access to information, you weaken accountability. When you hide records, you hide the truth.

Back to the Premier: When will the Premier come clean about what he is hiding in those phone records?

Hon. Stephen Crawford: The members opposite have a lot to say about transparency, but they ignore the reality that every province in Canada, as well as the federal government, protects cabinet confidentiality. Ontario is not breaking new ground here, Speaker. On the contrary, we're bringing our laws within established practices here in Canada.

Across Canada, every province respects and protects cabinet confidence or executive council deliberations in their access-to-information laws: British Columbia, which, if I'm not mistaken, is an NDP-run province; Manitoba—perhaps the member should have discussed that with the Premier of Manitoba when she was there a few weeks ago, about the FOI—she probably didn't; Quebec; New Brunswick; Nova Scotia; Prince Edward Island; the federal government, Speaker.

Frankly, we will not take lectures about transparency from a party—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order. I will be warning people today. I'm warning you now, I have no problem warning people today.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, yesterday we learned that this Premier and this government lost 150 criminals. Yesterday, we asked 11 times—I repeat that, 11 times—about that. And we didn't hear once, "Yes, it's a problem. I'm trying to fix it. I'm worried about it." We didn't hear that at all. In fact, they laughed it off.

It's a serious situation. I don't think it's funny for the victims of the 150 criminals that are out there, that we don't know about, that are lost in the wind. People should be able to trust that someone who did something to them who is sent to jail will stay there.

So how can we take the Solicitor General's late admission that it was a problem and he was going to look into it seriously?

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'll say it again. I said it yesterday outside. It's completely unacceptable, and we have been fixing the problem since the day we inherited a serious problem of neglect in public safety from the opposition.

What we have done is, we have made changes administratively. We've made investments to make sure that

we've benefited from the digitalization with the Ministry of the Attorney General to make sure it doesn't happen. We're going to make sure that everybody is held to account.

But I'll say one more thing, Madam Speaker. I know, and the Deputy Solicitor General for corrections reaffirmed this yesterday, that if there was an improper release, those people are immediately re-apprehended and put back in jail, where they belong.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, we built as many beds as we had to close because Mike Harris left hundred-year-old jails. And this government can't be taken seriously, because in the House leader's riding, there has been a jail on the books for eight years, and there's not even a shovel in the ground. You can't take him seriously.

How does the minister expect us to take him seriously? He was briefed about this in January 2025. Nine months later, the situation didn't get better; it got worse. There were more people released in the first nine months of 2025 than there were in 2024. They lost more criminals in 2025 in nine months than they did in 2024.

So how can we actually believe that this minister is going to fix it if when he knew about the problem it got worse?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Well, Madam Speaker, I'll say it again: Any improper release is completely unacceptable. But when the ministry found that there was an improper release, those people were immediately re-apprehended and put in jail.

When the leader of the third party tries to scare Ontarians and make them forget their record of closing seven jails, never attending one graduation for the police, never visiting a fire hall, never meeting with an association—and when Bonnie Crombie says police are scary, that's your record.

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

Mr. John Fraser: You lost 150 criminals, Minister. You lost 150 criminals.

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

Mr. John Fraser: The minister was briefed in 2025. He didn't come out and say, "Look, there's a problem." Even yesterday, he didn't know there was a problem—or he made it like he didn't know there was a problem. But we found out through what? Does anybody know? FOI. Wow. An FOI, the same FOI that this Premier and this government are going to try to eliminate so we never find out. Can you imagine if this didn't happen for another couple of months? We would never have got it. It would have been retroactive.

So how many other secrets are they keeping? What are they keeping from the public? If we can't trust the Solicitor General to actually admit there's a problem when we ask him 11 times in here about it and it's like he doesn't even think it's a problem, how can Ontarians believe that this government is actually protecting their public safety?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: It's very simple: When there was an improper release, those people were re-apprehended instantaneously. I said that.

Madam Speaker, our record protecting Ontario stands on its own. Thousands of new police officers have been spread across the service because of the investments that we have made by paying the \$17,000 tuition for 2,100 individuals who join, by bringing thousands of new spaces, of new jail cells, online, just like we said. Our record of being tough on crime; on standing with families who have been victimized by murderers, by drug traffickers, by human traffickers, people that shoot a father in front of a child—we stand with them.

The opposition record of having Bonnie Crombie say police are scary, that's your record, and you know it.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. John Fraser: No matter how loud the Solicitor General speaks, how much he talks about police, he knew since January 2025, and yesterday, they couldn't answer the question 11 times.

So if you're the victim of an assault or a robbery or a carjacking or a home invasion, do you know what helps you sleep at night? That the criminal who did that is behind bars. That's not happening. They lost 150.

So a simple question to the Solicitor General: Will he report back to this Legislature the details of which criminals were released, what they were charged with, the reason they were mistakenly set free and a plan to ensure that it never happens again?

1050

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Improper releases are completely unacceptable, and stopped. What I can tell the Legislature is very simple: This government has been fixing a problem. We're fixing a problem by providing extra administrative supports. We're fixing a problem by making sure that the digitization of records is there. We're fixing a problem by making sure that we have better oversight. And we're fixing a problem because one is too many and we want to get that number to zero.

At the end of the day, because my friend across the aisle doesn't hear very well, I'll repeat it: Those people that were released improperly are back where they belong, almost instantaneously behind jail. That's how you protect Ontario.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I didn't hear the word "unacceptable" once in 11 questions. I didn't hear that yesterday. I didn't hear "unacceptable." I didn't hear any of what the Solicitor General said.

These folks like to blame everybody else, but the reality is, the Solicitor General and the Premier lost 150 criminals and they can't answer questions. They're gone. They're in the wind.

I said it yesterday, but maybe the Solicitor General will have an answer today. Can he explain to us what's behind the Premier's catch-and-release program?

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

Hon. Zee Hamid: I'd like to thank the leader of the third party for that question. I'll repeat the same thing the Solicitor General has been repeating repeatedly: Anyone who was improperly released and found out was immediately apprehended and brought back. It seems like the leader of the third party refuses to hear that. You can tell; they're not listening even right now.

Speaker, this problem was created by the mismanagement from that third party for 15 years—15 long, painful years. They took us back. They destroyed the system. They shut down seven jails when our population kept going up. And for eight years, when we've been building the system, when we've been building jails, when we've been hiring correctional officers, where have they been? Voting against every single thing because they choose to stand with criminals, with human traffickers, with sexual offenders, as opposed to us, who stand up for the hard-working men and women in uniform. We'll continue to do so.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Prove it. Prove your claims, Solicitor General. Prove it. I'm not hearing any proof. I just asked you for it. You're doing everything but.

The reality is, you've lost 150 criminals. Yesterday you didn't think it was a problem. It wasn't that you saw the light; it's that you felt the heat, and I hope you're feeling it right now, because it's unacceptable that a government would lose 150 criminals and not be able to report back to this House just exactly what happened, who got released, how it happened and how they're going to fix it. If the Solicitor General can't do that, then maybe somebody else should be doing that job.

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Madam Speaker, our record of standing with Ontarians to keep them safe speaks for itself. It can't be clearer: Improper releases are unacceptable.

I might say to the member opposite that what I'm going to do is find out, in the 15 years they were running the show, how many improper releases they had and what they did about it.

I can tell you what we're doing about it: We're fixing it. We're putting more administrative efforts in place to make sure that it doesn't happen. We're using technology. We're using digitization to make sure that everything is just so.

Madam Speaker, what I can't believe the opposition doesn't recognize is they left the correctional system broken beyond belief. That's why we've added thousands of beds. That's why we've added 2,000 correctional officers. That's why we're rebuilding our old jails. But at the end of the day, we won't compromise on one thing: protecting Ontario.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Minister of Education. Parents are here in the gallery today because they are alarmed by what the Conservative government is doing to our public schools and the one million children who attend them. This is what their kids are experiencing: overcrowded, large class sizes; schools being prepared for closure; hundreds of teacher layoffs; cuts to language programs; cuts to special education.

This is Jessica Roberts, a parent. She says, "Making cuts to classes for kids with disabilities tells us everything we need to know about this government's priorities."

Minister, what do you have to say to the parents here who are demanding this government stop the cuts and start prioritizing our schools?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Of course, the member opposite will know that education funding is at the highest level that it's ever been in provincial history. The member opposite will know that we've substantially increased special education funding in the province of Ontario.

But as I've said on many occasions, Madam Speaker, I don't think parents care that the opposition says I'm not spending enough or that I say I'm spending record levels. This is a story they've heard over and over and over again for the last 50, 60 years. A minister gets up and says, "I'm spending the most," and the opposition gets up—and the unions say, "You're not spending enough."

So here's what we're going to do. We're going to rebalance the system so that it's focused on student achievement. We're going to take the distractions out of the system, and we're going to focus again on giving teachers the resources they need so that our students can succeed.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member from University–Rosedale.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Minister, these parents came here today because the cuts made by this government are directly impacting their children. That is why they're here: They are alarmed.

The minister can say all he wants about what the budget is telling us according to him, but the facts tell a different story. These are the facts: The government is on track to cut another \$900 million from schools over the next two years. That is the Financial Accountability Officer—\$900 million.

Minister, how bad are you going to let public schools get before you stop the cuts and start investing in our kids instead?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member opposite obviously knows that the funding formula is based on student enrolment, so obviously, when student enrolment goes down, certain areas of education are readjusted. But despite the fact that enrolment has gone down across the system, we are still spending record amounts in public education. We have declining student enrolment across the system, and we are spending more than we ever have on education.

Again, it comes down to the same thing: When you're a \$43-billion ministry, I think the people of the province

of Ontario, the parents of the province of Ontario, expect that ministry to show leadership. That's what the bill in front of the House does: It shows leadership from the ministry. It puts more money back into our classrooms. It ensures accountability for our students. It removes the distractions and the fights between boards and parents so that teachers aren't put in the middle of that.

I know that's stressful for the opposition. I know it is, because they thrive on chaos. But what I think our students want is a system that works on their behalf. That's what this bill is about. It builds on the great work that was done by previous Ministers of Education to refocus the system on achievement.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Does anyone in the government benches know who said this: "The justice system is no longer just a revolving door for repeat ... offenders; the door is now wide open." Well, it was the Premier, and yesterday we learned that it was him who opened that door and lost 150 prisoners.

To the Solicitor General: Did you lose 150 prisoners due to your government's negligence, or due to its incompetence?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I'll remind the members to always address their questions through the Speaker.

I recognize the Solicitor General.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I'll say it again: Improper releases are completely unacceptable. We inherited a system that was brought down to its knees. We have been fixing it since the day this government came into office in June 2018.

And I'll say it again, Madam Speaker, so that the member can hear it: The improper releases—those people were re-apprehended within minutes. Those people were apprehended and brought back to justice.

At the end of the day, what the Liberals fail to realize is, they starved a system. They closed seven jails. They didn't attend police graduations. The member from Ottawa, the leader of the third party, had an opportunity to attend the largest graduating class at the Ottawa Police Service, and he wasn't there. Nobody was there.

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

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Well, Minister, your finger-pointing and circular answers aren't going to make anyone feel safe tonight—

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

1100

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Minister, your circular answers and finger pointing aren't going to make anyone feel safe tonight when they're at home, Speaker, trying to feel safe with their family.

Minister—through you, Speaker—documents obtained by the media through the freedom of information act show that you were briefed on this issue as early as January 2025

and you never once—never once—brought it to this House’s attention. Meanwhile, crime rates are going through the roof. Don’t take my word for it. Listen to this: three masked gunmen storm the Piper Arms pub in Scarborough Town Centre; 20-year-old man found fatally shot near the University of Toronto, Scarborough; boy, 14, wanted for attempted murder in Scarborough double shooting.

No wonder crime is out of control. You’re asleep at the switch and allowing criminals to walk through the front door of the prison

My question to the Solicitor General, Speaker, I’ll ask it again: Is this due to your government’s negligence or simple incompetence?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: When an improper release occurred, which was completely unacceptable, those prisoners were rearraigned and put back in jail almost instantaneously.

But I would ask the member opposite: When this government passed a budget that had so many examples of investments in our public safety—to build more jails; to give more money to police services, including his police service, Toronto Police Service, which is my police service. I want to thank the men and women from Toronto who work hard every day to keep us safe.

Why do you always vote no? You don’t have to vote no. You can stand with your police service—

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: —and you should be standing with 33 Division in Toronto and say thank you for—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Don Valley North has been warned. The member for Ajax has been warned.

I recognize the member for York South–Weston.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

MPP Mohamed Firin: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade.

Amid unprecedented global economic uncertainty, countries around the world are looking for reliable trading partners that respect the rules of free trade and are committed to building strong and stable relationships.

For us in Ontario, that means promoting our strengths on the global stage and opening new doors for our workers and businesses. It also means reducing our reliance on any single trading partner by strengthening ties with nations that share our values. Since 2018, our government has been laser-focused on delivering these goals.

Speaker, can the minister tell this House more about the work that’s being done to diversify Ontario’s trade and build lasting partnerships around the world?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, President Trump’s tariffs have shown us exactly why our efforts to diversify our trade are not only important, but they are absolutely critical. That’s why we continue to take unprecedented

actions to increase our trade with partners all across the world.

So here are some of the facts, Speaker: Since 2018, Ontario’s trade is up with India 88%; South Korea, up 94%; Switzerland, up 132%; Brazil, up 241%; Vietnam, our two-way trade is up 288%. Speaker, across every continent of the globe, we are now creating opportunities for our businesses and our workers.

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

MPP Mohamed Firin: I would like to thank the minister for those encouraging figures and for his great effort and tirelessly working to promote Ontario.

At a time of global economic uncertainty, it is more important than ever that Ontario continues to expand its reach beyond any single market and build strong reliable partnerships with allies around the world. Through our government’s proactive engagements, whether in Europe, Asia, or the Middle East, we’re seeing Ontario businesses gain access to new customers and new opportunities in fast-growing markets. Speaker, this is not about reducing reliance on one trading partner, but also about ensuring that Ontario-made products are reaching more markets than ever before and that our economy remains resilient in the face of global challenges.

Speaker, can the minister tell this House more about how these efforts are driving increased exports and strengthening Ontario’s presence in key international markets?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, since we were elected in 2018, we have seen our non-US exports increase by 74.5%. In Germany, our exports have increased nearly 81%. In Japan, our exports are up 44%. Poland is up 117% and, in the UAE, a 197% increase. Whether it’s cars, or medicine, or machinery, agricultural products or natural resources, there is a massive demand for products that are built right here in Ontario. The demand is all across the world.

Speaker, we’re going to continue our engagements across the globe, ensuring that Ontario remains front and centre. As Premier Ford has said many times, he wants every nut, every bolt, every widget to be built right here in the province of Ontario.

EDUCATION ISSUES

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: My question is to the Premier.

In a letter to the Minister of Education, the chair of Thames Valley District School Board’s special education advisory committee raised concerns about “secrecy” at the board and how the appointed supervisor has “significantly reduced ... engagement and transparency,” with decisions happening behind closed doors. The Conservatives’ highly paid insider/supervisor is operating without accountability, and my community is losing trust.

Will the Premier direct his minister to respond to the letter and correct the culture of secrecy at TVDSB?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: So, I guess what the member opposite is suggesting is that a board that used money that was meant for the classroom, that instead went to a luxury hotel in Toronto and partied it up—that we should somehow support that type of an engagement. No. No, Madam Speaker.

I'll let the opposition continue to support a governance system that has failed our students so poorly in the province of Ontario.

Thames Valley is a classic example of why we brought in Bill 33. They are the poster child for why we brought in the reforms that we have in front of us right now, because what we're going to do is remove the diversions and distractions within the system and focus on student achievement.

We're going to stop putting teachers in the middle of disputes between parents and school boards. We're going to have real results expected from our education directors. We're going to refocus budgeting, human resources and capital into an office of a CEO—a person who can undertake those duties while still ensuring that the director of education is focused on one thing: student achievement.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Back to the Premier: Television, movies and video games include content warnings, but every day in Ontario, young people are witnessing vicious assaults, emergency evacuations and young people hurling vile and abusive language—all in their classrooms. But it's not a complicated problem to solve. Teachers are calling for smaller class sizes, targeted mental health and special education supports to help children succeed.

After billions of Conservative cuts and ignoring escalating problems in education, why on earth should students, parents and education workers believe this government gives a damn about public education?

Hon. Paul Calandra: When I speak to teachers, they say they want a system that is focused on allowing them to deliver results on behalf of their students.

I'll agree with the member opposite: There are a lot of additional distractions. I know that Minister Lecce, when he was there, instituted a cellphone ban. I am looking at extending that because a lot of the teachers in the system are telling me that there still remain distractions in the school, that they are very frustrated by the use of social media and the impacts that has, especially in our elementary and in our secondary schools with respect to bullying.

I am looking at other jurisdictions, the steps that they have taken. I've made no secret of that. I've also said very clearly that there have to be consequences for decisions that are made, consequences when you decide to skip school. This bill addresses that, but we also have to look at the discipline policy within our schools. Our teachers are telling me we have to bring back consequences for bad decisions if we're going to give them the ability to manage their school.

I appreciate the members opposite's support for—

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

EDUCATION ISSUES

Mr. Ted Hsu: In May 2020, this government put out a news release that it had a great 2A Support for Students Fund “to provide school boards with more flexibility to address special education, mental health initiatives as well as unique learning needs.”

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In October 2020, a government news release said, “Revoking regulation 274 is about ... giving school boards more flexibility....”

In October 2021, there's another news release saying they would “give school boards the flexibility to hire....”

After eight long years in power and having supposedly given school boards more flexibility, why are the Conservatives now throwing all school boards under the bus?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I don't know where to begin with that. I guess the member opposite forgets that we were in a global health and economic pandemic during the time frames that he mentions. Of course we were going to extend flexibility. The entire world was operating on flexibility. The member himself will know that the government of Ontario, this Legislature, came back and worked flexibly so that we could address the needs of the province and of the people of the province of Ontario. And we've extended, we've increased, special education funding by over \$3.85 billion above where it was when they left office.

That accountability has to return back to the system, and it starts with the Ministry of Education showing leadership to ensure that there is a consistent delivery and consistent level of results across the province. I'm not going to apologize for that at all. It is a \$43-billion ministry, and the people of the province of Ontario should expect that it delivers results on behalf of students.

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

Mr. Ted Hsu: In August 2018, they put out a release entitled, “Ontario's Government for the People Respecting Parents by Holding Unprecedented Consultation into Education Reform.”

In April 2023, the Minister of Education said, “We're now going to be imposing a requirement for school boards to meet with their parent communities and other stakeholders and voices....”

Now Bill 101 says, stop collecting information from students, staff and parents. The minister knows best, and the best thing is to give him more power to control it all from Queen's Park.

After eight long years in power and five Ministers of Education later, why does this minister think he knows best?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Of course, the bill does no such thing. But the member opposite and his party are continuing to support something called the climate survey within the school boards. So I'll let them go into their communities and explain to parents why a grade 7 student

should be asked if he considers himself a Canadian. I'll let them go and explain how it improves the system when you ask somebody in grade 4 if they're non-binary, trans-gender or questioning; asking a student as young as grade 4 if they identify themselves as asexual or demisexual; asking students as young as grade 4 if they are worthless or inferior; asking students as young as grade 4 if they feel others will miss them when they went away.

I don't think that's the type of thing that helps build a better student—just the opposite, Madam Speaker—so I'm cancelling this survey, because it has no way of improving student results. He can try and explain to parents—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

ENERGY RATES

Hon. Ernie Hardeman: My question is for the Minister of Energy and Mines. Keeping costs down for Ontario's families remains a top priority for this government. At a time when energy demand is rising and affordability is top of mind, it is critical that we take a disciplined, responsible approach to building out our energy system. That's why our government is using competition and long-term planning to secure new power at the lowest possible cost to the ratepayer.

Under the previous Liberal government, sole-sourced above-market contracts drove up cost and left Ontario families paying the price.

Speaker, can the minister outline how our government is keeping energy costs down while ensuring a reliable supply of power for Ontario's families and businesses?

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

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Speaker, while the Liberals locked families in contracts paying up to 80 cents for kilowatt hour, keeping costs down is our Premier's top priority, and that is exactly what our plan delivers. Our government is delivering on this plan with the largest competitive energy procurement in Canadian history, using competition to bring prices down, and we're already seeing results. Projects are coming down at the rate of 73% lower than the overpriced contract signed by the previous Liberal government.

At the same time, we've launched the largest energy efficiency program in Canadian history, helping families use less energy and pay less every month. Through the Home Renovation Savings Program, people can get thousands of dollars to upgrade their homes, including windows, insulation, appliances and even rooftop solar. We'll keep taking actions to make life more affordable for families across this province of Ontario.

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

Hon. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you to the PA for the answer.

Keeping energy affordable requires more than just securing new supply; it requires discipline in how projects

are delivered and how demand is managed over the long term. That means building the right projects at the right time and at the right price, while also helping families and businesses reduce energy use.

Our government has taken a responsible approach, ensuring projects are built on time and on budget, while investing in energy efficiency programs that help lower bills and reduce pressure on the grid. After years of poor planning and overpriced contracts under the previous Liberal government, our government is focused on keeping energy affordable for Ontario families.

Speaker, can the parliamentary assistant explain how this approach is helping to keep our energy costs down?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Our government has a proven track record on delivering major energy projects on time and on budget, restoring discipline to a system that was mismanaged under the Liberal government. That is the same approach we're continuing with our new procurements of the LT2, the largest competitive energy procurement in Canadian history, securing the power we need and at the lowest price for ratepayers.

At the same time, we're lowering demand and reducing bills through the historic investment in energy efficiency—over \$10.9 billion in this plan to help families upgrade their homes, use less energy and save money, while avoiding billions in future system costs.

Speaker, this is how we keep energy affordable and build responsibly and help families use less.

While the Liberals left Ontario with decades of overpriced, sole-sourced contracts, our government is delivering disciplined—confidence in the people and confidence in this province of Ontario.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, the hospital in Tillsonburg is about to lose 26 PSW jobs, and at London Health Sciences Centre, hundreds of nursing roles are disappearing—all because of this government's continued underfunding.

With these hospital budget cuts, it's predicted that we will lose up to 9,000 nursing and PSW positions by 2027. Why is the minister cutting health care jobs and compromising patient safety?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I think the member opposite needs to be reminded that, as recently as last month, in our budget, we actually once again enhanced hospital operating dollars in the amount of \$1.1 billion—on average, an increase of 4%; a 4% increase that, I might add, we've already done in the last three years. I would compare that to previous governments who, for three years running, actually froze hospital operating dollars for three years.

So are we investing in our hospitals? Are we investing in our people? We are, 100%. We've actually seen a 15% increase in the number of nurses who are working in our publicly funded system. Those are numbers that you can point to to show that we've actually invested in our hospital system and our health care.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for London—Fanshawe.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, here's the truth: Ontario already has the lowest nurse-to-population ratio in the country, and it is short 25,000 registered nurses. For every 10 nurses hired, six leave.

Will the minister commit to implementing mandatory patient-to-staff ratios to ensure safe care, or will she continue to allow staffing shortages to put patient care at risk?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Let's talk about the numbers. Since Premier Ford took government, we have actually seen 100,000 nurses registered in the province of Ontario. Currently, because of the excellent work that is happening with Minister Quinn and his ministry, we actually have 30,000 nurses who are training in the province of Ontario. And, again, a reminder: We have actually seen a 15% increase in the number of nurses that are working in our publicly funded health care system.

Those are the numbers that people point to and see that we are making an impact—because we're not only investing in our hospitals, we're investing in our people, we're investing in our training and we are welcoming the world to Ontario and their health care system.

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EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Speaker, as a former lifeguard, I saw first-hand the importance of swimming lessons. The Lifesaving Society of Canada says, "Swimming is a life skill that all children need to learn." The Red Cross says, "Learning to swim saves lives."

With hotter summers, more people are jumping into a pool or a lake to cool off, but unfortunately, not everyone survives. Close to 200 people drown every year in Ontario, as well as hundreds of ER visits and hospitalizations for non-fatal drowning incidents.

While debating Bill 101, the Minister of Education mentioned pools in TDSB schools, saying he is very sympathetic to the board needing assistance with that infrastructure.

Speaker, my question to the Premier: How will you invest in school pools and ensure students are learning a vital life skill?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: A very good question; I appreciate the question from the member. I have said, and the Premier has also been very clear to me, that at some of the historical infrastructure in places like Toronto, where pools were built in co-operation with the municipality, and the municipality at some point decided to no longer support that, there would have to be special accommodation for that.

At the same time, life-saving skills like swimming—we saw in Dryden, I think, last year, a number of other instances. The mayor of Dryden was very, very expressive at last year's AMO conference that the province had to

assist. We said that we would look at ways of adding into the curriculum additional opportunities for kids, not only in Toronto but across the province, to have access to life-saving swimming classes. So it is something that we're working on right now.

I know some people would suggest that there are other ways to do this, but just given the instances that we saw last summer, I think it is incumbent on us to see what help we can do. If we can provide that through the education system, at least in part, we will.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Speaker, we have a serious shortage of lifeguards in Ontario. The TDSB now needs two lifeguards on deck to align with Ontario pool regulations. School swim programs need more staff to continue.

In beautiful Beaches—East York, swimming lessons—part of the elementary curriculum—have gone from once a week to biweekly or monthly.

Fewer lifeguards also means fewer swim teams. I know the members from Eglinton—Lawrence, Willowdale, York South—Weston, Scarborough—Agincourt and York Centre are also very concerned about their school pools.

Speaker, my question to the Premier: Given that swimming is a life skill and that we all want to reduce drownings in Ontario, what is your plan to solve the lifeguard shortage at schools?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, this is not just a problem in Toronto. I know that when my daughters were learning to swim—we don't have pools in our high schools or in any of our schools in Stouffville, so my wife and I had to go to the local community centre. That's where we had swimming lessons with our children, and we used other community resources in order to give our children that opportunity.

So not every school in this province—in fact, very, very few have access to pools right within their schools. Is there something that we can do to handle those challenges in Toronto? Absolutely. But more importantly than that, Madam Speaker, this is something that we have to work on province-wide.

We have seen an alarming increase over the last number of years—again, I reiterate that the mayor of Dryden made a very, very, very passionate appeal on behalf of a number of communities where he had been seeing things that he was unhappy with. We made a commitment then that we would work within our school system to at least help.

But it's not just the school system, right? We have to work within our communities because not everybody, as I said, has access to a pool. We have to find other ways of delivering this program.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Brian Saunderson: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Many people living in rural and northern communities across Ontario, including my great riding of Simcoe—Grey, rely on local transit to get to work,

to school and to medical appointments. However, many of these communities face challenges in expanding and improving transit services to meet growing demand. Without the right support, it will be difficult to build and sustain reliable transit systems. We must ensure that, as our communities grow, transit systems keep pace.

Speaker, can the minister please explain how our government is strengthening local transit systems across Ontario?

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

Mr. Ric Bresee: Thank you to my friend the member from Simcoe–Grey for the question.

Speaker, our government is taking real action to expand transit and improve access to these essential services in rural and under-served communities. That's why we are doubling the funding for the Ontario Transit Investment Fund, increasing it from \$5 million to \$10 million annually for the next three years, for a \$30-million total. This funding is giving communities the tools they need to build and to sustain reliable transit systems that meet the local demand. It will ensure that Ontarians, no matter where they live, have access to reliable transportation options for years to come.

Speaker, we're connecting people to jobs, to services and to opportunity all across Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Simcoe–Grey.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you to the parliamentary assistant for that answer. I'm very glad to hear about our government's commitment to supporting transit in rural and under-served communities.

However, Speaker, we know that many residents in these communities still face barriers when it comes to accessing reliable transportation. We also know it's not a one-size-fits-all solution across this province. Flexible and locally tailored solutions are needed to meet the unique needs of residents and ensure people can stay connected to their jobs, to their education and to essential services.

Speaker, can the parliamentary assistant share more about how these investments are supporting innovative, community-based transit solutions across our province?

Mr. Ric Bresee: Thank you again to the member from Simcoe–Grey. That's exactly what the Ontario Transit Investment Fund is delivering. We're supporting municipalities, Indigenous communities and non-profit organizations to launch and expand transit services that work for them. Our government is investing in the start-up and expansion of new bus routes, on-demand rideshare and door-to-door transit. We're investing in practical solutions that reflect the very local needs. These investments are making it easier for people to get to work, access essential services like health care and stay connected throughout their communities.

Speaker, we're making sure that no community is left behind.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

MPP Lise Vaugeois: For the people of Long Lake 58, going to the town of Longlac on foot means walking along the Trans-Canada Highway, the notorious two-lane Highway 11, with no separated walkway, no lighting and not even a shoulder in winter. Transport trucks fly by mere inches away, and people are losing their lives. The most recent death was a student from the local school.

The community needs action. Will the minister immediately reduce the speed limit, add street lighting and high-visibility signage so that members of Long Lake 58 stand a chance of surviving their only route into town?

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

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Madam Speaker, we continue to make historic investments into our highway programs. We have budgeted dollars that go into ensuring that we continue to have safe highways and safe roads. That's why we are expanding both Highway 11 and Highway 17 across the province. It's part of our \$30-billion investment into highways, roads and bridges.

Along with that, when it comes to road safety, we have passed a significant amount of pieces of legislation in this Legislature to ensure that we improve road safety. We continue to work with communities to collaborate on many of these opportunities for improving road safety across whether it's our highways or roads in northern communities and others as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Thunder Bay–Superior North.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I really couldn't tell from the answer whether the minister was responding to the numerous letters from this community or not. I know they've been sent.

Long-term solutions addressing the dangerous and inequitable conditions facing people in Long Lake 58 must be prioritized, and that means building a lighted walkway completely separated from the highway. Will the minister commit to releasing funds so that MTO engineers can create the design plans now and be ready to build by the 2027 construction season?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I'm happy to continue to engage with that member or that community on the variety of requests that we are getting from northern communities.

The one thing that is for sure is that there is no government in the history of this province that has put more money towards highway expansion, road safety and ensuring that we support our critical networks and our roads across northern Ontario. In fact, just last year, we put forward over \$650 million of support for just our northern highways program.

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Madam Speaker, I'll continue to work with that community to improve road safety. We'll continue to work in this Legislature to ensure that we pass legislation that improves road safety on our roads and that we put those

drivers, whether they be careless or unsafe, behind bars or restrict their access to our roads.

But most importantly, when it comes to critical infrastructure investments—whether that's public transit, whether that's highways in the north—this government is getting it done and we're putting dollars behind it to ensure that happens.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. John Fraser: Yesterday, we found out that the Premier and the Solicitor General's government lost 150 criminals. And yesterday we asked 11 times—11 times—and not once did we hear “unacceptable.” The Premier got up twice and didn't say a word about it. He was actually just attacking people on the other side. He wasn't saying, “It's a problem. It's unacceptable. I'm going to get to the bottom of it.”

The Premier likes to pretend he's Walker, Texas Ranger when he's at a Home Depot parking lot. But when you lose 150 prisoners, it's kind of more like an episode of the Keystone Kops. We don't know what's going on over there. They leave the door wide open.

Yesterday, this government didn't once say it was unacceptable and they were going to fix it, here in this chamber. How can we believe that they're actually going to do it?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Steve Clark: You know, Speaker, this member doesn't—

Interjections.

Hon. Steve Clark: The challenge with this member, Speaker—and he's so disagreeable. He's got a new mantra being the late-show king.

The minister was very, very clear: This issue is unacceptable for the government. The minister has put a plan in place to fix it. He's articulated that very clearly today, and this government will accept one thing: that dangerous criminals need to be in one place and that's behind bars.

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

Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, through you to the member, I will again say that the minister has indicated the unacceptability of this issue and the fact that the government knows the issue and is dealing with the issue. Every single one of those inmates, Speaker, through you, that was released inappropriately went back to jail, went back in a jail cell, and that's the bottom line.

DEFERRED VOTES

PROTECTING SENIORS' RIGHTS IN CARE HOMES ACT, 2026 LOI DE 2026 SUR LA PROTECTION DES DROITS DES PERSONNES ÂGÉES DANS LES MAISONS DE SOINS

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

Bill 23, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 and the Retirement Homes Act, 2010 respecting tenancies in care homes / Projet de loi 23, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation et la Loi de 2010 sur les maisons de retraite en ce qui concerne les locations dans les maisons de soins.

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

The division bells rang from 1133 to 1138

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

On April 15, 2026, MPP Pasma moved second reading of Bill 23, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 and the Retirement Homes Act, 2010 respecting tenancies in care homes.

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

Ayes

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

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

Nays

Allsopp, Tyler	Flack, Rob	Pirie, George
Anand, Deepak	Ford, Doug	Quinn, Nolan
Babikian, Aris	Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Racinsky, Joseph
Bailey, Robert	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Rae, Matthew
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Gualtieri, Silvia	Rosenberg, Bill
Bouma, Will	Hamid, Zee	Sabawy, Sheref
Bresee, Ric	Hardeman, Ernie	Sandhu, Amarjot
Calandra, Paul	Harris, Mike	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Holland, Kevin	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Cho, Stan	Jones, Sylvia	Saunderson, Brian
Clark, Steve	Jordan, John	Smith, Dave
Coe, Lorne	Kanapathi, Logan	Smith, David
Cooper, Michelle	Kerzner, Michael S.	Smith, Graydon
Crawford, Stephen	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, Laura

Cuzzetto, Rudy
Darouze, George
Denault, Billy
Dixon, Jess
Dowie, Andrew
Downey, Doug
Fedeli, Victor
Firin, Mohamed

Lecce, Stephen
McCarthy, Todd J.
Mulroney, Caroline
Oosterhoff, Sam
Pang, Billy
Parsa, Michael
Pierre, Natalie
Pinsonneault, Steve

Tangri, Nina
Thanigasalam, Vijay
Thompson, Lisa M.
Tibollo, Michael A.
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Vickers, Paul
Williams, Charmaine A.

Nays

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

Gélinas, France
Gilmour, Alexa
Gretzky, Lisa
Hazell, Andrea
Hsu, Ted
Kernaghan, Terence
McCrimmon, Karen
McKenney, Catherine
McMahon, Mary-Margaret
Pasma, Chandra
Rakocevic, Tom
Sattler, Peggy
Schreiner, Mike

Shamji, Adil
Shaw, Sandy
Smyth, Stephanie
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Stiles, Marit
Tabuns, Peter
Tsao, Jonathan
Vanthof, John
Vaugeois, Lise
Watt, Tyler
West, Jamie
Wong-Tam, Kristyn

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 38; the nays are 65.

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

Second reading negated.

PUTTING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT FIRST ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 DONNANT LA PRIORITÉ À LA RÉUSSITE DES ÉLÈVES

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

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

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

The division bells rang from 1142 to 1143.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): On April 14, 2026, Mr. Calandra moved second reading of Bill 101, An Act to amend various Acts in respect of education and child care.

On April 16, 2026, Mr. Rae moved that the question be now put.

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

Ayes

Allsopp, Tyler
Anand, Deepak
Babikian, Aris
Bailey, Robert
Bethlenfalvy, Peter
Bouma, Will
Bresee, Ric
Calandra, Paul
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon
Cho, Stan
Clark, Steve
Coe, Lorne
Cooper, Michelle
Crawford, Stephen
Cuzzetto, Rudy
Darouze, George
Denault, Billy
Dixon, Jess
Dowie, Andrew
Downey, Doug
Fedeli, Victor
Firin, Mohamed

Flack, Rob
Ford, Doug
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn
Grewal, Hardeep Singh
Gualtieri, Silvia
Hamid, Zee
Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Mike
Holland, Kevin
Jones, Sylvia
Jordan, John
Kanamathi, Logan
Kerzner, Michael S.
Leardi, Anthony
Lecce, Stephen
McCarthy, Todd J.
Mulroney, Caroline
Oosterhoff, Sam
Pang, Billy
Parsa, Michael
Pierre, Natalie
Pinsonneault, Steve

Pirie, George
Quinn, Nolan
Racinsky, Joseph
Rae, Matthew
Rosenberg, Bill
Sabawy, Sheref
Sandhu, Amarjot
Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Sarrazin, Stéphane
Saunderson, Brian
Smith, Dave
Smith, David
Smith, Graydon
Smith, Laura
Tangri, Nina
Thanigasalam, Vijay
Thompson, Lisa M.
Tibollo, Michael A.
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Vickers, Paul
Williams, Charmaine A.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 65; the nays are 38.

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

Mr. Calandra has moved second reading of Bill 101, An Act to amend various Acts in respect of education and child care. 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 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 1147 to 1148.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): On April 14, 2026, Mr. Calandra moved second reading of Bill 101, An Act to amend various Acts in respect of education and child care.

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

Ayes

Allsopp, Tyler
Anand, Deepak
Babikian, Aris
Bailey, Robert
Bethlenfalvy, Peter
Bouma, Will
Brady, Bobbi Ann
Bresee, Ric
Calandra, Paul
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon
Cho, Stan
Clark, Steve
Coe, Lorne
Cooper, Michelle
Crawford, Stephen
Cuzzetto, Rudy
Darouze, George
Denault, Billy
Dixon, Jess
Dowie, Andrew
Downey, Doug
Fedeli, Victor

Firin, Mohamed
Flack, Rob
Ford, Doug
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn
Grewal, Hardeep Singh
Gualtieri, Silvia
Hamid, Zee
Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Mike
Holland, Kevin
Jones, Sylvia
Jordan, John
Kanamathi, Logan
Kerzner, Michael S.
Leardi, Anthony
Lecce, Stephen
McCarthy, Todd J.
Mulroney, Caroline
Oosterhoff, Sam
Pang, Billy
Parsa, Michael
Pierre, Natalie

Pinsonneault, Steve
Pirie, George
Quinn, Nolan
Racinsky, Joseph
Rae, Matthew
Rosenberg, Bill
Sabawy, Sheref
Sandhu, Amarjot
Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Sarrazin, Stéphane
Saunderson, Brian
Smith, Dave
Smith, David
Smith, Graydon
Smith, Laura
Tangri, Nina
Thanigasalam, Vijay
Thompson, Lisa M.
Tibollo, Michael A.
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Vickers, Paul
Williams, Charmaine A.

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

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.

Gilmour, Alexa

Shaw, Sandy

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

Bell, Jessica	Gretzky, Lisa	Smyth, Stephanie
Bourgouin, Guy	Hazell, Andrea	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Bowman, Stephanie	Hsu, Ted	Stiles, Marit
Burch, Jeff	Kernaghan, Terence	Tabuns, Peter
Cerjanec, Rob	McCrimmon, Karen	Tsao, Jonathan
Clancy, Aislinn	McKenney, Catherine	Vanthof, John
Collard, Lucille	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Vaugeois, Lise
Fife, Catherine	Pasma, Chandra	Watt, Tyler
Fraser, John	Rakocevic, Tom	West, Jamie
French, Jennifer K.	Sattler, Peggy	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
Gates, Wayne	Schreiner, Mike	
Gélinas, France	Shamji, Adil	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 66; the nays are 37.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading? I heard a no.

Hon. Paul Calandra: The bill will be referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The bill is therefore referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

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

Hon. Steve Clark: I appreciate the opportunity to update the House under standing order 59.

As has been indicated earlier in the notices, it is the government's intention to debate Bill 100 this afternoon, followed by private member's motion number 58.

On Monday, the government will be calling government order 44 in the morning. It is the government's intention to introduce a bill Monday afternoon, followed by opposition day, per your ruling this morning, followed by Bill 100.

On Tuesday, in the morning, we'll have a debate on the government bill; in the afternoon, Bill 100 and private member's motion number 63.

On Wednesday: again, government bill debate; in the afternoon, Bill 100 again, followed by private member's motion number 64.

Thursday will be a government bill debate followed by private member's Bill 99.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Thunder Bay–Superior North has given a notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to the question given by the Minister of Transportation regarding Long Lake #58. This matter will be debated on Tuesday following private members' public business.

There being no further business, this House stands in recess until 1 o'clock.

The House recessed from 1153 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Deepak Anand: It's an honour and a pleasure to introduce Harmin Dhaliwal, a government relations student from Seneca Polytechnic. A sportsman, he plays soccer, has his own charity and is doing an internship in my office at Mississauga–Malton. Welcome, Harmin, to Queen's Park.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I would like to welcome, from my constituency office in Ottawa, my executive assistant, Darren Tyrrell, who is leaving us in a few weeks to go to teachers' college. Our loss in Ottawa West–Nepean, I know, is going to be his students' gain. They're going to be very lucky to have Mr. Tyrrell.

Also from my Queen's Park office, my legislative assistant, Alia Mufti, who is celebrating her birthday today. Happy birthday, Alia.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Happy birthday.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated April 16, 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.

PETITIONS

VETERANS

Ms. Catherine Fife: This petition is called "Raise the 'Lest We Forget' Veterans Flag at Queen's Park." Every year on Remembrance Day Canadians honour our military's selfless service to the nation. This particular petition is calling for the Lest We Forget flag to be raised here at Queen's Park, as other provinces have done so. The flag is a symbol used to honour all veterans and active members of the Canadian Armed Forces, as well as first responders and their families, recognizing their sacrifices.

I'm hoping that the Legislature takes this under consideration going forward. It's my pleasure to affix my signature in full support of this petition.

GENDER IDENTITY

Mr. Aris Babikian: I have a petition signed by 2,500 parents. It is a lengthy petition, but I'm going to summarize it to make it easy for everyone.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, the Minister of Education and the members of the provincial Parliament:

“Whereas parents and guardians have a fundamental and well-established role and responsibility in directing the education, upbringing and moral development of their children; and

“Whereas transparency, informed consent and consistent communication between schools and families are essential to students’ well-being, parental guidance and public accountability in the education system;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the teachers, principals and other school staff be prohibited from using a new preferred name or pronouns related to gender identity of students until parental notification has occurred, and, in the case of students under 16 years of age, until explicit parental consent has been obtained;

“That the government of Ontario establish clear, consistent and province-wide policies to ensure parental notification, consent and transparency in these matters across all publicly funded school boards.”

I wholeheartedly support this petition and I will affix my signature to it.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly to reduce class sizes in our public elementary schools. It says here that larger class sizes negatively impact the quality of education, reduce access to teaching resources and significantly diminish teacher-student interactions, which are detrimental to students who need additional support.

The petition calls on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to commit to making the necessary investments in public education to lower class sizes, increase student supports, and ensure students have the schools they need.

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

LABOUR LEGISLATION

M^{me} France G  linas: I would like to thank Rebecca Bailey from Lively in my riding for these petitions. They’re called, “Enact Anti-Scab Labour Law.”

As you know, Speaker, lockouts and strikes are rare; 97% of collective agreements are negotiated without work disruption, but when there is a strike or a lockout, the use of scabs is really detrimental to the community. Most of the people who cross the picket line are people that are desperate, and then they will then bear the brunt of the hatred, the discrimination. The hard time will be on these workers for decades after they have crossed the line. This is not fair. When workers withdraw their labour in a strike, it’s okay to have a minimum set in the collective agreement to keep the place going, but it is not okay to use replacement workers, to use scab labour.

The NDP has tabled 17 bills to do this. My colleague Jamie West, MPP for Sudbury, and the MPP for Niagara and I tabled a bill again this session. I hope the government

will realize the damage they are doing to workers by allowing Ontario to use scabs. Other provinces don’t allow it—British Columbia, Quebec. The federal government passed an identical bill. We now have a million workers who work for places where you’re not allowed to use scabs during times of lockout or strikes. We ask that Ontario do the same.

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Aadyant to bring it to the Clerk.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I’m pleased to rise in the House today for a petition from the ETFO. You can see that a zillion people have signed it. They’re worried about the cuts to education since 2018 which have resulted in larger class sizes. We all know how much more beneficial it is for our kids to be in small classes. There’s more attention, it’s a safer environment for all classmates as well as the teacher and it’s a better space for your mental health.

So I’m happy to sign this petition—I wholeheartedly believe in smaller class sizes—and I’m going to send it with page Ella.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

MPP Lise Vaugeois: This is a petition to raise social assistance rates. I want to thank Dr. Sally Palmer for all the work of gathering these signatures. Actually, I also want to thank people from Thunder Bay, Ancaster, Dundas and Hamilton West, which is where I grew up, for having signed this petition.

The purpose of the petition is really to say that people on ODSP and Ontario Works are starving, and they’re winding up as homeless. The rates are so low, it is punitive; it is legislated poverty.

I humbly—or not humbly; I’m not sure—support this petition and will give it to page Catherine with my full endorsement.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Mr. Adil Shamji: Madam Speaker, I’m pleased to present the latest in a petition that has garnered over 16,000 signatures in the wake of the radical transformation to OSAP which threatens the post-secondary education of students across this province.

In light of the fact that grants have been dramatically reduced, converted to loans, placing a massive burden on our students, this petition calls for the government to fix OSAP ASAP and to do so by reversing the announced changes to OSAP that reduce non-repayable grant funding, to conduct comprehensive consultations with students, institutions, financial aid offices and advocacy groups and, ultimately, to uphold Ontario’s commitment to accessible, affordable and quality post-secondary education for all.

1310

I wholeheartedly support this petition and am pleased to present it to John.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I have another petition here that is entitled “Prohibit Medical and Surgical Transition for Minors Petition.”

It says that “most children with gender dysphoria need time rather than a medical or surgical transition to become comfortable with their bodies” and “medical and surgical transitioning are associated with many adverse health outcomes.”

The petition calls on the Legislative Assembly to “prohibit regulated health professionals in Ontario from providing puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones, and transitional surgeries for minors under the age of 18.”

I support this petition. I will affix my signature to it and send it to the Clerk’s table with page David.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, I present this petition, “Save Our Waterfront.”

As many are aware, the Premier has made it clear that he intends to use the powers of the province with expropriation around the island airport to declare a special economic zone so he can completely revamp the business model at the island airport, substantially increasing flights overall and introducing jets.

This poses huge problems in terms of development of housing. In downtown Toronto, many will be aware that we spent over \$2 billion to floodproof the Port Lands with the expectation that many thousands of units could be built on that land. That will be cut back dramatically because of flight requirements.

This change is one that should not go forward without the consultation and approval of the city of Toronto and without consultation of and approval of those people who live in the area.

I have signed this petition. I support it, and I give it to clerk Owen to present.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I have another great petition from the riding of Essex. This one was sent in by Rosa White, a resident of the town of LaSalle. It is on the Ontario-first theme.

It talks about how this province—that is, the province of Ontario—is helping keep millions of Americans in their jobs because Ontario is the number one purchasing customer of 15 American states. It also talks about how both houses of Congress—that is, the Senate and the House of Representatives—have voted against the tariffs that have been imposed by President Trump. In addition to that, it talks about how the US Supreme Court has ruled that President Donald Trump’s tariffs are, in fact, illegal.

This petition goes on to say that this Legislature should impose regulations and issue procurement directives for those bodies which are engaging in issuing contracts for goods and services and supply chains that purchase goods and services using government-sponsored funds or, in other words, taxpayers’ money.

In short, it says to put Ontario first. That’s why I support this petition. I’m going to sign this petition and give it to this fine page for delivery to the Clerk’s table.

LAND USE PLANNING

Ms. Catherine Fife: This petition’s entitled “Protect Farmland and Sustainable Growth in Waterloo Region.”

As you know, we lose 319 acres of prime farmland every day in the province of Ontario. This government has made a habit of using MZOs to override local planning procedures.

In Waterloo region, it’s very disturbing because the provincial government has actually allocated more money to expropriate this land than they have for water infrastructure. We are right now in an unprecedented circumstance where we are not building any housing because we do not have any water.

All local representatives have signed non-disclosure agreements. We have no transparency of what’s actually happening in the region, around how this land is being decided, nor do we even know what the project is. You’re going to expropriate all of this prime farmland for an undisclosed industrial project at great risk to the community. It’s fiscally irresponsible, environmentally irresponsible.

I fully support the call from the community to immediately pause all plans to expropriate and rezone lands in Wilmot township. This has gone on long enough.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I’m here to present a petition that goes against the changes to the freedom of information act. The people in this province, the people of Ontario, elected us because they trust us. They want an Ontario government that is free, fair, accountable and transparent, and the changes to the FOI legislation fly in the face of that.

I support this petition to stop these changes to the FOI legislation to make sure that we continue to have an Ontario government that is free, fair and accountable.

I want to thank the folks in Newmarket–Aurora for signing this petition. I support this petition, and I will hand it to page Spenta.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Deepak Anand: I’ve had the opportunity, in the past, to read the petitions from hard-working Ontarians trying to help and support other hard-working Ontarians. This actually came from Windsor, and it actually has the member for Essex’s name on it.

Madam Speaker, the petition, the people who petitioned it, are saying that they're asking their voice, the government of Ontario, to support and adopt a regulation making sure the procurement directives become appropriate, helping and supporting Ontario-made goods and services and supply chains in public sector procurement, including capital infrastructure and construction projects.

This is a great petition. I have read similar petitions in the past, and I absolutely believe in what they're saying: to support Ontario's economy, to support Ontario's workers. And they're doing it because they believe that Ontario, as we all know, is the number one export market for 15 US states—helping not only the people of Ontario, but also millions of people in America to stay in their jobs.

Senators and representatives from all sides of the aisle in the US have voted against Donald Trump's tariffs. The US Supreme Court has declared President Trump's tariffs to be illegal. This petition is saying, "Stand up for Ontarians. Help Ontarians and make sure that we go and start buying Ontario more."

I fully support this petition, Madam Speaker, and I'm going to hand it over to Charlotte to be given to the table.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Bryan Smith from the Oxford Coalition for Social Justice who signed up hundreds of names. I didn't know there were that many people in Oxford, but apparently they are all worried about private clinics.

Basically, they shared that they had found out that the price to do surgery in private clinics is sometimes double, triple what we pay to have the same service delivered in our public hospitals.

They've done the data and shown that when British Columbia introduced private clinics for surgery, it did not help with the backlogs whatsoever. Right now, in Ontario, hospitals have the capacity in their current underused surgical rooms to do more surgeries, whether it be complex or routine surgery.

So they petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that all funding of Ontario private clinics and independent health facilities cease immediately, and that it be further resolved that adequate funding to perform medically necessary surgery be allocated exclusively to public hospitals in Ontario.

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Ella to bring it to the Clerk.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BETTER REGIONAL GOVERNANCE ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 POUR UNE MEILLEURE GOUVERNANCE RÉGIONALE

Mr. Graydon Smith, on behalf of Mr. Flack, moved second reading of the following bill:

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

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the associate minister.

Hon. Graydon Smith: Well, thank you very much, Speaker, and good afternoon to everyone here in the chamber. I would note, just before we start off with debate this afternoon, that I'm sharing my time with the Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the member from Simcoe-Grey.

Speaker, again, I'm thrilled to be leading off this debate today on Bill 100, the proposed Better Regional Governance Act, 2026.

Not surprisingly, and maybe in the most obvious statement of the day, this is a bill about governance, but not governance in theory; governance the way it actually works on the ground: the structures that determine whether decisions get made, whether infrastructure gets built, whether growth is managed effectively and, ultimately, whether the people we serve see results. Because if we are being honest, the current system of regional governance in Ontario is not as clear, not as consistent and not always as effective as it needs to be. And that matters, of course, because we know that good governance drives good outcomes.

1320

Speaker, Ontario is growing. We know that. Our regions in Ontario are growing, and that puts pressure on infrastructure, housing, transportation services. That pressure increases every year. And yet, in many parts of the province, the leadership structures responsible for managing growth remain fragmented and inconsistent. Regional chairs who are responsible for coordinating across the many municipalities that exist within their regions are often selected through varying processes, accountable in multiple directions and operating within systems where their authority is not always clearly defined.

That result isn't causing failure in the system, but it is causing friction. It's causing delays. It's causing uncertainty. And as we have discussed many, many, many times in this chamber, there is enough of that being caused by external pressures outside of Ontario and outside of our regions that we need to act quickly, decisively, make decisions smartly and carry on with our business quickly.

That inability to move forward with the clarity and decisiveness that the moment demands can be injurious to

us. Bill 100 addresses that directly, and it does so through a set of focused, structural changes that aim to clarify that regional leadership, strengthen the accountability framework and improve decision-making at the regional level.

I want to focus too today on not just the intent but the mechanics within this legislation, because this bill is about how things work and, of course, we all want them to work well.

At the heart of this bill is a shift towards the appointment of regional chairs in areas where that is not occurring already. The intent here, again, is to move toward a more consistent model across our regions, where leadership is clearly defined, directly accountable and aligned with the responsibilities that regions carry today.

But I also want to be clear about how those appointments for chairs would be approached. This isn't to be a casual process. Appointing a regional chair will involve a careful, deliberate assessment of experience, capacity and leadership ability.

These are complex roles. They oversee growth in large regions with high populations, infrastructure needs, planning and services that affect hundreds of thousands, and in some cases, millions, of people. So the intent is to ensure that those appointed bring the right mix of governance experience, understanding of regional systems and the ability to work collaboratively across municipalities to the head of that table.

Ultimately, this is about ensuring that the individual in that role is positioned to manage complexity, to be able to move decisions forward—important decisions—swiftly and deliver outcomes for the region as a whole.

Regional chairs are not symbolic positions. They're very important. They play a role in coordinating growth across many and multiple municipalities; overseeing major infrastructure planning; managing many, many services; and, increasingly, their role is central to whether Ontario succeeds in building communities that are livable, functional and able to grow.

The model outlined in Bill 100, if passed, provides clarity in who leads, who is responsible and how decisions move forward.

Speaker, it's important to recognize there is no consistent model for chair selection across the province, as I mentioned before: some regional chairs already appointed, some regional chairs elected at large, some regional chairs selected by their council. So we have multiple selection systems operating at once. While there are, again, examples of each model working, that inconsistency itself creates confusion and uneven expectations amongst people that are within those regions and in the interface with the province. We've seen appointed chairs succeed, notably in Peel and York regions. We've seen other models function as well. But the absence of consistency is itself part of the problem that this bill seeks to address.

This is not an abstract problem. Municipal leaders themselves have been talking about this for as long as many of them have been part of municipal councils. They're candid about the challenges of working in

councils that are very large in number but very slow in decision-making.

Some recent media coverage highlighted the mayor of Barrie, Alex Nuttall. He spoke in support of changes that streamline regional governance, streamline decision-makers in some cases and lead to better, faster decisions being made.

That perspective speaks to a broader reality that we hear repeatedly from many municipal partners. We must create clarity of leadership because it matters when regions are trying to move quickly on housing, infrastructure and growth. The goal is consistency, accountability and leadership that is well positioned to act in these regions.

Speaker, I want to address what some have noted as a concern around accountability. There is a misconception that can arise in debates like this: that strengthening leadership somehow reduces accountability, when, in reality, the opposite is true. A regional chair, however selected, is not and cannot operate in isolation. They remain accountable to regional council, the communities they represent around that table and, ultimately, to the people of that region.

And, Speaker, I can tell you this from experience: Those around a council table, those that sit around a regional council table, will never let a chair, regardless of how they have been selected, how they got there and what additional powers they may or may not have—no councillor will let them forget that they need to be accountable to that council as well, accountable to the communities within that region as well.

In fact, we have heard from mayors around Ontario in different regional councils that the challenge isn't about accountability. We've got a system where people know their roles. But there is a challenge and a frustration around how decisions are made. We hear that time and time again. Decision-making can become fragmented. There are too many competing points of view that pull conversations in different directions, and chairs find themselves in very, very difficult positions, caught in a constant tug-of-war between various factions. And when that happens, what happens? Decisions slow down at precisely the moment they're needed most.

The issue is not one of accountability; it is one of clarity. It is one of clarity of leadership and direction, and the ability to move forward when this system becomes stuck.

This bill, if passed, will not remove accountability. It will reinforce clear leadership and make that responsibility and accountability, in all directions on the compass, more clear.

Speaker, there's a broader principle at play here, and it's about responsibility and authority being aligned. We know that the province has stated its priorities over and over again. We want to see communities succeed. We want to see them be prosperous. We need to see them grow. We need to see housing grow. We need to see infrastructure there to accommodate that. We want to see economic growth. Those are not optional positions for any government to take. They are core responsibilities, yet the

governance structures responsible for delivering those outcomes at the regional level have not always been aligned with that reality.

1330

Bill 100 helps to address that. It helps ensure that regional leadership is positioned to work in alignment with not just provincial priorities and deliver on those shared objectives but to continue to serve the communities within each region. Together we grow, and together we prosper.

Speaker, this bill includes clear transition provisions to ensure stability. It allows for continuity of leadership, orderly implementation of changes and no disruption to ongoing projects or service delivery. This isn't about—stick of dynamite—creating a sudden change; it's about responsible, staged implementation because governance reform must strengthen the system, not destabilize it.

Ontario and its regions are obviously diverse in population, geography, and even in some services that they provide. This bill recognizes that. It provides the ability to phase implementation, address region-specific circumstances and ensures that reform is applied in a practical way, and it ensures consistency in direction but flexibility in execution.

Speaker, I want to speak from experience again. I know everyone that's heard me speak before was waiting for me to mention yet again that I was a municipal councillor for a long, long time, 16 years.

MPP Wayne Gates: Were you elected?

Hon. Graydon Smith: Sixteen years on municipal council, and I enjoyed every second of it.

I served as the deputy chair at the district of Muskoka. I've sat around those regional tables. I've worked through challenges, decisions, growth pressures, infrastructure decisions, competing local priorities, and I can say it honestly: They're not easy tables. You've got multiple municipalities, differing local pressures, differing political dynamics, but real consequences tied to every decision. Most of the time, that system works. People collaborate. They find decisions. They move forward.

But there are moments—and anyone who has sat around those tables knows this—where things stall and where things get stuck. There were times around that district table where we were dealing with decisions that impacted the entire region, impacted the potential for growth in that region, impacted how we allocated dollars that we had to the different pockets of that region, impacted how service provision would roll out in that region. The communities came to the table in good faith. Everyone understood the importance of the decision, but then things just slowed down.

When we got to a point where we could make a decision—let's use development charges as an example, where we knew that the right thing to do would be to reduce development charges in our area to facilitate growth, to have home builders come back to our area and make good things happen in those areas that were already primed and ready for growth. Well, that decision bogged down. It didn't bog down for a section of one meeting, that

one little agenda item that took 10 minutes longer; it bogged down for meetings at a time and weeks at a time.

While we finally got to a decision point, frankly, we should have got there sooner, quicker, faster and better. We could have done that if we had a different system that provided a chair more strength and an ability to move a conversation along.

It's a conversation that got stuck. It's a conversation that had consequences. It's a conversation that would have benefited from exactly the provisions that are in Bill 100.

I can repeat that again when it comes to—and I'll use Muskoka as an example one more time because it's the one I'm most familiar with—the allocation of OPP costs amongst different regions and municipalities in our area, a conversation as old as the service itself but one that takes time, takes resources, takes attention away from other issues around the table—another classic moment where things get stuck.

We went through a governance review in Muskoka. We spent months being stuck because, while we had excellent chairs in Muskoka, they didn't have the tools and the flexibility they needed to bring us back to focus on the priority of what we were trying to do with the tools that we were needing to use to create that focus—again, the tools that Bill 100 will allow a chair to use and implement.

Again, we may hear some howls from the other side of the table, but anyone who sat around that regional council table knows these things happen time and time again.

The structure we're working with today has not been touched in some cases and in some regions for a very, very long time. Review is reasonable, review should be expected and changes that drive the system forward and drive good outcomes forward should be expected.

Strong leadership, no matter how strong it is, no matter how it got there, can be constrained by the structure it needs to work in. In those moments what's needed is not the 14th round of debate on the same topic; it's the ability to move things forward and make decisions in the best interests of regions, to keep a focus on what matters for the region as a whole. That's what this legislation will support.

We can talk about what happens if we maintain the current system: Governance selection inconsistencies remain, decision-making remains slower than it should be and accountability remains unclear. That creates, again, as we've talked about, a ripple effect, very real consequences. We get delayed infrastructure, slower growth, increased costs, missed opportunities.

That's happening today, at a time, as I said off the top, when we can least afford it. It stuns me that we debate time and time again in this chamber the impacts of what is happening geopolitically and economically all around us and can agree that, jeez, we should do something about that. And as we do things about that, as we say we need to act with more clarity, with more intent, with more purpose, we hear the howls from the other side.

We need to work together. We need our regional councils to work together. We need our local councils to come to the table with clear eyes to work together to make

decisions in the near term that have massive implications and ramifications for communities in Ontario.

Speaker, we provide billions of dollars to regions in Ontario from our government to help with infrastructure and the priorities that matter in those regions. To fortify and strengthen our relationship with regional governments and to continue to work with those councils that make decisions is something that is necessary today, that we need to concentrate on today.

Bill 100 will help get us there. Bill 100 will ensure that the function of regional councils remains strong, clear and at the forefront of making decisions that have wide-ranging impacts on the services that people use, consume every day in their communities and on the ability for these communities to grow.

We have very, very real challenges ahead of us, and we will continue to work and bring solutions to this table and to our other government bodies around Ontario at the regional and municipal level. I want to thank them, by the way, for the work that they do, because they do excellent work. We'll continue to work with them to make sure that we have an effective system that deploys what we need to get done to benefit people every day.

Speaker, I thank you for the time to be able to speak on this today. I'm going to turn things over to my friend the Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries.

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The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries.

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and a pleasure and a privilege it is to be here on this Thursday afternoon, this spring afternoon, joining the debate on really important legislation that is going to ensure we have a stronger region in Niagara—that we have stronger regions, plural, across Ontario, especially across the GTHA—and I believe really reflects the continual drive for improvement, for modernization and the belief that we can't be stuck in the past.

We have to move forward, and that's something that we've seen from this Premier and this government: A continued commitment to modernization, to believing that better is always possible and to believing, frankly, that government has a role in ensuring that we expect better of ourselves, expect better of all governments to deliver the vital services that taxpayers pay for.

I hope the members opposite are listening here, but I know that as we participate in debate, we're going to hear different points of view. I hope the member for Niagara Falls will also be listening as we have this conversation here in the Legislature. Because all of us, as members, were sent here to represent our constituents. We're sent here to represent the constituencies we have the privilege of serving but also to represent some of the broader regional needs. I think if we look at Niagara as an example of that, I'm very pleased to see the legislation we're debating.

I want to acknowledge the Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and how he kind of detailed some of his perspectives, having served on regional gov-

ernment. I also want to acknowledge the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and his team's work on bringing forward this legislation. I want to say as well that, as a member of provincial Parliament—I haven't had the privilege of serving at the regional level, but I do have a deep interest in this legislation because it will, ultimately, impact my constituents and it will impact the region I love, the region I get to call home, the region I have lived in for my entire life.

Becoming the MPP back in 2016, almost a decade ago already, Speaker—so thankful for that opportunity—

Interjections.

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you.

The riding I was originally elected in was a riding called Niagara West—Glanbrook, and I actually had, at that point, a chunk of what is now the Speaker of the House's seat, the Glanbrook portion—Niagara West—Glanbrook at that time. So I had the privilege of working partially in Hamilton with the Hamilton portion of the riding and then also, of course, in the Niagara West portion. I had the opportunity to see the decision-making capacity that was happening in Hamilton with far fewer politicians, and then I had the opportunity, and I have had now subsequently, to work with the regional council of Niagara and with local municipal governments as well. I've seen time and time again how indecision at the Niagara regional council level can harm the services we need to see improved. It's not just the harm of the individual decision. It's the opportunity cost of decisions that weren't made, the opportunity cost of inertia.

There's a saying that we've talked about, and I think it applies to some of the lower-tier governments and municipal governments, specifically at the regional level. It's a saying that's called "paralysis by analysis." Perhaps you've heard of that before: paralysis by analysis. We're going to study it. We're going to send it to committees, we're going to bring it back from committees, we're going to discuss it and we'll send it to other levels of government. We'll blame the other levels of government. We'll make sure that we then blame the lower-tier level of government. That's what we've seen, unfortunately, from regional governments over time.

We've seen delayed decision-making on water and waste water infrastructure that can frustrate affected communities. We've seen permit delays. Thankfully, we had legislation a couple of years ago—I believe Bill 23, if my memory's correct—that ensured the planning authorities that used to rest with the region of Niagara are now with lower-tier municipalities. This is great news. It helps deal with some of that merry-go-round, that circus of people who were bringing forward, in some cases, tiny projects, like adding an accessory dwelling unit or adding a place for their retiring parents to live. They would have to go through the NPCA, the NEC and Niagara Parks and then they would have to go to the Niagara region. They would have to go through the city—I mean, it just became what I've heard referred to as the never-ending merry-go-round of permitting.

Thankfully, we have taken action as a government to bring the powers of planning out of the region and give those to local municipalities. That's a good thing and I think has helped to address some of the progress. But, really, those opportunity costs, the lost businesses—it's really hard to measure; those lost businesses that don't come to a community because of the malaise of decision-making.

We had, in Niagara—and I know these numbers will be staggering to colleagues and I hope the members opposite are listening to these numbers. Taxes in the Niagara region increased by 25% in the last three years alone—25%. We've seen local politicians in Niagara from the lower municipal level and the regional level raise questions about cost and effectiveness and, frankly, those discussions have now revived the ongoing discussions regarding the long-standing issue of reducing the size of our municipal councils.

Let's talk about that. That's a discussion that has been going on. At least, in the decade that I've served, I've heard about it from day one. I'm sure colleagues who have been in this chamber longer have heard about it even longer. I understand there are reports going back to 2000 where there are already regional governance reviews that were happening and discussions at the Niagara region. So this is not something that came out of nowhere.

I want to acknowledge, actually, for a second—how do I say this? I understand why he made the decision he made, that former chair Gale decided to leave. I understand that.

Ms. Catherine Fife: He didn't decide to leave; you fired him.

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: But I will say, to be candid: He has, I think single-handedly, ensured that the conversation that bubbled up from time to time—I mean, look, I see some colleagues heckling from over there. I know that the member from St. Catharines, I know that the member from Niagara Falls, have heard this discussion. Had they walked around the region as I spoke with people, they would have heard the discussion about regional governance. “Too many politicians.” It's impossible.

You heard it even when we saw, finally, regional transit come. How long did it take to get Niagara regional transit in place? It was embarrassing, frankly. Now, they did it and I'm glad they did it. I think it would have happened a lot faster if we had had the structure that Bill 100 is going to be placing into effect. Because yes, regional governance in Niagara has been talked about for a long time but, to his credit, Bob Gale really, I think, got the ball rolling when it came to starting that conversation in a very strong way in the Niagara region, and people reacted.

Look, some people had a lot of opinions. I like to say, Speaker—and I think you've heard me say this before—I have seven siblings. We don't agree with each other on what to have for dinner when we all get together. To expect that 126 municipal politicians are going to have a complete consensus on exactly what structure change should look like—I think you're kidding yourselves. So perhaps, maybe members of the opposition will say, “Oh, we have to get 126 people to say, ‘This is exactly the

model that we all agree on,’ before we can make any changes.” They're pie in the sky for all sorts of reasons; I think that's one of them.

The reality is the province did hear a strong consensus on a couple of things. I would say one of them was that taxes are too high in the Niagara region; second, that we have a massive backlog of infrastructure; and third, that the decision-making capacity of 126 bifurcated levels of government, politicians, is too many.

Look, the Premier said it, but why did he say it? Well, he said it because he's heard directly from a lot of people. The Premier talks, we've heard before, right? He gives out his phone number. He comes to Niagara a lot and I appreciate that. What did people bring up when he came to the Niagara region? What do people bring up on his cell phone when they call him? They bring up the fact—and he said it bluntly: There are too many people, too many politicians in Niagara; more municipal politicians in one region than in the entire province than there are MPPs—look at us. There are 124 of us here in this House. There are 126 in Niagara.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order.

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: Sorry: There would have been, before this legislation finally brought common sense back to governance in the Niagara region.

So it's been discussed for a long time, but there was a consensus as well on the need for change. There wasn't a consensus on exactly what type of model should come forward—fair enough.

But I will say this: I have seen numerous efforts from folks—even actually back in 2020, there was, I believe, a 28-page report. It came to regional council, and it detailed the motions and efforts that have been made towards reform since 2005. And it self-describes. It describes—people say, “Well, then they should make all the changes.” Yes. They haven't been able to make the changes. That's the reality.

I agree. I mean, they should have made—I'll hear the opposition members. I guarantee you, they're going to stand up and say, “They should make all the changes. You should just leave it with them.” And my answer back to that is, they had a chance. They asked for change. They wanted change.

1350

We have letters—okay, who do we have letters from? We have letters from, I believe, almost all of the mayors of all the municipalities in Niagara, recognizing the need for change, coming out in support of this legislation.

Interjections.

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: It's painful, I know; I hear the heckling. I hear the members opposite. I hope they're listening. I hear them talking about the concerns and I respect that, but look, the mayors of Lincoln, Niagara Falls, St. Catharines and Welland—they have all been very vocal in their support for reforms to regional governance.

And now, the mayors of Grimsby, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Port Colborne, West Lincoln, Pelham, Thorold and

Wainfleet are publicly welcoming the proposed changes in Bill 100. They've come out with a statement saying that. So I think that is the vast, vast majority of the population.

In fact, we've actually seen Grimsby, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Port Colborne and Thorold—they've all said that they want to voluntarily reduce the size of their local councils, and I support them in that. I think absolutely good for them, because that will cut, I believe, another eight politicians down.

Lincoln actually—earlier this year—has already voluntarily reduced their council size from eight to six. Huge kudos to the council of Lincoln: That took intestinal fortitude. I appreciate them stepping forward and being willing to do that to become more efficient, and ultimately, to make better decisions that are going to move projects forward, new housing forward, new infrastructure forward and also ensure that they are able to be more responsive. Mayor Easton from Lincoln said, "Regional governance reform is a critical step toward ensuring fair, efficient, and accountable decision-making across our" region.

And while Bill 100 doesn't change, actually, the number of lower-tier municipalities in Niagara, it does help to streamline decision-making by reducing regional council to the mayors of the lower tiers plus an appointed chair. If passed, this bill would, through legislative amendments, reduce the Niagara regional council by removing 19 regional councillor positions. That result would be a reduction from a 32-member council to 13-member council comprising the 12 mayors of the lower-tier municipalities in Niagara region plus an appointed chair.

Just for context, Halifax is two-and-a-half times the geography of the Niagara region—similar size, actually, about half a million people; I think we're at about 510,000 right now in the Niagara region—and if my memory is correct, they have 16 councillors plus a mayor and they don't have the lower tier. So we're still going to have, with these changes, around 100 councillors. I mean, it's still going to be quite substantial, the amount of politicians that we have. But it's really going to also improve, I believe, the direct accountability.

I respect the regional councillors that I have worked with and I thank them. They are committed to their communities. They care about their communities. But I'm going to be very blunt: When you ask people, "Who is your regional councillor?"—and I've actually asked people, because I've had people come and say, "Oh, I don't know if I like these changes." I say, "Okay, so who's your regional councillor?" and they blank. "Well, Mayor Easton." You're proving the point. Or "Mayor Ganann" or "Mayor Junkin."

They all assume—and they are right—that their mayor is a regional councillor and that is true. They often don't know who their local regional councillor is and that's not a slight against those regional councillors. Again, I respect their passion and their care and their commitment to their communities, but from a purely accountability-based perspective, people know who their mayor is. They know that their mayor sits at the regional table. And I'm sure, Chair, you've had this experience in Durham as well—that

people will go to their mayor or their local councillor, but they often don't really know who their regional councillors are.

This is going to fix that. There is not going to be any hiding anymore. If you have a regional councillor who is a mayor, they can't say, "Well, the regional councillors outvoted the mayor, so blame the regional councillors," and the regional councillors can't go, "Oh, you've got to blame the mayor." No, no, no, no, no, no. No, no, no. It's called having the mayors do the work that mayors are called to do, and that's also govern their municipalities and govern the region of Niagara. I think that that is going to be good for accountability and democracy in the Niagara region.

Now, weighted voting: It's a question that has come up; people ask about it. I'll just say, the way it's been framed is, okay, we're going to have the mayors. How do we restore the fairness of representation on Niagara regional council if we don't have those regional councils around the table? Because, as you know perhaps, the regional councillors who are there—the reason that we had regional councillors was essentially that you would have the number of councillors based on the population of your individual city and then that would be reflected around the table.

So I want to expand, for the benefit of the members of the House and those who are watching today, a little bit more about what weighted voting will look like.

Weighted voting is a system that's already used by some upper-tier municipalities in Ontario, such as counties, where each member of council is assigned a different number of votes. So what does this mean? It's based on factors such as, for example, what we talked about: the population or the number of electors that they represent. This generally means that representatives from more populous municipalities have a weighted vote which intends to reflect the proportional representation at that county or regional level. It's not something new. It already happens. It indirectly happened in Niagara by having all of those regional councillors. It's used in Simcoe county, for example. They already have that system.

While generally each upper-tier municipality can set its detailed rules through bylaws, the general structure is this: Each lower-tier municipality—in Niagara West or Niagara Falls or whichever individual municipality—will have at least one representative on that upper-tier council. So it will be clear and you don't go running around—"Which of my seven, which ones are the ones that are going to vote if I'm in St. Catharines or Niagara Falls? How many of these councillors do I go to in Welland?" I see the member opposite from St. Catharines talk about—no, no, no. You know who you're going to go to. It's going to be your mayor. You know exactly who is going to be voting and they will be assigned the number of votes as a number that is proportional to their municipality's population.

Then when a vote is held, a recorded vote might show the number of weighted votes cast. However, there are differences between the simple majority of members present, which might be different from the majority of weighted votes. And really, we're going to work to get this

right. We're not saying that everything is set in stone yet. This legislation is enabling legislation, and it will detail some of a framework that is going to be in place. But we're going to work with the lower-tier municipalities. We're going to work with local councils. We're going to work with folks at the region as well to ensure that we have a transition of a new council structure that ensures appropriate and effective representation.

This isn't coming into effect tomorrow. I mean, we still have half a year until the municipal elections. So this is something we're going to obviously get right and take our time to get right. But it's not something new. I'm sure I'll hear colleagues as they chirp away over there. They'll raise their concerns and they're allowed to do that. But I'll go back to the fact that there have been clear, clear signals for many years coming from the Niagara region that detail the need for change.

Look, I've had people reach out since we came forward with this legislation and say we didn't go far enough. If you read the local papers, there were articles from people arguing, "Oh, we should go full-blown, make it one city—you know, go the Hamilton route; go the Ottawa route." You had others saying, "We should have five cities; we should have six." There were all sorts of things. Then there were people—and I remember this very clearly: "If there aren't amalgamations, we'll be okay with whatever. Just no amalgamations—please, no amalgamations."

Of course, members of the opposition changed their tune as soon as we came out and said, "Well, we're not doing amalgamations. We're actually going to be ensuring we're reducing the number." "Oh, no. What? No." Well, that was a different tune than a lot of them were speaking a few weeks ago, so I guess they can't be consistent in that either.

Listen, I want to impress on the Legislature though that it is important that we get this done. We have to move on this now. I wasn't around in 1970. Most members I don't think were around in the 1970s—a few members I guess here and there—a couple of the members there. But I'll say this: In 1970, when the Niagara region came into existence, it was a different era. We came from 26 municipalities and two counties—the county of Welland and the county of Lincoln—and 26 municipalities that I'm sure most of us probably don't even know the names of. I know my area's names like Clinton and Louth. I think of South Grimsby; we had Caistor Gainsborough. We had all these little municipalities and they amalgamated.

Now, they had to change with time because they were responding to the 1970s. It was an era of change: it was post-war, there was rapid industrialization, rapid needs for industrial growth, rapid needs for infrastructure growth. The Premier at the time saw that need, he responded to the need for change, and he brought in the Niagara regional governance.

I really have always admired Jim Bradley, and I have to tell you, I miss him all the time. He was a great regional chair, he was a great MPP, a great minister and someone I really appreciated. I remember asking him—because the funny thing is, he got more and more conservative with

time, like small-c conservative. What I mean by that is he didn't always want change. I get that, and I really liked him. We would have good lunches and good conversations. And he went, "Sam, I think the way things are right now working pretty good." I said, "Okay, so what did you think in 1970 when they brought in the structure we have?" "Oh, I was against it." So I was like, "You were against it, but now you think it's great?" I think that that's what's going to happen with this.

1400

There are some people who say, "Oh, I don't know if everything"—this is responding to the letters of mayors. It's responding to the calls of elected officials. It's responding to the calls of business owners who say, "We need to get decisions made. We can't have all this lost opportunity cost." We can't have indecision that paralyzes government. We cannot have paralysis by analysis.

We need to move to reduce the cost of living for people who live in Niagara. We need to move to build infrastructure to keep our roads safe, to keep our communities moving. We need to move to plan for the future. You know, 1970 till today—56 years of growth that have happened. We need to plan not just for today, not just for the next electoral cycle, but we need to plan for the next 56 years.

I believe this legislation will do that. I'm proud to vote for this legislation, and I hope all members in this House will join me in doing so.

And now, to speak more about what this bill will mean for the good people up in Simcoe county, I will turn it over to the excellent member Brian Saunderson.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member from Simcoe–Grey.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: It's certainly a pleasure to join the debate today on Bill 100, not only in my responsibilities as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, but also because this directly impacts my riding of Simcoe–Grey, which is a member of Simcoe county, but also because I served on county council in Simcoe county and served as a municipal councillor in the town of Collingwood. My comments are largely shaped by that experience, when I was deputy mayor and then mayor of the town of Collingwood from 2014 to 2022.

The evolution of the county council—members may know that of the regional review, Simcoe county is the only county government that has been included in that grouping. We're not a regional government, so there are differences. But we are the largest county both geographically and population-wise, and we're one of the fastest-growing counties in Ontario. We have a population now of about 325,000 and that is expected to grow by another 185,000-plus, bringing us to over half a million people. The county has a long history. It was formed in the 1860s, I believe, around Confederation, and has served the member municipalities very well since that time.

So my comments today are largely grounded in my experiences both at Simcoe county and municipally, as well

as here at Queen's Park, where I'm now in my second term.

This government, as I spoke to on Monday to Bill 98, is looking at some structural changes for planning, for official plans, for site plans and also for municipal service delivery corporations, because as we know, across the province, we're facing a large infrastructure deficit of about \$200 billion.

This government has been working very closely with our municipal partners—444 municipalities in Ontario. I'm happy to say that in the government, on both sides of this House, in our rump section as well, this is the only party that truly represents every area code in the province. We have done that because we are committed to working collaboratively with our municipal partners to make sure that we advance their interests. And since coming into government in 2018, we have increased our funding for our municipal partners by about 40%.

That is not only through program funding, but also through infrastructure funding: the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund; our HEWS funding, Housing-Enabling Water Systems funding; housing and safety funding; and also the \$1-billion infrastructure fund. I can tell you that in Simcoe county, the 16 member municipalities have benefited by over half a billion dollars—\$500 million—in infrastructure funding to help us build the linear infrastructure we need in the ground to grow, to get houses in the ground and to get housing starts going to make housing more affordable and keep the dream of home ownership going in this great province.

Before I turn to the specifics of the proposed amendments, I want to provide some context about Simcoe county specifically. Beginning in 1994, Simcoe county council was structured to include both the mayors and deputy mayors of its 16 lower-tier municipalities. That resulted in a council composed of 32 members, and they elected from within the warden. So the warden was never elected; it was a delegated appointment through the voters. The appointment of a warden has been consistent throughout the county's history, going back to 1994. So there's been no change made by the fact that the warden will now be appointed; it will be appointed by the provincial government, and we were also elected. The delegated authority is going from the municipal council up to the provincial government, so there's no change in that.

In October—well, I think I can go back farther than that. When I was a council member, between 2014 and 2022, and particularly between 2018 and 2022, with the urging of the provincial government, we went through a very specific review not only of our governance model but also our service delivery model. You may remember the municipal efficiencies funding, modernization funding, that was advanced. We used that funding to look at our service delivery of linear infrastructure, our services delivery of fire services, our service delivery of libraries—all of those things that come under both the county and lower-tier municipality—to try and find a way that we could deliver our services more efficiently to the public, to the taxpayer, to the end user.

I would also point out that Simcoe county has an extremely efficient system. When we look at the municipal taxes that go to the local municipality, the upper-tier municipality and the education school tax portion, in my municipality of Collingwood, 60% of the residents' tax dollars went to the municipality, 20% went to the county and 20% went to the province for education. Of that 60% that goes to the municipalities—as I indicated before, if you take one tax dollar for all levels of government, that's the eight cents that goes to your municipality.

This year, the county of Simcoe has a budget of over \$1 billion: 60% of that budget is flow-through program funding from the province, and I'll cover those services later; 40% comes from the municipal members. That's an extremely efficient delivery system when you consider the breadth of the services that are provided by the county to the 16 member municipalities. And those member municipalities do not include the cities of Barrie or Orillia; those are separated cities. They purchase on a pro-rata basis a portion of our social services, which I will also talk about.

The county of Simcoe is an extremely efficient model in terms of taxpayer dollars both from the province and from the municipalities for the services that are delivered. However, we are seeing stresses on that. As I indicated in my talk the other day, in my comments in the House the other day—I think it was Monday—on Bill 98, we have to find efficiencies to make sure we stretch that tax dollar, because we've seen, particularly since the pandemic, an increase of stresses on municipalities to get linked together, with the incredible stresses that come from the increase in the prices for procurement, for infrastructure, for housing and for local services. So we have to work with our municipalities to find efficiencies there, and that is the genesis of this bill. That is part of the iterative process that both the Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries have talked about today. This is not an isolated example of our work with our municipal partners to try to find more efficiencies; this is an iterative process that's covered governance, it's covered infrastructure, it's covered program delivery, it's covered planning and it's covered housing, and this is all part of our partnership with our municipal partners.

And so, as a result of our discussion at the county council from 2018 to 2022, there was also a review that was done by Michael Fenn and Mr. Seiling that was looking at the composition of county council. The county council worked in collaboration with both of those officials to look at systems about how we could do it. That has informed our discussion about the composition of the county council. And I can tell you that, going back to the late 1990s and the early 2000s, composition of council has been a quarterly—for every single session of the county council, it has been a point of discussion: finding efficiencies, finding the best ways for representation and for getting voices on the table.

So in this term of government, from 2022 forward, Simcoe has also been looking at their composition. In October 2024, Simcoe county voted to expand its

membership to 33 members so that it would add an appointed warden. So it didn't reduce its size from 32; it actually added one. But in just three months, in January 2025, council reconsidered that approach, and after its reflection it decided to reverse its earlier decision and instead to pursue a more streamlined model, reducing its size to 17 members for the 2026 to 2030 term. That included 16 member municipalities' one representative—the mayor—and an appointed warden, appointed by the county council.

1410

The timeline was important there, because as we get into the election year—May 1 of this year the candidates will need to declare their candidacy for the upcoming election in October. In order to make these changes we have to do that now, so that by May 1, if this is passed, the county will know of the changes to their electoral system and how their governance model is.

Under that model, as I said, there would be the warden for the county, appointed by council, and then the 16 lower-tier mayors, each representing their municipality. And so to give effect to that decision, it's not a simple vote by council. It requires what's called a triple majority: It has to be approved by the county council; it has to go down to the lower-tier municipalities and it has to be approved by a majority of the lower-tier councils that represent the majority of the residents of Simcoe county. Then it comes back to council for final approval.

So there are three separate thresholds. They passed the first threshold, as I said, in January 2025, and it went down to the lower-tier municipalities. Those lower-tier municipalities passed it on a majority basis—again, representing the majority of the population of Simcoe county—and then it came back to the county council, where it was defeated in a tie of 8 to 8, and so it stalled after years of discussion. This goes in part to the comments by the Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries. It got stalled after much debate and a lot of discussion, and the member municipalities and the residents of those municipalities, on a majority basis, approved the change, but when it came back to the county council, it was defeated in a tie.

In the fallout of that, there was great dissension in the county, and so it came back to county council, and, in a weighted vote, they passed the resolution asking the warden to write a letter to the province, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, asking for this change. So that's how it's here before this House today: It was requested by Simcoe county, and it was requested by the majority of the voters of Simcoe county in the majority of the member municipalities. It came two thirds across the line in the triple-majority requirement, but was defeated by a tie at council when it came back.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Not the chairs.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I don't even know what that comment means, so I'm going to move on.

Faced with that outcome, this government has decided yet again to listen to the residents, and to get in the game

and make a change that was asked for by the residents of Simcoe county and asked for at a critical time in the municipal cycle, so that we can be prepared for the next election. By bringing forward these proposed changes in advance of the nomination period, we're providing the municipalities, the prospective candidates and the residents of Simcoe county with the clarity they deserve, after requesting that we make this change.

That certainty, I believe, is essential to an orderly transition to the new governance model that is before us at the request of the majority of the residents of Simcoe county. As I said, it would reduce the size of council from 32 to 16, plus a warden who would be appointed—a delegated appointment, as it was before, only it's not being appointed by the county; it's now being appointed by the province.

As we know, all municipalities are statutory creatures of the province, so it's my suggestion and submission that this is really no difference, whether it be appointed by the county or by the province. In fact, with all the issues that we have before us, it makes sense that the appointment be made by the province, so that we get above the weeds of local politics to appoint somebody. We're developing the criteria for those appointments, so that criteria will be known in advance. All applicants will have to apply, and then they will be vetted and reviewed, just like we do with all provincial appointments, whether it be justices of the peace, judges or members of the various committees that serve throughout this province.

It's important to understand, and I think the residents of Simcoe county understand, that this change is about improving efficiency and clarity in the decision-making process—it's not about reducing representation—and it preserves the current balance of representation for each of the 16 member municipalities. Their voice is the same after this legislation is passed as it was before, but now we have a more efficient, streamlined system that will assist in making these decisions in a timely basis because we know we have lots to do across the province.

The county already has in place a weighted vote, which allows the lower-tier municipalities and upper-tier municipalities to be weighted based on their populations. The way the system works is that the lower-tier municipalities are each allocated three votes; however, they get additional votes assigned to the municipalities who have more than 5,000 electors at a rate of one additional vote for every 2,000 electors above that threshold. Historically, those weighted votes were divided between the mayor and deputy mayor. And now that system will continue with the mayors on the same basis, so the voices, as I said, will remain intact. All the municipalities will have the same representation and same voice at council.

The warden would also hold a weighted vote, set at the level equal to the lowest number of votes held by any other member of the council. So that warden voice would be factored in with the lowest representation value of any of the other municipalities, and that ensures that the warden has a meaningful role at council but also that it is recognized that the warden is a separate role. What that means,

Speaker, is that even with the reduction in the number of council members, the representation of the electors across Simcoe county remains the same.

I want to talk a little bit about the 16 lower-tier municipalities. They stretch from Highway 400 in the south to the shores of Georgian Bay in the north and from Highways 46 and 47 in the east to Highway 124 in the west. These include the towns of Bradford West Gwillimbury, Collingwood, Innisfil, Midland, New Tecumseth, Penetanguishene, Wasaga Beach, as well as the townships of Adjala-Tosoronto, Clearview, Essa, Oro-Medonte, Ramara, Severn, Springwater, Tay and Tiny. Ironically, Tiny is actually one of the biggest municipalities—go figure. The county seat is located in the township of Springwater, which is in the community of Midhurst.

As I said, the county delivers a wide range of services that are very broad-reaching. It's responsible for the construction of more than 900 kilometres of regional roads and 120 bridges. Since 2018 it's operated the LINX Transit system, and we talked this morning in question period about the importance of local public transit. It also delivers paramedic services not only to the county but also to the separate cities of Barrie and Orillia. And it manages residential waste collection for approximately 150,000 locations, operates municipal waste facilities, including hazardous waste sites, and maintains three active landfill sites.

It has four long-term-care homes with 500 residents and provides a range of supportive housing for aging in place. It plays a significant role in social services, including the management of more than 4,000 social housing units, nearly 3,000 of which are rent-geared-to-income. It oversees Ontario Works, ODSP as well as being involved in local economic development, tourism promotion, settlement services, emergency management, bylaw enforcement. It is the owner of the Simcoe regional airport, which is a huge economic driver that will become increasingly important with the development of the Ring of Fire. It has cultural services such as archives and museums, and it handles the early years programs in the region as well.

All of these programs are critical to the health and well-being of our residents, delivered at the upper-tier level in co-operation and collaboration with the lower-tier municipalities. It's incredibly important for our residents in Simcoe, which is a growth node, that we deliver these services effectively and efficiently, and that is the genesis of this legislation.

As I said, it's an iterative process. I support this 100%, as do the majority of the residents of Simcoe county, and I hope the members opposite will understand that.

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

MPP Catherine McKenney: Thank you to the three of you for that enlightenment.

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The regional municipality of Ottawa-Carleton, pre-amalgamation, also had unelected and appointed chairs. They were unaccountable, it was undemocratic, and we actually moved to elect a chair. Then the Conservative

government came in, amalgamated us and told us everything would be much better in the large city of Ottawa. But today we've got higher taxes than we did then. We've got more staff, we've got more debt, so it did not work out. It did not work out and that was on you.

I just wonder, outside of strong mayors, which are also unaccountable and lead to less democracy, is there a line that you won't cross? Would you actually appoint a majority of city councillors at some point because you thought maybe that would make your jobs easier?

Hon. Graydon Smith: I appreciate the question from my colleague across the aisle. We've gone into the land of fantastical hypotheticals this afternoon. I appreciate that.

Speaker, let's be clear about what this is about. This is about getting the job done in regional municipalities that play an incredibly important role in governance and decision-making in Ontario. Some are small; some are large. All are very, very important.

The opportunity to appoint chairs is not one that we are taking lightly but one that we believe will have a massive, positive impact. There will be a process to that chair appointment. These will be people that are qualified and able to do their job to take these regions and move the business along quickly and effectively and make sure that they're operating at their very highest level.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Back in—what was it—2018, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing at the time commissioned a gentleman named Michael Fenn and a gentleman named Ken Seiling to do a report on regional governance. God knows how much was spent on that—

Interjection: It was \$250,000.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: There we go—how much time it took these smart gentlemen to do all this consultation. Then the report was given to the then Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing in 2019 and was never released.

I was just wondering—to anyone over there who would like to answer: Where is the Seiling and Fenn report on regional governance?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I thank the member for the question. What is very important about that question—and having been a member of that council at the time—is that it again brought the discussion to the county council, which has brought us here to this discussion today about the governance review.

We looked internally. Through our modernization findings, we looked internally, and the discussion at the county is what's driving what's in this legislation today.

The relevant portion for the member opposite is that the residents of Simcoe county are asking for this change and that's what this legislation is about.

Interjections.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Chair, I want to thank both the associate ministers and the parliamentary assistant

for their presentation and outlining how stepping up to support locally developed solutions is basically a necessity.

Now, local leaders have already identified the need to reduce council size to improve efficiency, but their proposal narrowly missed the required threshold. Can either the associate ministers or the parliamentary assistant explain how this approach respects local input while ensuring that the region can move forward with a more effective governance model?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I want to thank my colleague for the question. It is a very important question because it goes to the—we hear constantly from across the floor that what we’re doing is undemocratic and not being done with consultation. This legislation that is before us with regard to Simcoe county and Niagara is exactly connected to the will of the public. It is being driven by the residents and the taxpayers.

In Simcoe county, the majority of the residents of Simcoe county voted for what’s in this legislation. So to try and say that it is undemocratic or unrepresentative is completely inaccurate. That’s the whole point of what’s in this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A reminder to all members to direct their remarks through the Chair and stop heckling.

Questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: This bill means that eight regions in Ontario will soon be governed by a Ford hand-picked insider, maybe a failed Conservative candidate or a loyal PC donor. And this hand-picked Conservative insider will also have strong-mayor powers. This gives an unelected, unaccountable appointee the ability to override decisions that were made by democratically elected local councillors. This is similar in many ways to the government’s attack on locally elected school board trustees.

Why is this government so determined to dismantle local democracy at school boards and now regional councils?

Hon. Graydon Smith: My goodness, when I hear questions from the NDP, I often think of a poster that was up on the wall of my English class in grade 10 that defined “hyperbole.” Anyway, these questions are quite fantastical today.

Listen, I think what is important to note is that we’re not interested in hand-picking just anybody for this job, as somebody would say across the aisle. We’re not interested in that at all. We’re interested in a process that finds a great person for this job, that has got multiple steps to it, that includes vetting previous elected officials—building in safeguards, making sure that these people are vetted through Ontario’s established appointment process, making sure that there are well-established metrics and mechanics to find the next chairs that will lead our regions. But most of all, we want to find the people who can get the job done and who will get the job done for these regions that desperately need it.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: It’s too bad; I would really hope the member from Niagara West could answer this. He mentioned “analysis by paralysis” and, absolutely, I don’t like things to take so long to get done, so I agree with that. But what I don’t agree with is this government’s method. “Super slapdash” is what I would call it. Basically, you barrel through like a bull in a china shop with your legislation, then realize your mistake and often-times have to reverse it or come out with another bogus bill to finish the job, like you’ve done with Bill 17 and then Bill 60 and now Bill 98. So I’m just wondering why you don’t just take the time to do it right the first time? Why the hurry to do it now before a municipal election? Why—

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

Hon. Graydon Smith: Again, I appreciate the question. I think we’re doing this in advance of the election to make sure that there is a long runway and lots of continuity and that there are no surprises.

When it comes to Niagara, we’ve had lots of feedback from people in Niagara, elected leaders in Niagara—Jim Diodati, Frank Campion, Sandra Easton; mayor, mayor, mayor—in a region that has been asking for change.

We thank everyone for the input that we’ve received. We’ve developed a bill very thoughtfully, and we’ll be implementing that just as thoughtfully, I hope, with the pleasure of this House.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Unfortunately, there isn’t time for another question—

Mr. Matthew Rae: Aw, Speaker. She told me she was going to recognize me.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member for Perth–Wellington is not going to be recognized just yet.

Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It is indeed a pleasure to rise to share the concerns of Waterloo region as it relates to Bill 100, the Better Regional Governance Act, which is not named accurately in any way, shape or form.

I will say, I will be sharing my time with the members from St. Catharines and from Niagara Falls.

I’ve listened to the discourse on this bill from the government members, and they’re talking about a “clarity of leadership”—in quotation marks, of course—because what this government has essentially done to municipalities is consistently create chaos. In fact, as we speak right now, municipalities who have been targeted by this government—this would be Durham, Halton, Muskoka, Niagara, Peel, Waterloo and York—are currently advertising right now for regional chairs for an election which will be upcoming. Your duty to consult municipalities, to have conversations with those municipalities when you are significantly changing governance structure is once again an abdication of responsibility from the Ford government.

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To summarize, because I’m going to get to some of the feedback really quickly on how Waterloo region is responding to the surprise announcement that we will no longer be electing our regional chair—and it kind of

reminds me of that Monty Python act where the fellow says, "Well, I'm your king," and then the peasant says, "Well, I didn't vote for you," and then that peasant loses his head, essentially. There is a very much a growing theme here where this government is gathering, collecting and really being very greedy about the power that they want in this province, and it's coming at the expense of our communities and the well-being of our communities.

This is where we are thus far: So far, this government has replaced elected representatives with unelected insiders. Property taxes will be set by someone you never elected and can never remove. This is a recipe for corruption from a government already under criminal investigation. In fact, this Premier is currently in conflict with the courts of Ontario, who have ruled that his cellphone records must be made public because he's been doing personal work on his professional cellphone. He, of course, has introduced retroactive legislation so that he doesn't have to pay attention to the law.

From small towns to big cities, this is a government that has demonstrated again and again that you do not respect local communities. In fact, you have a disdain for democracy. This is also a government that has spent years downloading costs onto municipalities. Now he wants to control those municipalities and how they spend their limited tax dollars.

It's important for people to understand that communities will be on the hook for provincial failures on housing, transit, infrastructure, with no meaningful say over how those issues are managed. We know that in Ontario right now, such is the chaos that this government has created that we are now at housing starts around 1955 levels. So the chaos that you have created around planning, around grabbing power, around mixed messages has really essentially taken us back in time, Madam Speaker.

Finally, what we have done is we have consistently brought solutions forward to this government on municipal funding, be it on housing, be it on transit and respect for municipalities. We have tried to bring a new level of discourse and respect for municipalities because they are our partners in this. You treat them like children.

I will say, there also is very much a punitive nature to this government. When municipalities do speak up, they pay the price. There is a certain mean-spiritedness or vindictiveness to how some of these appointments have happened, and I'll get back into that in a second.

In summary, this Premier's disdain for the democratic process, for this institution as a Parliament, is at, as he likes to say, historic levels—disdain at historic levels for our democracy. The meaningful engagement with duly elected officials across the province is something that he's not interested in, and he shows that disdain every single day.

I will say, Dalton McGuinty answered my first question in this House as the Premier of Ontario. He showed up, as did the previous Premier.

The Premier walks into this place, goes right by his chair, goes to gossip, goes to have a little chit-chat but will not answer questions from the official opposition. This is

the truth, and that demonstrates that he feels like he's above this place.

I think that we have to be very careful when a leader holds on to power, prevents those who should have rights and responsibilities—because we are duly elected in our communities—and he tries to remove that power from us. When he does that, he removes the power and voices of the people we're elected to serve. That is the true definition of a disdain for democracy—not unlike that orange guy south of the border. So we need to be very mindful of patterns of behaviour. When people show you who they really are, you should pay attention.

This is what this government's record thus far is on dealing with municipalities:

First elected in 2018, they cut Toronto council in half, and they cancelled some regional chair elections.

They went on to take away municipalities' power to adopt ranked-ballot voting systems—which is a more fair system, I think, and municipalities themselves voted for it. He overruled them.

He went on to impose strong-mayor powers on municipalities with respect to prescribed provincial priorities. Mayors were not asking for it, but he selected mayors to have powers to override duly elected councillors in those communities.

He went on to enable minority rule by strong mayors—and this was Bill 39.

He assumed power to appoint regional chairs in Peel, York and Niagara—and that was Bill 39.

He stripped certain GTA regional municipalities of their planning responsibilities, thus creating chaos. Waterloo region is feeling it every single day, with not having enough water infrastructure to build housing in 2026.

He suddenly mandated the dissolution of Peel, through Bill 112. That was followed by an equally sudden reversal of this decision. I remember meeting with the region of Peel, and the chair at that time said that they lost employees and they were having a hard time attracting new talent into the Peel region because Peel and Brampton and Caledon—this was going to be a bigger, better model, and all you did was create a mess which set that region back, including on their infrastructure movement. Although it was a fun press conference to watch, to see the mayor of Brampton and the mayors of Mississauga and Caledon all trying to establish who was more powerful—it was amusing for a hot second, but not too much past that. Really, the people of Peel paid the price for your disorganization and for your sloppy, messy legislation that you brought to this floor.

They went on to force prescribed municipalities to transfer their water assets to private corporations.

You've messed up almost every single file in the province of Ontario, from health care to education.

You think you can build a fantasy island on the waterfront and a new convention centre.

You've subsidized a massive spa that should never have even made it to the desk of the minister.

And for some reason, you think that privatizing water is a good idea. This has certainly raised the concerns of

people in Waterloo region, because we rely on an aquifer. We don't have a pipeline to any Great Lake—too bad, though, because the Minister of the Environment apparently didn't realize that 80% of our drinking water comes from an aquifer. Do you know what you don't do? You don't issue commercial permits without reviewing their impact on the community. People's wells are drying up. Farmers do not have enough water to feed their chickens and feed their land. So not only have you disrupted our growth and our economic potential, as a region, with your messy legislation, but we are in an untenable position, where we are not building housing in a housing crisis.

This is your legacy. This is your record. And it is a sad, sad state of affairs.

Now you've decided, "We're just going to appoint our friends and our insiders to these elected positions." You've repeatedly ignored the statutory requirement to consult with municipalities prior to enacting changes affecting municipal interests. So not only do you have a disdain for democracy as a whole, you also have treated municipalities so poorly—so poorly—and it's showing, because our communities are paying the price.

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As far as Waterloo goes, the feedback and the sudden decision to appoint a regional chair has created this bigger question: What's the timing like? What is the process like? Do they have details? Of course they don't, because this, just like all the other legislation, has been drafted on the back of a napkin.

I think John Michael McGrath did an excellent piece. He says, "Why Is Ontario Instituting Minority Rule?" And this is an important piece, is that the democratic process requires the participation of our communities. That is the way we hold politicians to account. If we don't like them, we don't vote for them. That is a right and a responsibility and it is a core tenement of our democracy.

John Michael McGrath goes on to say, "Under a law proposed by the Ford government, later this year millions of Ontarians will find themselves living under minority rule. That most basic measure of democracy—minorities may be protected but otherwise majorities decide—will not apply across a huge swath of this province...."

"Where the real offence to local democratic rights begins is from the government's other announced change: These new local chairs will be conferred with the 'strong mayor' powers the province has bestowed to elected mayors in over 200 cities." And these powers actually include "the ability to reorganize bureaucracies, hire and fire most high-level positions, and, crucially, the ability to veto some measures or affirmatively push forward measures even in the case of majority opposition."

You are appointing people who can override our democratic rights, and you are standing in your place and saying it proudly in the name of efficiencies when you are part of the problem. You have created the chaos in the province of Ontario and now you are just going to appoint a person who can override and overrule our democracies.

You think about that right now. All of us, when we get elected in this place, we take an oath—we take an oath to

serve the best interest of the people of the province. Appointing one person, hand-selecting that person and giving them the ability to override our local democratically elected councillors is not in the best interest of the people of this province, and you know it.

You are actually—and to listen to the Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs say that this will create some clarity. Oh, the clarity is that duly elected people won't have the same rights as the appointed person that's sitting beside them, right? That's the clarity. The clarity is that you don't value democracy. The clarity is that you just want those appointed people to do what you want, to do your bidding. So you are actually, and ironically—but not surprisingly—setting up future councils for more conflict.

So, this is the way it will work: "Appointees from Queen's Park will now have the power to override the decisions of democratically-elected local officials and substitute their own judgment, even in the face of majority opposition. Reversing the decisions of these provincial appointees will take a two-thirds majority on council, where it's possible at all."

So this is where we are in the province of Ontario, right? And it's more than a backsliding of our democracy. This is like an overt, aggressive action that this Premier and his cabinet are taking against the people of Ontario. It's a shameful day for us, for us as legislators who are elected and who value the democratic process. You know that there are places in this world where to have the ability and the privilege to serve in this place is not even available to women, right? It's not available to people who don't have the financial means to do so. We are supposed to be different, and you are weakening that model.

Moving forward, a third of the province's population "will continue to vote for their local politicians but, depending on the municipality and the responsibilities of regional governments, decisions on things like firefighting or transit or water quality are going to depend on a provincial appointee."

I don't care who you appoint. Protecting the water in Waterloo region should never be negotiable, Madam Speaker, right? And if you privatize water, that creates such a power imbalance for our economy and for the health and well-being of the people that we're elected to serve.

We know that you're not good at this, okay? We understand this. You appointed Bob Gale in Niagara region—a failed candidate of some sort—and then he had announced that he had a copy of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. I mean, you have to be embarrassed by this—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Sorry?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: A signed copy.

Ms. Catherine Fife: A signed copy—oh, my God. For the love of humanity, right?

You are not good at appointing people because those people have not been tested by the people, essentially. So this is obviously a bill that is not going to be supportable by us, because it fundamentally works actively and aggressively against the very principles of our democracy.

This how John Michael ends this. He says, “Personally, I think the Tories should just save themselves the trouble and ditch Bill 100. But if they won’t, PC MPPs are going to have to explain to voters back in their ridings why Doug Ford thinks they deserve less of a say in their own affairs than someone who lives in Toronto or Ottawa.” And he says that he’ll be tuning in to find that out.

In Waterloo region, they passed a motion to ask you to stop doing this. The former mayor of Cambridge and regional councillor Doug Craig has said really clearly that this will diminish local democracy. And this isn’t about more or fewer politicians, I would argue; this really is strictly about power, and a power grab by this government.

Because Waterloo region—there is a report, as was previously mentioned. There is a report on our governance structure. It was done six years ago, Madam Speaker. We paid \$250,000 for it. It was done by Ken Seiling, the former chair of the region of Waterloo. He told me, “I want that report to see the light of day because there are efficiencies that can happen.” There are better ways for us to operate as a region. But that is our information, and you are withholding it, right? This is not the solution to any governance questions that exist in the region of Waterloo.

Appointing your friend or an insider to overrule our democratically elected people does not solve the problems of the region of Waterloo. So it demonstrates that your motive in this is truly not about efficiencies or clarity. This is only about holding on to power, getting more power and following through on your own agenda. That agenda runs counter to the interests of the people of Waterloo region, and I will be fighting it tooth and nail.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: It is always a pleasure, a privilege and an honour to stand in my place here in this House and to be the voice for the residents of St. Catharines. I rise today to speak in strong opposition to Bill 100, the so-called Better Regional Governance Act, a piece of legislation that is anything but better and certainly not about governance in the public’s interest.

What we are witnessing is not reform. It is not modernization, and it’s not about efficiency. It is a continuation of a troubling pattern from this Conservative government, one that centralizes power, sidelines local voices and erodes the very foundation of the democracy in all of our municipalities.

Let me be clear from the outset: This is not better governance; it is centralized political control. Niagara residents can see it for exactly what it is: a power grab dressed up as reform.

Over the past few months, the issue of amalgamation and governance has been a hot local topic for Niagara residents. Should we or should we not amalgamate? What does that look like? And how much would it cost the local taxpayer? These are the conversations around every kitchen table in Niagara.

Well, let me paint a picture for you, a timeline of events. Whispers of amalgamation began following the passing of our previous regional chair Jim Bradley, a man who dedi-

cated almost his whole life to public service and served the Niagara region with tact and professionalism. Instead of allowing a transparent and accountable process to determine his successor, this Conservative government stepped in and appointed Bob Gale almost four months later, after the passing of Jim Bradley, a decision that raised serious concerns from the outset.

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For those of you that are not from Niagara region, Bob Gale was among the group of politicians from the 2014 to the 2018 term who were nicknamed “the cabal.” Now it’s time for all of you to go and get your popcorn, because this story gets better.

Let’s shortly describe what the cabal was. At the time, a political conspiracy was revealed and later confirmed by an Ombudsman investigation to be an inside job—that Bob Gale was part of a committee created to influence hiring of the Niagara CEO. And this is who this government chose to place at the centre of the region’s decision-making.

But hold on; it doesn’t stop there. Gale ran for MPP under the Conservatives in the 2022 election and, of course, lost against my colleague, the member from Niagara Falls.

Now, it doesn’t take a rocket scientist to see the pattern here, does it? This is not a coincidence; this is a pattern of political convenience. This Conservative government, under the Ford government, purposely appointed a political figure to do their dirty work—to stir the pot, create panic amongst communities and use their leverage to introduce this bill, Bill 100.

Created chaos, manufactured confusion, then justified central control—that is a pattern. Legislation that, at its core, hands unprecedented authority to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to appoint regional chairs across Ontario strips away the rights of residents to elect the individual who will ultimately control regional budgets, staffing and decision-making.

Let us not forget the appointed Conservative candidate, Bob Gale. These appointed individuals would not answer to the people who pay their taxes. They will actually be answering to the Premier and his cronies, the ministers.

This is not accountability; it’s complete control. If you do not elect the chair, you do not control the decisions. This is the reality of this bill.

And let us be clear about what kind of power we are talking about. These unelected appointees would be granted strong-chair powers. They will be allowed to set budgets, hire and fire senior staff and pass bylaws with the support of just one third of council—that’s right, one third of council. Let that settle in. One third is not democracy anywhere in Canada. It is an engineered minority that rules. That is not governance, Speaker; that is override of authority.

For the people of Niagara, this bill comes after months of chaos, confusion and, frankly, a little bit of embarrassment. We have seen backroom appointees, controversial resignations and a complete lack of transparency. Residents are thinking, “What is going on here in Niagara, and

why is this happening without our input?" Imagine—no input from anyone in Niagara. And they are right to ask these questions, because democracy without consultation is not democracy at all.

Back in February, I released a survey. Over 400 residents in St. Catharines put in their submission, and 90% of the people that put in their submission oppose forced amalgamation and decisions without any of their consultation—90%. That is not a split of opinions; that is clear public verdict. And this government's response is to ignore it?

This is part of a broader pattern, though. They cut Toronto city council in half in the middle of an election. They stripped municipalities of ranked ballots. They imposed strong-mayor powers across Ontario. They've attempted to dissolve Peel region, only to reverse course when it became inconvenient for them—different municipality, same strategies, centralized power and weakened local democracy.

Speaker, the government claims this is about efficiency. Where is that evidence? Show me that evidence. Where is the analysis? Where is the business case? Because what we are seeing is not evidence-based policy, Speaker; it is political decision-making without accountability and without the voice of the people.

Perhaps most concerning: a weighted voting system. Votes could be weighted however the minister chooses: one person, one vote, unless Queen's Park decides otherwise. That is not reform; that is rule-changing power.

This raises a very simple question: Who does this bill serve? Because it does not serve the people of Niagara. Municipalities are struggling because of the governance structures. They are struggling because this province keeps downloading and downloading costs and uploading the blame—in 2024 alone, \$5.4 billion in provincial responsibility funding locally. That is not partnership at all. That is offloading failures onto the municipality.

Niagara taxpayers: higher taxes every year and now less say in how those taxes are spent; 80% of infrastructure costs—we are asking municipalities to build Ontario while starving them of the resources to do it. Speaker, the problem is not governance; the problem is neglect, and Bill 100 is a distraction from that neglect.

Health care: municipalities stepping into provincial responsibilities time in and time out.

City halls are becoming the emergency backup system for provincial underperformance.

Again, how does Bill 100 fix any of this? It doesn't build homes. It doesn't hire doctors, and it doesn't lower costs. It just moves power further and further and further away from the people. What it does do: It shifts power away the people. This bill is not about fixing services, it is about controlling decisions. Madam Speaker, the people of Niagara definitely deserve better. Local democracy is not optional; it is foundational.

Representation: When Queen's Park controls the structure, local voices get way drowned out. Municipalities are not extensions of this province. They are not departments. They are democratically elected governments.

Consultation: You cannot say "for Niagara by Niagara," as the Premier has said, while excluding Niagara from the process altogether. Let's not forget: We have seen selective endorsements and even cases where rogue mayors have been used as cover for decisions involving public assets like water and waste water systems. That should concern every taxpayer in this province. If this government is serious, stop dictating, start partnering, stop controlling and start supporting.

We've heard the promises before: housing, costs, efficiency—big announcements but very small results. People in Niagara are not fooled. They know when policy is about outcomes and when it is about control.

Regional taxes: That is taxation without representation, plain and simple.

Speaker, that is why the cabal still matters here: because it shows the pattern of insiders, influence and closed-door decision-making that erodes trust, and when trust disappears, legitimacy disappears with it. Strong mayors are an example. When you concentrate power, you don't reduce risk; you multiply it.

In closing, the people have spoken. They have spoken, and they are not buying what this government is selling. Bill 100 is no good for Niagara—no consultation, no mandate, no accountability. This is why this bill must be opposed by all members of this House, and on this side of the House we will always vote against bad policy and undemocratic and dangerous precedent-setting bills like Bill 100 is going to be.

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The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member from Niagara Falls.

MPP Wayne Gates: It's always a pleasure to rise and talk in the House, especially on Bill 110. I'm going to start by talking about some of the comments that were made by my colleague across me from Niagara, who talked about how there's too many politicians in Niagara. What he doesn't tell you is that at any point in time, all they have to do in Niagara is cut down politicians by their councils. They can do it on their own.

When somebody says, "Well, I don't believe that"—and they might say that, except when I was running for council—I'll give you a little history. I had run a number of times for council. As I think I told these guys, I lost seven times before I got elected once. But the one time I was running, the council changed from a ward system, which had 12 elected officials, down to an at-large, getting rid of four councillors. It was done in Niagara Falls, and eight got elected instead of 12, so they cut the council down. Do you know how I remember that story so well, Speaker? I heard you say, "How?" I finished ninth. That was another one of my losses, so I remember it.

Fort Erie did the same thing. They cut the number of councillors down. Lincoln just cut their council down. We can do it on our own. We don't need to be told what to do from Toronto. Niagara wants to do what's right for Niagara. They want to have their own system. They want to be able to do it, and they will do it. So when the MPP

stands up there and says, “Oh, they have too many councillors in Niagara,” it’s not right.

I say to that MPP, and I say to every MPP—and I’m looking at the Liberals over here, the Greens and everybody. How many here have got elected? How many have been elected? Put your hand up. Then why is it the position of this government that we want to appoint chairs in Niagara? And not only in Niagara, because one of the surprising things about Bill 100, I’m going to tell you, is I couldn’t believe that you weren’t just doing it in Niagara. You were doing it in nine other municipalities in the province of Ontario.

You want to control the entire province. You don’t care what the residents are saying, what they think about their community, what they think about their elected reps. Because the one thing I know, and you guys should know, is that if you don’t like the job I’m doing—Speaker, what can you do if you don’t like the job we’re doing? You can vote us out. That’s called democracy.

And I’ve been lucky, because even though I lost seven times, I’ve won five times in a row now because I haven’t been defeated. But one of the guys I ran against—his name has been mentioned here, and I’m not going to say anything bad about the guy—was Bob Gale. I ran against him in 2022. We had an election. I won; he lost. But guess what the Conservatives have done ever since? They appointed him to different jobs. They’ve appointed him to the parks commission, appointed him to chair of the region.

I’ve run five times—you guys can clap if you want; not so enthusiastic—but I’ve run five times and won the last five times. Every single candidate that ran against me—guess what happened to them?

Interjection: What happened?

MPP Wayne Gates: The Conservatives appointed him to a job. And that’s what the problem is: You should earn your spot. If you want to be a councillor, run for council and get elected. Because you’ve got to go out there, knock on doors and say, “I’m the best guy. This is why I’m the best guy,” or the best woman. Instead, this government is doing it all wrong, saying, “You don’t have to run. I’ll just appoint you to a cushy job.” It makes absolutely no sense to me, because Niagara—you guys come there a lot, I know. Put your hands up: How many have been to Niagara? You guys have a convention there every three weeks. I don’t know whether it’s the wine industry or what it is, but you’re always down in Niagara, and I welcome you down there. The reality is, we can’t be appointing people. This is wrong.

I’m going to read something, because he read about—I think her name was Easton, the mayor out in his area. He talked about her. She’s a Conservative, by the way—not that I hold that against her, but she’s a Conservative and that’s what she was talking about. I want to read from the mayor of Fort Erie, who I consider a very good mayor. I consider him a good friend, and quite frankly I go to the mayor quite regularly for advice. Because do you know what? I don’t know everything. I don’t know everything about the municipality, even though I’ve represented it for a while. There are some things I don’t know. So I’ll knock

on his door and say, “Can I have a meeting with you? Can I talk to you? Can I find out what’s going on here?” I respect him.

This is what he wrote about this bill. Fort Erie Mayor Wayne Redekop said earlier this week at town council regarding this bill, “I think it’s important for us to push back—if we value our democracy, we should push back hard.” That’s not a partisan statement. It isn’t. And it’s not hot air. The mayor is speaking plainly about what this bill represents to the people he serves, and the mayor has been elected a number of times in Fort Erie.

In his formal statement following the announcement, Mayor Redekop went even further. He warned that “an unelected regional chair would have the power to reject decisions supported by the majority of the popularly elected mayors at regional council.” Do you know what that line is saying? In Niagara, you’re going to have 12 mayors and a strong-mayor-power chair appointed by you guys. He can overrule all those elected mayors, even though he’s unelected. And he can do that because the province and the Premier of Ontario say, “No, no. We don’t want that. We want something else, and you’re going to deliver our message.” Because that’s what this is about. It’s about control from Toronto—not control from Niagara, control from Toronto. In this case, it’s the Premier.

How do I know it’s the Premier? I can tell this story too. I don’t know if he’ll admit he did it, but he did. The last day before Christmas, we’re all coming around, we’re all buddies, we’re shaking hands. We always do that every Christmas. The mayor came to me—

Interjection: No.

MPP Wayne Gates: The Premier came to me and he said, “Gatesy, I’m going to tell you something. You’ve got too many politicians in Niagara, and you’re either going to go to one city or you’re going to go to four.” I told him, “You’re not doing anything without consulting Niagara region and that population.” They tried to do that under the chair that they appointed, and it went to hell in a handbasket. It was awful. People were so up in arms. But that’s what he wants. He doesn’t want anything, but he wants control. He wants control over one city or four cities. And I’m going to tell you, people from Niagara are saying it; they’re saying amalgamation is off the table. I’m not so sure. I don’t have anything else to say about that. But I’ll continue on with this letter from the mayor.

In his formal statement following the announcement, Mayor Redekop went even further. He warned that “an unelected regional”—I already read this, but I’ll read it again because it’s important—“chair would have the power to reject decisions supported by a majority of popularly elected mayors at regional council.” That’s disgraceful in a democratic society. Think about that for a moment: 12 mayors in Niagara, each elected by their communities, could come together, debate, deliberate and arrive at a majority decision, and one appointed individual could override them—appointed by the Conservatives.

Mayor Redekop also said, “This is the latest step that risks eroding democratic governance in Ontario.” And importantly, he stressed that “it is critical that the public

be consulted”—did you hear that part? “Public be consulted”—you guys aren’t good at that. Not just on this bill but on most bills—“and supportive of these significant changes to uphold their democratic rights and those of their elected officials.”

As I’m reading this out, you can see he’s a very smart guy. As a matter of fact, he used to be a lawyer; he’s retired now. Very smart guy—very, very smart.

He also raised broader concerns about the precedent this sets. What happens when decisions of this magnitude are made without meaningful engagement with the people who will actually live with the consequences? Because, Speaker, once you normalize the idea that leadership can be appointed instead of elected at a regional level, it becomes easier and easier to justify similar changes elsewhere. And that’s what we’re seeing in the bill.

1510

He wrote this. He didn’t know about this, but that’s what you guys are doing. In all these other communities, it’s going to be easier. It’s going to be easy to control them as well, not just Niagara. That’s exactly why so many local leaders are speaking out. Leaders all over Niagara are speaking out because they understand that this isn’t just a technical governance tweak; this is a fundamental shift in how power is exercised.

To all my colleagues over there, my colleagues in front of me and the Liberals that are over there listening intently, that’s what this is about. This is about power. Make no mistake about it. It’s about making sure that their friends and maybe their family members get to do extremely well on some of the land that’s down in Niagara and elsewhere, quite frankly, in the province.

People in my community remember exactly what happened when this government decided to meddle in local governance. What did we get from it? Listen to this. It’s going to happen. It’s going to happen in Kitchener. It’s going to happen in Simcoe. It’s going to happen in Durham—weeks of chaos, confusion. We got uncertainty for municipalities, for staff, for the residents. Municipalities didn’t know how decisions would be made. Staff didn’t know how to implement them. Residents didn’t know who was accountable. Who do they go to?

When that kind of confusion sets in, it doesn’t just stay in a council chamber. This is important: It affects service delivery. It affects planning. It affects people’s confidence in government. I believe that confidence in this government and the trust in this government is at an all-time low, after eight years. I firmly believe that, and these are some of the reasons why. You take people for granted, and you end up getting hurt.

Here’s the key point. This is what we asked for over and over and over as they came to council. There was no data to support what you’re doing. There was no business case to support what you’re doing. There definitely was no transparency. This is the point that is upsetting people in Niagara—I’m sure they’re going to upset the people in Durham, they’re going to upset the people in Kitchener, in any community that this is under: Decisions are coming out of Toronto. That didn’t reflect the reality on the ground

in the Niagara region. We didn’t want decisions from Toronto.

This may surprise you. We have some very talented people: very talented mayors, very talented councillors and very talented regional councillors. These are very smart people who are making important decisions every day. Everybody that’s elected is there for one reason: to help their community, make sure their community is better and make sure there’s more opportunity for their family and their kids. It’s not just people from Toronto who know what’s going on, not just the Premier who knows what’s going on and how better to reflect—we live in Niagara. We know what we need in Niagara. We know how to make it better.

I might be wrong on this, Madam Speaker. There’s a reason why 14 million people come to Niagara Falls every year: because we know what we’re doing down there. There’s a reason why 3.2 million people go to Niagara-on-the-Lake every year, and it’s not just the wine, by the way. There’s lots more to Niagara-on-the-Lake than wine: great shows, great theatre, great museums. We have lots going down in Niagara. We don’t need Toronto to tell us what we’re doing, and quite frankly, that’s not leadership. Do you know what it’s called, Madam Speaker? That’s interference. You’re interfering with the lives in Niagara, and it’s wrong.

To believe that this time, it will be different—Speaker, I don’t think people in Niagara or across Ontario are buying that, because Bill 100 doubles down on the same top-down approach—Toronto-down. It gives the minister the power to appoint regional chairs and then give them regional chair powers—not elected by the people, like all of us were. We were all elected by the people.

I’d like to thank all the people who supported me, and I’ll continue working as hard as I can to get the other people to support me next time.

Not accountable to the voters, not accountable to anybody other than the Premier—so if the Premier gets mad at you, do you know what he can do? Does anybody know? Help me out here. He can get rid of you, appoint somebody else. So who are you going to listen to? Are you going to listen to the residents? In my case, I’ve got to listen to the residents; they elected me. But when you’re appointed by the Premier, who are you going to listen to? Somebody on that side, yell it out; you’re not all busy. I’ll tell you who. You’ve got to listen to the Premier. Does that make sense to you, in a democratic society? And like I said, appointed.

We have to be honest—you guys have got to be honest too. I’m not saying you’re not honest. I’m just saying you’ve got to be honest—honest about what that means. It means that the most powerful figure at the regional level will not owe their position to the people of Niagara. They’ll owe it to the Premier, they’ll owe it to the government that appointed them, because once you’re appointed, my friends, you can be unappointed. If you don’t do what you’re told, that’s what happens, and we know that.

In a province where people expect to vote for their leaders, where accountability is supposed to be fundamental, this government is seizing more and more and more control. And it doesn't stop there.

I've still got some time left, so I'm good.

The bill gives the minister the power to remove those chairs at any time, so not only are they appointed, but they also serve at the pleasure of the government here in Toronto. That creates a very different set of incentives, because when your job depends on maintaining the confidence of Queen's Park and not the confidence of voters, it changes how decisions get made; it changes who to listen to; it changes whose priorities come first. That's not local governance. That's centralized control, straight from Queen's Park. And then you layer on top of that the potential for strong-chair powers—and I explained that a little bit earlier in this speech. We've seen what happens when power gets concentrated in one office. We've seen councils sidelined. We've seen debate cut short. We see that almost every day here. You guys cut off debate all the time. You don't go to committee. Again, that's power. That's what we're talking about. We've seen discussions pushed through without proper consultation—you guys are a stranger to that word, quite frankly. We've seen situations where elected councillors, who represent thousands of residents, are effectively reduced to spectators.

In Niagara, we're talking about 12 municipalities—12—12 communities with different priorities, different economies, different needs. Niagara-on-the-Lake is not the same as Welland—we have a better hockey team there, too, than Welland. Fort Erie is not the same as St. Catharines.

Interjection.

1520

MPP Wayne Gates: Yes, you beat us last week, in game 7. I was there.

Each community has its own identity, its own challenges, its own vision for the future. We have a vision in Niagara. We know where we want to go—I'm not sure it's two Ferris wheels. And regional governance works precisely because it brings those voices together. It forces collaboration. It requires compromise. These are not bad things. It ensures no single community dominates the conversation.

This bill risks undoing that balance because it says one appointed chair with enhanced powers can override those local voices—in a democracy. This isn't China. This isn't Russia. This is Ontario, and we all need to be able to get elected. That's what we need. We certainly shouldn't be controlled by Trump.

Speaker, that should concern every single one of the members in the House because once you start down this road, replacing elected leadership with appointed leadership, you are fundamentally changing the relationship between government and the people they serve. You are taking power away from communities and centralizing it at Queen's Park with the Premier—Premier Ford. And for what? It's a fair question: for what?

Where is the evidence that this will lead to better outcomes? Where is the data that shows appointed chairs

will make more effective decisions? Where is the business case that proves this is the right direction? We've asked those questions. Municipal leaders have asked those questions. Residents have asked those questions. And there are no answers. This government has given us no answers. Instead, we get vague language about efficiency and streamlining. But here's the thing: Faster decisions are not always better decisions. In fact, in governance, speed can sometimes be an enemy of good decision-making.

Good decisions take time. That's why we normally take our time when we get married. We don't rush into that. Good decisions take consultation. They take debate. They take disagreements, just like we're having today. But at least we're having the debate. At least we're having the conversation. You might not agree with a word I'm saying, I might not agree with a word you're saying, but at least we're getting it out there. We're able to debate this. You're not allowing it to happen because you're just going to appoint them. It's bizarre to me.

That requires input from people who are actually affected. That's what democracy looks like. And quite frankly, in a free society and having a dad that fought in World War II, democracy means a lot to me, and it should mean a lot to everybody here.

And yes, it can be messy. It can be. It can be slow. But the process is what ensures accountability because, at the end of the day, if people don't like the decisions that their elected officials are making, then what can they do? Anybody know? Yell it out.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Kick them out.

MPP Wayne Gates: Kick them out; un-elect them—they're not doing their job. Can you do that with an appointed chair, Madam Speaker?

Interjections.

MPP Wayne Gates: She's smiling; she can't talk. The answer is no.

That's a fundamental problem with this bill—that's a fundamental problem. So I'll read that over again to get the attention of my colleagues across: An elected official, you can vote them out. You can't do that to an appointed chair, especially one with strong-chair powers. That's a problem with the bill.

And, Speaker, I want to be very clear. People in Niagara are not against reform. I've already said that. I've given you examples where councils—I know there are other councils now that have sent in requests to the minister: "We can reduce our council by two;" "We can reduce it by three." Whatever they sent in, it hasn't been approved yet, and I know there's a way that that can get done. So we're not against reform.

We want government to work in Niagara. We want coordination. We want efficiencies. We want our tax dollars used wisely.

They want to build homes. I've said this before. I've got grandkids that are moving into—well, looking at their first home. I've got my daughters that have homes. We all want to have a home. I have a home. They want services that meet their needs. These are fair asks. But they're not asking to give up their voice. In fact, they're asking for the

opposite. They want more say. They want more transparency, more accountability.

And that's why this approach is so frustrating. Because instead of working with municipalities, this government is imposing a solution straight from Queen's Park. I'm going to keep saying that because that's where this is coming from. Instead of respecting local knowledge, they're overriding it, and we've seen how that plays out.

We saw it with the previous appointed regional chair situation in Niagara—a decision made without local buy-in, a process that creates division instead of stability. We saw councillors divided. We saw municipalities divided. We saw trust—which, they should all trust politicians—eroded. And that matters because it only works when people trust the system. And, Speaker, we saw it in a renewed discussion around amalgamation.

People in Niagara remember very clearly when former chair Bob Gale raised the prospect of amalgamation. I'm not going to stay on that long because I only have a couple of minutes left. We talked about amalgamation. All I'm going to say on that is, Niagara didn't want four cities; they didn't want one. They wanted a Niagara solution, not a Toronto-down one. I'm sure the amalgamation number is going to come up again over the next little while.

Because now that Bill 100 is introduced, people don't see it in isolation. They see it as part of a pattern, a pattern of top-down decision-making, a pattern of insufficient consultation, a pattern of major governance changes being proposed without the evidence needed to support them. Speaker, this isn't just about Niagara. Other regions across Ontario are watching this very closely because they know they could be next, and some are.

It's a pattern where the province steps in, proposes sweeping changes and expects local government to adapt, often without the time, consultation or evidence needed to do it properly. It creates instability. It creates uncertainty. It makes it harder for municipalities to plan. It makes it harder for them to deliver services. It makes it harder for them to build the infrastructure and the communities they need.

Speaker, governance isn't just about structure. It's about trust. It's about relationships. It's about ensuring that people feel heard, represented and respected. Right now, this government is eroding that trust, because people feel like decisions are being made above them, not with them. They feel their voices don't matter. They feel local knowledge is being ignored. Bill 100 is only going to make things worse. When you appoint a regional chair from Queen's Park, when you give them sweeping powers, when you allow them to override locally elected councils, you're sending a message. You're saying, "We don't trust local communities to make their own decisions." I don't agree with that.

Speaker, I trust the people of Niagara. I trust our municipal leaders, I trust the process of local democracy and I believe that any changes to regional government should be locally driven. They should be built through consultation; they should be supported through evidence; they should reflect the unique needs of each region—not

imposed, not dictated, not decided behind closed doors in Toronto. Protecting local decision-making isn't just an abstract principle. It's about respect.

When you look at places like Niagara Falls, Fort Erie, Niagara-on-the-Lake, it becomes very clear why this matters. They are not interchangeable. Niagara Falls is a world-class tourist destination. Millions of people visit every year. Fort Erie has got the racetrack, one of the prettiest racetracks in the world. But I will say, before my time goes up, we need Douglas Memorial Hospital open 24/7, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Some 40,000 people live in Fort Erie, and they're shutting down our urgent care centre. That makes absolutely no sense, and every single politician in Fort Erie is fighting to keep that hospital open and, quite frankly, every politician in this place should stop the closure of urgent care centres right across the province of Ontario.

I've got six seconds left. Thanks for allowing me to give time. I will say, come to Niagara over the holidays, enjoy the wine, the farmland and everything else we have to offer on our—

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

1530

Just a reminder to all members that the role of the Chair is to preside over debate, not participate in it. Leave me out of your debate, the member for Niagara Falls.

Questions?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleagues this afternoon for their remarks on this piece of legislation around improving efficiencies in our regional governments across Ontario.

My question is for the member from Niagara Centre—

Interjection: Falls.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Niagara Falls—sorry; there's so many of you.

He mentioned housing, obviously—something I think all members in this place care about, or at least on this side of the House—and the need to get more homes built for Ontario families and increase our housing supply. We're seeing housing supply not continue up to population growth or economic demand.

Can the members opposite explain why they oppose measures to strengthen regional governance, to improve coordination and speed up approvals? Because this legislation is specifically designed to do that, Speaker. Can the members opposite please explain why they oppose it?

MPP Wayne Gates: Well, I'm glad you finally got my riding correct. That took a while.

I'm going to tell you, why I'm talking so hard about this bill is because I don't believe that people should be appointed, and I don't believe that people are being appointed that are giving more power to a regional chair than an elected mayor—the elected mayor of Niagara Falls or the elected mayor of St. Catharines or Welland. That's the issue. The issue in this bill is people should be elected. You were elected. I have been elected.

Why are you supporting—a question back to you—appointing a chair in Niagara? You should be ashamed of yourself.

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

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to my colleagues for speaking.

When I was listening to the member from St. Catharines speak, one of the things she said—and I wrote it down—was, “The people have spoken.” And this was about having an appointed Conservative person—a puppet of the Premier, basically—in the role.

I was wondering if she wanted to expand about how it is important for people who voted for someone to represent them to not have someone who’s at the beck and call of the Premier—who, when the Premier says, “Jump,” they have to say, “How high?” Why is it important for the voters to have someone who represents them actually represent them?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you to the member from Sudbury for asking me that question.

It comes down to democracy. When we have democracy in this fine province of Ontario, we get to elect people and elect officials to be our voices at certain levels of government. Your municipal government and your regional government are the lowest level of government to the people. They’re the ones that live in your neighbourhood every day. They drive to work every day past your house. They’re the ones where the local regional government have their voice, and they get to speak about what they need within their communities.

At the provincial level, it’s not up to us to dictate who has the voice at the main chair of the regional government. That’s not democracy; that’s actually putting a disguise on a power grab and keeping things that are not transparent from the people in Niagara, or any other region that this is going to happen to.

The regional chair is a key figure. I’ve talked to the mayors, and I’m telling you—

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

Questions? I recognize the member for Beaches—East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you for your work mediating and moderating this spicy debate this afternoon.

Back in the day, in 2024, I was on the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy, where we had the big road trip all around Ontario for supposed regional governance reviews. I spent some time in Waterloo, St. Catharines, Niagara—thank you very much; beautiful places, for sure—and we heard from many people there: locals; locally elected officials; people with skin in the game who love their community and love representing their residents who got them elected.

I was just wondering if any one of you great speakers wants to explain how your communities feel about this bill.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you to my colleague to my side here.

I will say that the people of St. Catharines—and I’ll speak for my residents because I’ve heard from many of them. I want to speak for them because they say, “We have not been consulted. We have no understanding of what this government is doing. This bill is being rushed without our voices”—and they have no skin in the game, really. “This is not about fixing the problem. This is actually repacking a local government with fewer or no safeguards,” is what they’re saying.

I did do a survey and 90% of the people in the Niagara region said, “We’re against this reform”—not against reform; against what this government is doing. They are heavy-handedly taking away our democratic right to be able to elect our regional chair, to be able to talk to the local regional councillors. If they want to talk to the mayor, they can go to city council and talk to the mayor—

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

Question?

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Speaker, I was listening to the member, specifically from St. Catharines. She talked about how municipalities are struggling and these are in regions where council sizes are significantly above the provincial average. I get that. They’re struggling. And that’s what this legislation is focused on: addressing those very inefficiencies and improving the coordination that is required.

Better leadership on a regional level is better aligned with our provincial priorities. If they do not support this approach, how do they propose we eliminate the delays that residents are currently experiencing when projects require co-operation across multiple municipal jurisdictions within a single region? Does the member opposite believe it’s acceptable for Ontario to continue to operate under an outdated regional government structure?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: To the member across the way, wow, you’re far out of touch with the residents of Niagara.

Let me tell you about the governance in Niagara. They’re all part-time. They all make less than \$15,000 except for our region. They all live in the communities. They have no staff. They won’t cost as much as it will as you appoint a regional chair, and our mayors that now sit on boards can’t have time to be able to—

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Through the Chair, Madam Speaker: Our mayors will not have time to sit on these boards. They already said that.

Speaker, I will say to the member opposite that our mayors are going to be replaced on the boards and on the committees with a paid person. And that paid representative is going to be appointed by that government that does not have the voice for the people in Niagara.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: The government has claimed that this legislation, which is going to attack local democracy in seven regions plus Simcoe county in Ontario—they claim that the reason they are doing this is to help expedite housing and infrastructure. That is why these new, hand-picked, appointed regional chairs will be given powers similar to the strong-mayor powers. The government said strong-mayor powers were going to expedite housing and infrastructure, and they have actually done nothing. Housing starts have cratered even worse after strong-mayor powers than before.

My question to the member for Niagara Falls is, is he confident that giving chairs strong-chair powers is actually going to have any impact on housing starts in Ontario?

MPP Wayne Gates: I'm going to say no, right off the hop. No, it won't. But what I will say is that we have incredible builders in Niagara. We have a lot of really good builders that do a good job. We have lots of homes that are up for sale.

But as far as the chair that's going to be appointed, it will have no impact on housing at all. What he will do is—I think I can say this—he would be somebody that will be controlled by the Premier of Ontario and told what to do, when to do it and why to do it, and if he doesn't do it, he will be unemployed. That's what's going to happen.

1540

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

Interjections.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I don't think you'll be clapping in a minute. I will be sharing my time with my clever colleague from Don Valley East, just so you know on that.

Before I get started with the meat of my speech, I just—it's all coming back to me. A trip down memory lane, I think, is necessary: New MPP on a committee called Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy, where everything came to that committee—that was baptism by fire; all the egregious, destructive bills came to that committee, including the regional governance review, which we did.

We went around in the winter. We went around to, as I mentioned, St. Catharines and we heard from elected officials from Niagara, Thorold, Lincoln, Port Colborne, Welland, Fort Erie, Niagara-on-the-Lake, St. Catharines as I mentioned, we went to—where did we go? Burlington. And we heard from people from Mississauga, Peel, Brampton. We went to St. Catharines, I mentioned. We heard from Oakville, Halton region. We heard from Waterloo, Kitchener, Woolwich, North Dumfries, Cambridge—you name it. It was extensive. We went to Barrie and we actually went twice to the areas to discuss the regional governance review.

One of my questions to almost everyone who gave testimony was, "Do you feel this is a valuable use of your time and a valuable use of our committee, or is this all for naught? Is this an exercise in futility?" I actually got the vibe—because it was quite contentious, actually, at all those committee meetings, I got the feeling that the gov-

ernment had rushed into something and then we're deciding against doing it.

And sure enough—for sure, because that's 2024. If the government actually believed in doing that review, where's the report? That's the second report that hasn't come forward. In 2018, Seiling and Fenn did the report, gave it to the then-Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing in 2019 and that has never seen the light of day. There's \$250,000 sitting on a shelf collecting dust or cobwebs somewhere.

So we had all that time, from 2018, to actually do it right if you wanted to, methodically and meticulously. But instead, here we are, 2026, a few months out from an election, and you just want to ram it through, just like the Premier did with city council of Toronto, actually, during an election. It just defies logic. I need to have all your heads examined.

Okay, so we're going to move on from there, but we'll be coming back to that because it just—the rush is highly questionable.

This bill chiefly bestows power upon the minister that would permit him to determine the size of councils, appoint and remove the heads of councils, and control the weight of votes for eight municipalities. Wow.

And before this government cops out by claiming that the bill is the result of an ask by Simcoe county—hey, that's my hometown area. Sure, I know that there was desire in Simcoe county for this, as there was in some other municipalities—some desire, but not to go so far off the cliff. You guys cannot help yourselves by doing that, that you have to bring in this weighted voting, these appointed chairs. The chairs of these regions are basically going to be Pinocchio and you guys are Geppetto, pulling those strings. We know it. Geppetto and Pinocchio: That's what it's all about. They did not ask you, even if they were keen on some of this—it was some; it wasn't all. You always just go too far.

The municipalities—Durham, Halton, Muskoka, Niagara, Peel, Simcoe, as I mentioned, Waterloo and York, right? And yes, you have some support there. I will throw you that bone: You have some support. But the residents—I mean, take it to a referendum if you want. I support the right of the residents and municipalities to request changes to the legislation from the province, but this bill subjects eight municipalities to all of this governmental control. They all didn't ask for it.

This bill is the most recent entry in a long legacy of overriding municipal governance from this government. Bill 17, Bill 60, Bill 98, Bill 212—I'm getting on my bike soon—Bill 56, Bill 76 and more all inferred with municipal jurisdiction, as if we don't have enough to do provincially. Health care, education, housing are what we should be focusing on, but you're meddling with green development standards set by the city, and bike lanes.

Speed cameras: We're already hearing about drastic collisions on streets where you've removed them. Is anyone studying that?

Land annexation and official plans: Provincial legislation told municipalities how they should run their cities.

There's just an obsession with meddling in things you should not be meddling in, or things that work well. You decide to destroy them and not fix things that aren't working well, that are under provincial purview. Importantly, these powers are determined through regulations that can be tabled after the bill is passed.

When MPPs vote on this bill, we will not know the full scope of how the minister intends to use his powers. When Ontarians vote in the upcoming municipal election, they will have no idea whether their elected representatives will have a diminished voice or who will ensure council business is conducted efficiently and effectively, serve as the leader internally, be the municipality's official representative and act as the CEO of the municipality, because actually these chairs you are appointing will have the ability to override elected officials. Where does that happen? I mean, I could think of a few countries, and they're not good examples.

When Ontarians elect their representatives, they are led to believe their desired candidate will have an equal say amongst their counterparts. Having been former council members, many of you will know that one of the most important features of municipal government and what distinguishes it from other levels of governance is independence. Maybe look that up in the dictionary.

When municipal candidates run, they present as themselves and voters can choose the representative who aligns with their priorities, free of worry that their needs will get lost in party politics. Everyone is supposed to have an equal voice. But when the minister and this government award certain people a louder voice, a stronger say, they prevent them from adequately representing their constituents and genuinely offend democracy.

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These decisions are based on rules laid out by the minister in regulation—based on this party's politics. Our only logical assumption is that they will award their friends and those who align with their mandate the greater voice, because that has been the history here.

The minister's ability to determine how many votes a member receives and when, why and for how long they can receive the augmented voting power ushers in partisan politics to municipal governance. It creates a power differential where if a member would like their issue prioritized, they are incentivized to appeal to and acquiesce to members with greater voting power. Gone are the days when council members would rely on their ability to convince the majority of members. Everyone must fall in line for the member tapped by this provincial government.

The abandonment of equitable representation is only worsened as the bill goes on. Bill 100 additionally allows the minister to appoint a head of council. Previously an elected role, as we mentioned, if Bill 100 is passed, it would be left up to the direction of the government. As I said, it's all about control.

Now, your track record on discretion—well, questionable. I think most of us here are in the same boat when we say that we seriously question the ability of this government to make sound decisions for the benefit of Ontarians.

I continue to be puzzled by their choices, especially surrounding the processes that they choose to meddle with and those that they do not.

For example, the Ford government chose to slash conservation authorities from 36 to nine, stripped local knowledge from these agencies and left large regions vulnerable to flooding. How's the flooding going right now? Because that's all I see in the news. But don't worry, Ontario, the government does not have your back. The oversight is gone, so get ready, despite 10% of Ontarian homes already being uninsurable due to risk of flood—all in the name of efficiency.

When Metrolinx pushed the Eglinton Crosstown opening date more than five times, was entangled in more than three lawsuits, dished out hundreds of millions of dollars to settle said claims and finally delivered the line 15 years later, all this government had were words of admonishment, no strong action. For what one might say was the most delayed transit project in Ontario—or the world, probably—and certainly riddled with inefficiencies, this government did not force any resignations or mandate timelines be met. They simply shared their hopes for better. Yet they continue to boast excessive breaks from sitting in the House that delay our ability to actively create and debate legislation that would make Ontario better.

And one process that was disrupted over several long breaks mandated by this government is my committee, the government agencies appointments. My standing committee is responsible for reviewing appointees for government agencies, commissions and boards. The committee is composed of members from all parties, designed to give all committee members an opportunity to ask the candidate questions to assess if they are suitable for the proposed agency and submit their determination.

In its ideal form, the committee recommends that candidates who are not appropriate for various reasons are removed from the process, one such scenario being they lack pertinent experience and qualifications for their potential board but have gained favour due to their affiliation with the government. The committee review process would permit these concerns to be documented and taken under advisement.

However, the committee was unable to uphold their mandate for months at a time over the summer and winter break. I should say it's basically a summer-and-fall break and a winter-and-a-spring break, and we're basically just coming here for what's now considered weekends.

This resulted in hundreds of appointees pushed through without proper review. The fate of these appointees and the effectiveness of the corresponding agency they applied for was consequently left up to the whims of the minister and this government.

Now, let's take a look at this government's supposed sound judgment record. The minister for labour, immigration and skills development awards \$10.8 million to a strip club owner for the Skills Development Fund. And do you know what? I just read in the paper the other day that the TTC did not get skills development funding but the strip club did, which defies logic to me because the

TTC actually has more poles in their streetcars than the strip club has. Call me logical, but if that was the criteria, the TTC wins hands down.

Then the Minister of Municipal Affairs removes environmental protection for 2,998 hectares of green land so donating developers can build houses, which we all know was the greenbelt scandal.

The Solicitor General, under his watch—150 criminals were released and they cannot find them. And they cannot explain how or why this happened.

The Minister of Finance forwards provisions that excuse him and his colleagues from having to disclose their records in a lawful freedom-of-information request. And these are just a few scandals over the last couple of years. It has felt like a lifetime.

How are we supposed to trust that this government will make sound decisions for our province when they refuse to share their process for doing so? Moreover, with this government's determination to invade municipal governance, how are we supposed to trust them to make sound decisions for our municipalities?

Now we'll go on to the major obsession—another obsession, because it was meddling in municipalities, but now there's an obsession with strong-mayor powers and giving excess power to your friends. When the Premier passed strong-mayor powers, it was presented as a measure primarily to push forward housing, in line with other provincial priorities such as transit, roads and utilities, but mostly it was for housing. So you give the strong-mayor powers to speed up housing, to enable housing, to encourage housing, and what does the mayor of Markham do? He uses his strong-mayor powers to kill, to ban fourplexes—basically to stop housing. Again, I think I'm just thinking too logically in this place, but that doesn't make sense because it's the complete opposite reason why you gave those powers. Is anything being done about that? I'll put in an order paper question for that.

While veto powers and council override ability is baked into strong-mayor powers, it is explicitly limited to bylaws that the head of council reasonably feels would interfere with the provincial priorities noted above. Under this legislation, this government is proposing another expansion of strong-mayor powers. While some heads of council have used their veto power sparingly, in line with community needs and in continued consultation with their council, others have committed misuse and abuse of these powers in ways that should make us think twice about bestowing this ability upon more people.

Let's talk about Springwater, another one of my favourite topics. When we're talking about use and abuse of strong-mayor powers, there's no better poster child than Springwater, and not the councillors but the mayor of Springwater. Their authoritarian mayor is the perfect cautionary tale.

Setting the scene, Bill 76 enacts the *Barrie — Oro-Medonte — Springwater Boundary Adjustment Act, 2025*. You will recall that because we had to rush it through, steamroll it right through before the holidays—such urgency. It provides the annexation of portions of the

township of Oro-Medonte and the township of Springwater to the city of Barrie, tabled in late 2025, as we know.

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Bill 76 is in response to a dispute between Springwater, Oro-Medonte and Barrie. And what is actually peculiar—extra peculiar—is that at the regional governance reviews in 2024, when we went to Barrie, the mayor of Barrie had a big white binder that he just popped on the table. He had his own maps drawn up of land that he wanted in Springwater. And then, a year or so later—what you wish for, you can always achieve if you're friends of this government.

So the municipalities previously struggled to come to a formal agreement by their September 30, 2025, deadline imposed by a provincially appointed facilitator—which we know turned out to all be a sham. The issue of interest was a proposed annexation that would bring 1,376 acres of residential development land and 773 acres of industrial land into Barrie, an extremely controversial proposal in the region. The council of Springwater raised their concerns on several occasions, namely, how this annexation would benefit their community and why the annexation had to happen in the first place.

The mayor of Springwater used her strong-mayor powers to veto a motion to oppose the city of Barrie's boundary adjustment proposal and to direct a law firm to proceed with legal proceedings against it, Barrie Today reported. The mayor then used her strong-mayor power to compel council to accept the said deal, to which opposing councillors voted to have a solicitor block this move.

Within hours of the notice being passed, a partner at Loopstra Nixon sent an email to the deputy chief administrative officer advising her that, in his opinion, "the mayor's veto does not have the effect of overriding the council resolution."

Back and forth, back and forth—the mayor used her strong-mayor powers to stop an injunction that councillors wanted, to stop an inquiry that councillors wanted, to fire the town lawyer who warned her that it was a terrible, terrible, terrible deal for Springwater.

I'm not sure this is what you wanted when you awarded strong-mayor powers, but be careful what you wish for and who you are awarding this strong power to. In fact, there is a judicial review right now at the divisional court—I'm not sure if you realize that—with regard to the abuse and misuse of strong-mayor powers by the mayor of Springwater. It's like you let the genie out of the bottle.

I'm all for cutting red tape and for development, but I'm not for cutting corners and overriding democracy to do so. The PC appointees would now be responsible for highways, transport, waste management, public utilities, culture, heritage, parks and recreation, flood control, parking, health and safety—specifically in public places—permits for businesses, land use and more. These are issues that intimately touch all of our lives and issues that this government would happily hand over to the highest bidder.

This is not speculation; this is fact. And you heard from the elected officials in many of these municipalities: They do not want this to the extent that you're doing it. They do

not want you to appoint a chair. They do not want that chair to have such unwieldy, overpowering, ridiculously strong authority over them. They want local voices. They want to represent their people.

Many of you were local, municipally elected officials—elected officials—and you know this is wrong. We've seen, time and time again, this government prioritizes the needs of donors, developers, party members and their inner circle over the well-being of Ontarians.

So my hope for this bill is that the government, at the very least, respects the democratic process for this undemocratic bill. Some 86% of this government's bills were time-allocated. These bills skipped committee, limited debate, squashed the voices of Ontarians because this government did not want to hear from them—that's called consultation. That is what we not only are required to do but need to do, we should do and we should want to do. We work for the people of Ontario. They sent us here. We need to listen to them, and we should want to do so. You're losing sight of that.

This means the community members, industry professionals and grassroots organizations could not share their analyses of any of these bills, offer their feedback on how to improve—because Ontarians are smart people; they have good ideas. Why not listen to them with their suggestions that provide insight into how these bills would impact their lives but also how to improve them? Wouldn't you want the best possible bill?

That means 86% of bills were not amended to reflect evidence-based practice nor were removed of barriers that complicated people's lives unnecessarily and without recourse.

You've heard from my colleagues to the left of me, and you'll hear from more, but this bill is not supportable. I don't know when this government thought about this—how should I call it?—dictator-like governance, basically. It's not right. So I will not be supporting this bill. It is completely undemocratic.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): The member from Don Valley East.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I welcome the opportunity to rise and speak on Bill 100, the legislation before us. I say, "Welcome the opportunity" not that I'm pleased to have the opportunity—because it's hard to imagine a bill that could be more offensive or, frankly, ironic.

The short title of the bill is Better Regional Governance Act. It is legislation that has been put forward by a government that says that it wants to address dysfunctional leadership and governance even as it has become a role model for dysfunctional leadership and governance.

We don't get any leadership from the Premier—not real leadership from this Premier. There's no leadership that is meaningful that we get from anyone in the front row of this Legislature—

Hon. Zee Hamid: Some leadership.

Mr. Adil Shamji: —and certainly not in the second-last row over there.

I think that history will look back on this period as the Dark Ages, which really says a lot because past Conserv-

ative Premiers have included Ernie Eves and even Mike Harris, and those were pretty Dark Ages.

As I contemplate why history will look back on this period as the Dark Ages, it's easy to think of a number of things, like the catastrophic state that health care is in right now. For example, we've got millions of people without access to a family doctor, and, frankly, despite the government's overtures, they have no hope of getting a family doctor. We have rampant hallway health care, thousands of people finding care in unconventional spaces like hallways, closets, bathrooms in our hospitals every day. We find people being forced to pay with their credit card for medically necessary services. We're certainly seeing that with private billing by nurse practitioners. The federal deadline to bring them into public funding passed on April 1. This government is now in violation of the Canada Health Act, yet another reason this period will be called the Dark Ages. And we have never before seen underfunding of our health care system as well.

Another reason this will be considered to be the Dark Ages is the catastrophic state in which housing is right now. This is a government that came in a few years ago and said that they are going to build 1.5 million homes by 2031. They've given up on that hope. They don't even talk about it. It's not even mentioned in the budget anymore, and there's a good reason they don't mention it. Under their failed governance, under their failed leadership—of that Premier and everyone that sits in the front row, whenever they show up—every year they build fewer houses than the year before. Last year, I think they built 64,000 houses, a fraction of the 175,000 houses that they needed to build, and there's no hope that they're going to be able to do anything to right that.

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They have now resorted to copying ideas that the Ontario Liberals have been putting forward. We're the ones who called to eliminate the HST on new primary residences for all home buyers. We're the ones that said cut development charges in a massive way. These guys came in—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Government members, come to order please.

Mr. Adil Shamji: That was a flagship promise of the Ontario Liberals in the last election. These guys ignored it, and then they came back and they copied it. It was our legislation; it was our idea.

We're the ones who drafted a plan to get everyone a family doctor by 2029. I introduced that in December 2024. A month later, these guys came along and said, "You know what? Hey, that's a pretty good idea. We're going to do it too."

We heard the Premier say that he was worried if he drank a glass of water that it might turn him Liberal. That won't do it, but copying our ideas will.

This is the state that these guys are in. They have run their government—they have run this province into the ground, and all they have left to do is to point fingers at other people and say that they are dysfunctional, they are

not exhibiting strong leadership and strong governance, and to throw the baby out with the bathwater with the frankly ridiculous proposal of legislation.

Let me continue to explain why this will be looked on in history as the Dark Ages: what they're doing with education. We have multiple crises simultaneously. It takes a special degree of incompetent to cause so—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Member, can you wait?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Member, can you please sit down. Point of order.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Through you, Speaker, to the member opposite who has the floor: I direct him to the standing orders, standing order 25(b), where it should relate to the bill that we are debating this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Will the member please stay on the bill—and through the Speaker, please. Thank you so much.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Government members, please come to order.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Certainly, Mr. Speaker.

For the benefit of the government whip, I would like to make it abundantly clear that the thesis of my remarks this afternoon is that Bill 100 is legislation that's intended to address dysfunctional governance and leadership, which is exactly personified by this very government. So in order for me to illustrate how this government fails to make the mark, I need to establish the many ways in which this government has allowed dysfunctional governance and leadership to proliferate.

Obviously, I would never want to make unsubstantiated claims, so as I point out this government has dysfunctional governance and leadership, as a responsible member of this Legislature that doesn't just make stuff up—like we often see in the answers in question period—I want to provide evidence through the failures in health care; the failures in housing; the failures in education, particularly around out-of-control class sizes; the crisis in special education; the lack of educational assistants to make it possible for people with special needs to get the care that they need; the mental health crisis that is rampant in our schools; and the government's only failed attempt to bring a modicum of governance and leadership to the education system, which is to try and undermine and undercut the very trustees that we have.

It fits within a second argument that I will later come to—and which I know the government members will enjoy so much—around how this government seeks to place a stranglehold around the democracy that we're supposed to be having here in Ontario.

Anyway, allow me to continue, Mr. Speaker, on the thesis of dysfunctional governance and leadership, which this bill seeks to address—further examples of the dysfunctional government and leadership exemplified by this government.

The Skills Development Fund—that \$2.5-billion fund which, if appropriately used, could have allowed people to

have good-paying jobs and great new skills, but which instead was used to reward insiders and donors, in the same way that this bill will appoint heads of council who will be friends and donors and failed PC candidates.

This government is under an RCMP criminal investigation because they have an unhealthy disrespect for the law—again, another example of which is Bill 100, the Better Regional Governance Act.

This is a government that has leadership so very dysfunctional that the Premier is now facing the heat over his cellphone records which he refuses to turn over. As a result, he is trying to change the law. He is trying to tighten his stranglehold over our province's democracy and abolish freedom-of-information laws.

So, of course, to get to the government whip's point, it's important to speak on the subject of this legislation. This legislation is about good governance and good leadership, none of which we see on this side of the House.

What I will say about this legislation is that it continues in a growing trend of this Premier, the ministers that sit in the front bench and the backbenchers who support them, of tightening their authoritarian stranglehold over our province. I'll illustrate a couple of examples before I illustrate how this is the next in that trend. We see, as I briefly alluded to earlier, that there is an ongoing centralization of power that is manifest across multiple ministries and multiple policy sectors within our province, for example, with schools. This is a government that is taking out the feet from below the trustees, who are democratically elected to represent constituents, specifically students and parents, who just want the next generation to get a strong education. Rather than doing anything to empower them and make sure that they can contribute to that, essentially, they will be left to have minimal input into the selection of a chief executive officer in the school boards, and then that CEO will essentially be under the thumb of the Ministry of Education, essentially undercutting the important and vital role of the school trustees, who are democratically elected.

We see further centralization of power through the amalgamation of public health units across our entire province, which—no wonder—explains why we're seeing previously unheard of public health outcomes in this province, we're seeing the resurgence of infectious illnesses that have not been seen in this province for decades. A brief while ago, we had an outbreak of measles in this province of Ontario that was so bad it was the worst outbreak of measles not in all of Canada but in all of North America, caused by the lack of funding and the lack of responsiveness of our public health units because they've been forced to amalgamate.

Another recent example of centralization under this government that has created chaos and nothing but poor outcomes for the people of Ontario: The local health integration networks that delivered home care for home care patients were amalgamated under the centralized agency called Ontario Health atHome. Almost immediately after it was formed, it had a massive medical equipment and supply shortage that meant that patients with complex

issues—in pain, with cancer, who are potentially dying—could not get vitally needed medications, supplies, equipment. In many cases, they were being forced to be sent to emergency departments rather than get the dignified home care that they deserve—or were dying without the supplies or medications that they required, again, because of this government's persistent trend in tightening their stranglehold over our province and centralizing their authority.

Another example of them centralizing authority: ministerial zoning orders. Ostensibly, they did this so that they could accelerate home building. Nothing has happened since MZO came through, except the pace of home building has done nothing but actually slow down. In some cases, MZOs were used to further slow down home building. We saw an important modular housing project in Willowdale that was blocked because a desperately requested-for ministerial zoning order was not issued. Instead, they were just used to reward friends and donors.

In fact, the Auditor General in evaluating MZOs went so far as saying that this centralized form of authority, delivered by dysfunctional governance and leadership, in some cases actually slowed down the development of housing because it skipped vitally needed planning stages.

And then finally, as my, frankly, delightful colleague from Beaches–East York mentioned, strong-mayor powers: another example of an initiative that was thought to potentially improve governance and leadership, with the ultimate goal of improving home building. We've actually seen examples where that has been used to slow down and halt home building, and this government has not been able to do anything about that.

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So as this government steps forward and professes to want to fix what many can admit is not an ideal situation amongst regional governance. Anyone in this House can agree that improvements do need to be made. But as this government steps forward and says the only way to do it is to tighten their authoritarian, Trumpian stranglehold over regional governments, over democratically elected councillors, and to do it by passing Bill 100, that is simply laughable.

I've illustrated some examples of how this government is centralizing their stranglehold, but I want to discuss another thing for the clarity of the government whip, to make sure it does relate to this legislation: this.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: It's a prop.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Okay. We've got a member over here who thinks that holding up a piece of legislation is a prop, which is laughable, but I can do it without holding it up.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order.

Mr. Adil Shamji: In any case, for the benefit of the government whip, I do want to illustrate that my next comment, in which I provide examples of all the ways in which this government has undermined democracy—the reason that I'm doing that is because this is the next piece

of legislation that furthers that undermining of our democracy.

We've seen multiple examples of that under this Premier's failed leadership over eight tired, long and excruciating years. We saw an unjustified, uncalled-for early election, one in which the government professed that they were going to protect Ontario and yet has done anything but failed to protect Ontario.

They've failed to protect health care, failed to protect housing, failed to protect education, even failed to keep criminals in jail. The same government that says it's going to be tough on crime has literally let out at least 150 criminals from jail—lost track of it, despite the fact that the Solicitor General was made aware that they had been lost, failed to act on that and now is on its heels and backed into a corner because they've got nothing to say about it.

Step number one of an uncalled-for, undemocratic government was this unjustified election with a justified mandate that they have been unable to deliver on.

This is a government that is so committed to anti-democratic practices that, every chance they get, they try and use time allocation motions. They have created record cuts to the number of sitting days that we have in this Legislature so that they don't have to answer questions during question periods, so that they can rush through their legislation, so that they can introduce legislation at the very last minute in the hopes that the members of the opposition don't have time to prepare for it, because they don't like to listen to all of the things that we that we have to say.

This is the same government that has tried to override locally democratic councils through the implementation of ministerial zoning orders and strong-mayor powers, the same government that is keenly reserving the right to use the "notwithstanding" clause so that they can overrule the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the same government that is threatening to overturn freedom-of-information laws because they don't want to be held accountable and they don't want the people of Ontario to know who the Premier is taking his direction from. But we already know the answer to that. It is, of course, his friends, his donors and failed PC candidates.

This is the same government that implemented Bill 124, which was deemed as unconstitutional; the same government that implemented Bill 28, in which it tried to trample the collective bargaining rights of unions in our province and was forced to flip-flop on that after almost bringing our province to its knees at the risk of a general strike.

And finally, I will say that this is a government that simply doesn't hesitate to meddle. I've had a front-row seat to a number of ways in which this government meddles in the function of committees and councils.

You know, once upon a time, I was on the Standing Committee on Social Policy. This is the standing committee which, to date, every single health care bill has gone to in between second and third reading. One might have imagined that it would be helpful to have a physician on that committee. But because this government didn't want to have a functioning committee that actually had exper-

tise on that committee, didn't want to have to listen to things that didn't align with their narrative and their ulterior motives and their government agenda, they removed me from the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

This is what happens when you have a Premier like that and the people who sit in the front row. When they say that they want to improve committees, they want to improve councils, they want to improve governance, they actually take off expertise. They remove voices that have important things to say that bring expertise to the table.

And so, this is the reason—even before I dive into five very concerning elements of this legislation—that I was skeptical that this government was qualified to introduce legislation on anything that could improve governance and leadership.

Now, to make it excruciatingly clear to the government whip: Now that I've set the stage for why this government, I think, is not qualified to comment on governance and leadership, I will dive into the specific provisions within this legislation which I think failed to miss the mark so badly.

My specific comments on this legislation will focus on five areas. First, this government's unilateral ability to insert regional chairs. Second, its ability to subsequently take those potentially unilaterally appointed regional chairs and potentially give them strong-chair powers. Next, I will address how this government then proposes to assign weighted voting to councils and councillors—and, again, potentially in a unilateral way. On the fourth point, I'm actually going to point out something that I haven't heard anyone mention in this legislation, around something very peculiar in which regulations may be able to supersede legislation, which I don't think should ever be the case. And then, finally, I'm going to address the last-minute nature in which this is being introduced, mere months before an election.

On the first point: We exist in a democracy. In a democracy, generally speaking, the will of the people is expressed through their freely elected representatives. At the municipal level, that is, of course, the councillors and the mayor. And in a democracy, the will of those people is expressed through those councillors.

What is most peculiar in this legislation is that gets reversed. While people who reside in towns, cities and municipalities will retain the right to be able to elect councillors and mayors, a new regional chair—a head of council—will be inserted that has the ability to supersede their democratically elected representatives. Now, the legislation does create a provision that might allow that head of council to be chosen by the council, but the ministry reserves the right to be able to insert their own person.

Time and time again, when we've seen the government offered the ability to exercise extreme power and their full authority, they always go for it. They certainly did that with the supervisors of a number of school boards. In fact, in one case, what they did was they took a past PC candidate who chose not to run—who did not have an elected mandate. And, despite the fact that he did not get

an elected mandate in the last election, he was chosen to be a school board supervisor, to have authority over school trustees.

I cannot imagine something that could possibly be more undemocratic than that. So, how is it possible that an appointee of the ministry—of the Premier or the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing—how someone can be chosen like that over the will of a council is beyond me.

But it gets worse, because this government also reserves the right to allow that regional chair to have strong-chair powers. So now, we have not just an example of someone that's unelected who oversees elected individuals, but that person then also has the ability to overrule those elected individuals, essentially negating altogether the power of those individuals' votes.

How is this a democracy? This is the kind of thing that you would see under President Donald Trump. And no wonder this is being implemented. This is the same Premier who said he was happy when President Trump won.

Interjection: He loves Donald Trump.

Mr. Adil Shamji: He loves Donald Trump.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: He's a MAGA guy.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Yes, he's a MAGA guy.

Of course he's going to be taking cues from the President of the United States.

On what planet should an unelected individual be able to exercise authority over the elected will of the people—except if there is a King or a Queen that has absolute authority—not in a constitutional monarchy, of course.

Furthermore, this legislation then goes so far as to allow for weighted voting. We've seen numerous examples in which weighted voting has been dysfunctional. In fact, I will point to an example in March 2025, when Simcoe county actually had things fall apart because weighted voting was introduced. The Simcoe March 2025 walkout is a case study in which 17 of 32 councillors left the room rather than participate in a weighted vote. That is most peculiar. That is dysfunction that has been created by weighted voting.

1630

So it seems to me as though this government is looking around, finding examples and, as always, finding the most spectacular way to do things in the wrong way. They looked at a failed example and decided to take the wrong lesson from that.

There's something that I find most peculiar—and I have begun consultations with a number of lawyers, and we're all kind of confused about this: There is a provision which, again, really speaks to the authoritarian nature of this government. I will draw your attention to subsection 218.1(9), which states, "In the event of a conflict between a regulation made under subsection (7) and a provision of this act or of any other act or regulation, the regulation made under subsection (7) prevails." On what planet should a regulation be allowed to supersede a law? That should never be the case. On what planet should something that a minister scribbles on the back of a piece of

paper and calls a regulation be able to supersede a law that has been debated, voted on and passed by this Legislature?

The only reason that a government would do this is so that they can write laws that seem less offensive—even though this one is pretty offensive—but then they can subsequently write regulations afterwards that are as offensive as they intended them to be, and that regulation can then go ahead and supersede this law and any other law that it needs to. How should that be allowed? In a democracy, which we are, which we will always assert and protect, only one thing should supersede a law, and that is our Constitution—nothing else, and certainly not a regulation.

Finally, I want to touch on the last-minute nature in which this legislation is being introduced. There are going to be municipal and regional elections mere months from now. Prospective candidates have already submitted nominations. People have already begun to plan. Communities are already getting ready. It takes time. If we want meaningful democracy—to me, democracy means participation. Democracy is not just the act of casting a ballot. Democracy is about the act of being informed, of ensuring that government reflects the will and the desire and the wishes of the people. You don't change the underlying ways in which that democracy is exercised at the very last minute. You don't come in mere months before and say—you thought you were going to run in a particular setting or under a particular climate. You don't come in and change the rules from under people's feet. My point here is not that we should have pity for prospective candidates and that we should have pity for politicians—not at all. But we're trying to create a system that the people of Ontario and the people in these municipalities understand, that they can have confidence in, that they can know reflects their will, their wishes and their intentions. An understanding of democracy is already quite challenging. People already struggle to understand the democratic process, and it's even more opaque at a municipal level. Changing the rules mere months before it happens, introducing new levels of government, especially ones that can overrule elected ones, at the very last minute—it doesn't allow people to get informed, it doesn't allow people to get educated and it doesn't allow people to have meaningful participation.

That, to me, is the saddest part in all of this. Sure, the government will come through, and they'll insert their puppets and their minions. They do that all the time; it's no less acceptable in this legislation. But it's the fact that they're willing to do it in such a callous and transparent and careless way—a way that, for those of us who are watching, so transparently gives such little care to our underlying, fundamental democracy.

We have provisions in this legislation that will cut council positions unilaterally. We have councils that have said, "We recognize that there are opportunities for efficiency and we would like to remove positions." They have submitted those positions to the government, and all they require is the government to rubber-stamp and approve their request to cut their councils down. That would be a

more appropriate way to do it. This government has ignored the requests and said, "We're going to force them to stay dysfunctional so that we can say that they're dysfunctional and then come in and change it unilaterally." This is the kind of government that we have.

This is why for all of those reasons, for the five reasons I've illustrated—that this legislation inserts a regional chair, potentially and probably unilaterally; that that newly inserted chair will have strong-chair powers that allow that individual to oversee and overturn the decisions of democratically elected councillors; that this implements weighted voting that has, until now, in some cases proven to be dysfunctional—and, again, can be implemented in a unilateral way without appropriate consultation with the councils and the regional municipalities; because this legislation proposes to allow regulations to supersede legislation when, in my opinion and from everything that I'm learning, the only thing that should be able to supersede legislation is the Constitution; and by virtue of the fact that this legislation is being introduced at the very last minute, without adequate time to educate the public, to provide clarity so that people actually understand their democracy and know what it means for them to be able to meaningfully participate—for all those reasons, I think this legislation is inadequate, and I think it's ironic and hypocritical that it should be introduced by a government that is itself such a prime example of the kind of dysfunctional governance and leadership that it proposes to try and fix.

I thank all members in the House for their careful attention, and I invite everyone to join me in voting against it.

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleagues from Beaches–East York and Don Valley East for their remarks this afternoon. My question is to the member from Don Valley East. He talked at the end, colleagues, about their intention to vote against this piece of legislation, so my question to the member from Don Valley East is simple.

You know, colleagues, hopefully in 20-plus years from now, I'm sure—it's the cycle of politics—the Liberals will be back in government. I'm sure the member will still be here in this place. Maybe he'll be in the front row. Will that member stand in his place today and say that he will vote to repeal Bill 100 if he's ever in government, yes or no?

Mr. Adil Shamji: Well, I would caution the government whip that to presume the passage of legislation could risk putting him in contempt of Parliament. And so, I might invite him to retract that question.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: There's this old saying. It goes, power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. That's Lord Acton who said that, and he said that because what he's implying is that if someone's power increases, their moral sense diminishes. Do you think this phrase applies to the Conservative government?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: By all actions of these bills, that would seem to be true. Anyone who wants this much control and consolidation of power, you have to question why, and with appointments of friends and donors and failed candidates, you wonder about that. You also wonder why someone who's appointed as chair of the region will now have power over duly elected officials. I mean, that just says it all. That's just robbing people of their democratic right.

1640

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Sometimes it feels like we're the proverbial—is it the toad in the boiling water, or the frog in the boiling water that doesn't realize it's getting boiled because the temperature keeps going up? This government continues to chip away at democracy, continues to act more and more like, again, the emperor here.

So a question to my colleague from Beaches–East York—and I want to commend both of my colleagues for excellent remarks today—while you were at the regional governance review several years ago, did you hear people from the regions talking about wanting to have appointed politicians? I mean, do they want their mayor to be appointed? Where does it stop? So I wonder if you could just reflect on what those people actually want for the role of a regional chair.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much to the fine member who works so hard for her community in Don Valley West.

It's an excellent question. We went on this road trip all over Ontario—some members here went with me—and we heard from people from beautiful places. You know, Ontario is a great province. Pelham, Woolwich, North Dumfries—you name it. But what we did not hear from them was that they wanted this government to act as the master puppeteer, controlling the strings of a new chair whom they appoint—they choose to appoint—as the regional chair, and to have that person have more power than the people they went to the ballot box and signed the X for to have represent them. It's wrong.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: I listened to both the member from Beaches–East York and Don Valley East. We did actually hear from municipalities and we did actually hear from regions, and Simcoe made it very clear that they needed adjustments. This recognizes that regional governments must reflect the scale and the urgency of today's challenges.

If the member opposite believes that the current structure is optimal, can they please explain how these structures are helping to reduce the approval timelines and accelerate the construction of new homes in high-growth regions? Because it's not helping the people in the region of Simcoe.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you to the member from Thornhill for asking about my hometown area, actually, because you know I grew up in Colling-

wood, so I'm very familiar with Simcoe county—love it. And absolutely, there are members in Simcoe county who would like a reduction, as some of the other municipalities would like a reduction in the politicians. They want things to run more—I'm not going to say “efficient” because that has turned into a horrible word here, but absolutely. But what they didn't want was the government to appoint the chair—that was never part of it—and they did not want the chair to have strong-chair powers. We know there is already a case at Divisional Court challenging the egregious misuse and abuse of strong-mayor powers by the mayor of Springwater. So they did want some of it, not all of it. You went too far.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you to both members from the Liberal Party who gave their submissions.

My question is to the member from Beaches–East York. There's a lot of experience there as a municipal councillor. You were there in the city at the time when Bill 5 was passed here in the Legislature, cutting city council in half. Also, that bill went ahead and cancelled some regional chair appointments.

The premise at the time was that the government wanted to cut red tape. It was going to somehow foster the construction of more housing and reduce costs, but really, I think we saw it as a power grab, very similar to what we're seeing in Bill 100.

Can the member speak to the impact on council, what transpired there when council was cut in half and the power and the engagement of the citizens was removed?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much to the member from Toronto Centre, who was my seatmate at Toronto city council for eight beautiful years. You know what? I've actually tried to block a bit of that time out like I have childbirth because of what went on there. I always say I got this grey hair from Rob Ford and this grey hair from Doug Ford, but I'm here.

Absolutely, once again, the obsession with this Premier and Toronto, meddling in municipalities and cutting council in half denies Toronto their democratic right. Smaller municipalities have more engagement, more representation than we do. It's unfair, again.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We have time for a very quick question.

MPP George Darouze: We had lots of comments from the member for Don Valley East that had absolutely nothing to do with the contents of the bill. I'm wondering what his opinion is on the positive impact that this legislation will have to do with speeding up the decision-making for sped-up housing and infrastructure.

Mr. Adil Shamji: That's a really interesting question. I think it's a frequent topic in political science circles. In authoritarian regimes, the ability to come through and not have to consult—they call it the authoritarian tool box. There's a question of whether it actually speeds things up. I think, far too often, the authoritarian tool box actually fails to deliver.

I would caution the member who asked me that question: I think actually listening to each other and consulting with each other—I understand that, as it relates to regional governance, there was actually a report that was produced, a report that was subsequently stifled that we're not able to find anymore. I would be interested in looking at that.

I suspect we'll find better answers to speed up home building, but this government has not shown itself capable at all to do anything to accelerate home building.

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

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: It truly is a distinct honour to rise in this chamber today to represent the residents of York region, a place that I've called home for more than 24 years, and to speak on Bill 100, Better Regional Governance Act, 2026.

Speaker, I rise today to provide perspective from the ground, from a region that is already operating under the modernized governance model this bill actually seeks to standardize across our growing province. In York region, we are not speaking in speculation or debating the merits of governance theory; we are actually speaking from experience. We are a region where the model of an appointed regional chair has been in place, and we have seen firsthand how it contributes to the speed, consistency and effectiveness of regional government.

York region is a primary engine of growth for Ontario. It's home to over 1.25 million people and its rapidly expanding innovation sector. That growth is the result of deliberate coordination, strong partnerships with the province and a governance structure that values outcomes over administrative hurdles. This legislation ensures that the success we do see in York can be replicated in growing communities and across this province, ensuring that every region has the leadership necessary to meet the needs of the people of Ontario by moving away from the governance of the past and towards a model of modernity and efficiency.

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Speaker, we must bring this debate into the reality of the economic landscape. We are living through a period of significant global uncertainty. Supply chains remain complex, and the cost of building the homes and the transit our families require has reached historic levels. In Ontario, we are facing headwinds that demand we be more nimble, more efficient and more unified than ever before.

Now, despite these challenges, people continue to choose Ontario because they believe in the future we are building together. This confidence in our province is a testament to our potential and it serves as a powerful call to action for this House. We have a historic opportunity in front of us right now to meet this growth by ensuring that the housing, transit and critical infrastructure required for our communities to thrive are delivered with speed and with certainty. If Bill 100 passes, it will provide the tools that regions need to ensure that every person who calls Ontario home has the foundation they need to succeed.

The message from the people of Ontario is clear: They want us to build faster and more affordably. By standard-

izing chair selection and ensuring regional council sizes reflect the vibrant population realities of today, we are bringing in a more streamlined governance. Bill 100 is a proactive solution that better structures, with a model built for progress accountability. It is a vital part of our government's broader plan to harmonize processes and ensure that when a shovel is ready to go into the ground, regional leadership is empowered to champion that progress. We are evolving the way Ontario plans and operates to ensure lasting affordability and predictability for every resident.

Now, a core component of Bill 100 is the expansion of the minister's authority to appoint a regional chair. While the opposition may view this with hesitation, I point to the history of both York and Peel regions. In these regions, we have already seen the appointed model work. It has provided a level of stability and focus that can be missing in other structures. By fostering regional-provincial alignment, we have achieved a level of coordination that allows for long-term planning and immediate action for the regions.

In York, our regional chair functions as the head of a multi-billion-dollar corporation responsible for the essential services that, again, more than 1.25 million people rely on daily.

Madam Speaker, I think it is worth noting that this region is forecasted to grow to over two million residents by 2051. Now, this is going to require significant housing and infrastructure development.

Because these chairs are appointed with a clear goal for better governance, they are able to facilitate the strategic regional-provincial alignment necessary to get those shovels in the ground faster. They focus on the regional interest—regional transit extensions, major utilities and infrastructure, and housing—ensuring that the region as a whole moves forward.

The experience in York and Peel proves that this model provides the accountability and results that taxpayers do expect. We have seen appointed leaders deliver real, tangible results for their residents, proving that a consistent approach to leadership is a prerequisite for a growing province.

I should talk a little bit about how fast our area is growing—as I mentioned, by 2051, we're going to be around two million people. Well, one of the fastest-growing areas is actually East Gwillimbury, which is just directly north of my riding—44.4% since 2016, with its population expected to triple by 2051. And intensification in York region is truly our focus.

This bill introduces strong-chair powers. This mirrors the strong-mayor powers that have already begun to accelerate housing development in our local municipalities. These tools are not about the concentration of power for its own sake; they are about regional-provincial alignment. Extending these tools to the regional level will help strengthen coordination, reduce delays and help ensure that critical decisions are made in a timely and effective manner to get those shovels in the ground.

Speaker, a central feature of this legislation is the role of the appointed and empowered regional chair, and it is

important to clearly understand both the intent and the function of that role within a modernized governance framework. At its core, the regional chair is not designed to replace local voices, nor is it to override the will of council. Rather, this role is designed to strengthen how decisions are made by ensuring there is clear leadership at the centre of the table—leadership that is focused on coordination, facilitation, and delivering results for the people of Ontario.

Strong-chair powers provide regional leaders with the decisive tools that are needed to prioritize housing-enabling infrastructure, ensuring that essential things like waste water and road projects are fast-tracked to meet the urgency of growth. These tools allow for the alignment of regional budgets with actual growth needs, ensuring that every taxpayer dollar spent is directly supporting the delivery of new homes for our residents. By modernizing these roles, we are making governance more efficient and focused on providing better results, ensuring that regional administration acts as a catalyst for development, rather than a source of delay. By providing these tools at the regional level, we are creating a seamless link between provincial goals and local execution.

Speaker, governance is only as effective as the infrastructure it supports. One of the most significant constraints on housing in York region—and across the province—is the capacity of our water and waste water systems. If the pipes are not in the ground, the homes cannot be built. The members of this chamber have heard me speak about this precise issue, and they heard it in my motion that received unanimous consent from all members in this Legislature. That was on the modernization of communal waste water systems. Earlier this week, I spoke to Bill 98, the Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act. In speaking to these bills, I spoke exactly of this challenge that we have in York and why it is so important that we modernize our systems for communal waste water systems.

1700

Bill 100 works in tandem with our modernization of service delivery. By strengthening regional governance, we are creating the ideal environment for the use of municipal service corporations—MSCs—and communal water systems.

Now, in many areas, traditional municipal models struggle to finance and manage the massive scale of modern water infrastructure. Publicly owned MSCs allow for greater flexibility, specialized expertise and more efficient financing models, while maintaining strict public oversight and accountability. Furthermore, the introduction of communal water systems—it's a game changer. It's a game changer for unlocking land that was previously challenging to develop and communities that desperately were needing water and waste water infrastructure.

Now in my motion, I had specifically pointed to small and rural communities, including those found in York region. Well, Madam Speaker, by having a strong regional chair and ensuring regional-provincial alignment, we can ensure these communal systems are integrated and more

families connected. This ensures that infrastructure is built faster, more reliably and in a way that directly supports building more homes.

Most importantly, Speaker, this regional-provincial alignment will support getting shovels in the ground for the pipes that we need. When the province and regional leadership are in sync, we eliminate the delays that keep families waiting for homes.

Speaker, I would now like to highlight the specific changes to council sizes in Niagara and Simcoe county. The current structures in these regions are simply not reflective of modern population realities or the need for efficient decision-making.

Niagara regional council currently has 32 members representing a population of roughly 478,000. By comparison, Toronto city council has only 26 members for a population of over three million, by comparison to York region, where we have 22 members representing more than 1.25 million residents. Well, this current structure in Niagara is really creating confusion and economic inefficiencies which make it harder to deliver results.

Similarly, Simcoe county currently has 32 councillors for a population of 351,000. Local leaders in Simcoe themselves have recognized that this was way too large, proposing a reduction to 17 members—a proposal that narrowly failed only due to a tie among lower-tier municipalities.

By streamlining Niagara to 13 members and Simcoe to 17 members, we are ensuring that they can function with the speed and focus of a modern board of directors. These new councils will consist of the head of council for each lower-tier municipality, plus an appointed chair or warden. We are removing the hurdles that local leaders in Simcoe attempted to move themselves, providing the legislative path to the efficiency that they requested.

To ensure these smaller councils maintain fair local representation, Bill 100 also enables the minister to implement weighted voting. This system allows each member's vote to reflect population realities, ensuring that while the council is smaller and more efficient, it remains representative of the diverse wards and electors it serves.

Speaker, I want to touch on the vetting process for these appointments. It is a process grounded in transparency and professional integrity. A safeguard in this legislation is the role of the integrity commissioner. Every potential appointee will be subject to rigorous review to ensure they meet the highest ethical standards of public office. This vetting ensures that our regional chairs are not only experienced and qualified but also held to the stringent standards that the people of Ontario deserve.

By focusing on the integrity commissioner's oversight, we provide the public with the assurance that these appointments are based on merit, character and a demonstrated commitment to the public interest. This level of oversight, combined with the proven success of the appointed models in York and Peel, builds a foundation of trust, and it allows regional governments to stop looking inward at their own processes and start looking outward at the needs of the people. This ensures that the leadership at

the centre of the table is credible, qualified and ready to facilitate the productive dialogue necessary to move our province forward.

Speaker, in conclusion, the governance structures of our regional municipalities were largely established over 50 years ago. At that time, most of our vibrant urban centres were small towns or rural areas. The challenges of the 1970s, the scale of growth, the complexity of infrastructure and the speed of the global economy are not the challenges of 2026. And I truly believe, Madam Speaker, that everyone in this chamber can agree on this point.

Today, we are managing a housing and infrastructure demand of unprecedented scale. We face an infrastructure deficit that requires bold, decisive action. We simply cannot solve today's problems with yesterday's tools.

Bill 100, the Better Regional Governance Act, 2026, is about providing those tools. It is about recognizing that the governance of the past is no longer sufficient to meet the needs of a growing province. It is about taking the successful lessons from York and Peel—the lessons of regional-provincial alignment, strong leadership and the effective use of public utilities—and making them the standard for a stronger Ontario. By making these changes now, well in advance of the fall 2026 municipal elections, we are providing the necessary certainty for our communities.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocovic: I want to thank the member for her presentation today.

There is an absolute obsession by this government to stomp on democracy wherever they see it. They hate when democratically elected officials don't listen to what they want them to do. So, to control that, they bring in legislation to remove said democratically elected officials and replace them with appointments, because those appointments are malleable and ultimately are not accountable to the people of Ontario but accountable to this government.

Please explain why this undemocratic move is good in any way, shape or form for the people of Ontario.

Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I'd like to thank the member for Humber River–Black Creek for his question.

Your question is about local democracy. Local democracy is not weakened by this reform. It is refocused on the level where voters have the most direct connection, which is with their municipal councils. Regional structures exist to coordinate services that cross municipal boundaries—and I think we need to always remember that—not to replace local democratic representation.

1710

In practice, residents often experience delays not because of lack of democratic input, but because of a misalignment between multiple layers of decision-making. At the same time, the regional system is modernized to ensure that when these local priorities require coordination across boundaries, the system is capable of acting efficiently.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I want to thank the member from Newmarket–Aurora for her remarks. It really provides insight into the mind of this government. “Appointed and anointed” is what I hear, that that works really well. You wonder where it might stop. Canada is a federation of provinces where we've got powers that go across. Maybe we should be appointing Premiers. Would that make things more efficient? Would that make things more effective?

I can understand why this government wants to say that it's all about housing, because, of course, we all know that they won't even talk about their 1.5-million housing promise because it's another broken promise. So they're saying, “Oh, well, you see, we need this new tool, another new tool.”

To the member: Where would this kind of thinking stop? Should we be appointing legislators here in the Legislative Assembly?

Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the member from Don Valley West for her question, and I understand your question is really about the accountability of these appointed chairs.

At the end of the day, it is clearly defined and it's multi-layered. While the chairs are appointed to ensure a qualified focus on implementation, they operate within an industry framework that sets out their responsibilities, their limits and their obligations. Local elected officials continue play a critical role in setting municipal priorities and representing community interests. This structure recognizes that accountability. It's not only about election mechanics, but also about performance, transparency and delivery.

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

Hon. Zee Hamid: I've served in regional council in Halton, and as I understand, there are only three regions, including Halton, where the chairs are still elected; in some regions, they're appointed. Different regions have different systems. I also know that when this position was first created, it wasn't elected; it was appointed.

So my question, through the Speaker, is, shouldn't we make it consistent? And what are the benefits of making it consistent, considering that in some regions they're appointed and in some regions they're elected, and considering it's not really a political role and wasn't created as such? Isn't it better to appoint them everywhere, so we have consistency?

Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the member from Milton for his question. I think, when it comes down to it, we always want to ensure that the democratic voice is heard and it's heard across the province. That's what it is.

And the characterization does not reflect what legislation does. What we're doing here—every resident continues to be represented, and this is across the province. They're represented by their locally elected municipal council, and that means the primary democratic voice for their communities—and again, that's across the province. Regional governance exists to coordinate the services and

infrastructure that span multiple municipalities, and this legislation is focused on making that coordination more effective.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the opportunity.

The history of Canada has been a history of increasing democracy, responsible government. We moved away from British colonial times when a Governor General was appointed in the UK, we developed parliamentary democracy, and now we have a situation in which this government believes that appointed officials are more capable than elected officials. I have to say, there are days when I look over at the Premier and I think, maybe they've got a point.

Notwithstanding that, how on earth do you defend the idea that going back to a system of appointing rulers as opposed to electing them is a good idea?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I'd like to thank the member from Toronto–Danforth for his question.

The intent of this legislation is not to diminish democratic accountability—and I want to go back to my own example, because I'm York region and that's what I know best. In York region, we have our nine mayors, we have all of our regional councillors—these are all elected officials whom we've elected to act on our behalf. So when I think about that, that's our first layer. And now the upper tier—the upper tier, what they're focused on is delivering the priorities that my region needs desperately, like that waste water infrastructure that's costing billions of dollars. So what I want—and this is what this government wants—is to ensure that they can deliver on these priorities that we have all voted our elected officials to make sure it happens.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: First, I want to begin by thanking my friend in Newmarket–Aurora. We also share York region. We appreciated your PMB number 19, modernizing waste water and the solutions necessary. Speaker, like myself, she's interested in the growth of this province, she's interested in the growth of York region, and this is a priority for her.

At a time of global economic uncertainty and rising demands for housing and infrastructure, we know that infrastructure can't happen when we have a group that cannot get together on decisions. There are real consequences when local levels can't get down to business.

Can the member explain how strengthening regional government will help remove barriers specifically for her motion in waste water and improve coordination and directly support faster—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A very quick response from the member from Newmarket–Aurora.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I really appreciate that question from the member for Thornhill because she knows how much work went into that communal waste water. You heard me talk about East Gwillimbury, just

north of me, and Newmarket is pretty much at its limits. So I know my people are going to need to move next door into East Gwillimbury.

By giving a strong-chair power, it's going to allow a model so that we can address these practical problems that we have right now. Again, I talk about the waste water infrastructure challenge because we need all of those nine mayors and all of those councillors onside so we can move forward.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: I'm really honoured to be able to come and speak today on Bill 100. I'm a little bit under the weather, and I'm going to ask my colleagues to indulge me for a minute and just answer a couple questions for me.

My question is, how do you know you live in a democracy? What are the principles or the practices that tell that you live in a democracy. I'll put it out to any of my colleagues.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Vote.

Mr. Chris Glover: You get to vote. Yes, you have free and fair elections. Anything else?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Representation.

Mr. Chris Glover: You have representation, yes—no taxation without representation. That's another thing. Anything else?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Freedom of information.

Mr. Chris Glover: Freedom of information, yes, freedom of speech. Anything else?

MPP Jamie West: The person you vote for is accountable to you.

Mr. Chris Glover: The person you vote for is accountable to you? Okay, so all of these things are fundamental principles, and I will tell you that, over the last eight years, every one of those fundamental principles of democracy has been undermined by this government. We no longer have the right to free and fair municipal elections.

1720

This government, in 2018, changed the municipal council right in the middle of Toronto's election campaign. They changed it from 47 seats to 25 seats. That was fought all the way to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ruled, in a 5-4 decision, that Canadians do not have the right to democratic municipal elections. In the charter, we have the right to provincial and federal elections, but the charter is silent, so the decision that came down was that municipal elections—no. We could elect, in the city of Toronto—Mayor Olivia Chow is probably going to run again. Next October, we could re-elect Mayor Olivia Chow. The day after, Premier Ford could say, "You know what? I don't like Olivia. I'm going to appoint my own person." And that's sort of what's happening right here, this abuse. We don't have the right. Because of this charter decision from 2021, this government has taken all kinds of latitude. They looked at that and they didn't see that as, "Oh my goodness, that's shocking. We don't have the right to democratic municipal elections? We've got to protect that right because we've been voting in democratic municipal elections—or what we thought were democrat-

ic—for the last 200 years in this province, and before that in the colony of Upper Canada, and we always assumed that our vote was the final word.” But according to the Supreme Court, no, so this government took this and they said, “Oh, well, then we’ll introduce this new bill, Bill 100, and we will strip Ontarians of their right to elect regional council chairs.”

For the people listening, if you live in the regions of Durham, Halton, Muskoka, Niagara, Peel, Waterloo, York or Simcoe county, if this bill passes, you will no longer have the right to vote for your regional chair, and that regional chair instead will be appointed by the Premier. And then that regional chair will be answerable to the Premier, not to the people of that community. So if that appointee does something and the Premier doesn’t like it, well, the Premier can just remove him and appoint somebody else into that position. This is an egregious attack on our democratic rights, this Bill 100.

He’s also said in this bill—the Premier is saying, “You know what? This majority-vote decision-making? We don’t need that in our democracy in Ontario anymore.” In fact, what he’s saying is that we’ve already passed bills for strong-mayor powers, so that a mayor with one third of the votes of council can override a vote of two thirds of council. Well, these appointed chairs will have strong-chair powers—not strong-mayor powers; they will have strong-chair powers. And with these strong-chair powers, these appointees and one third of the elected councillors on the regional council will be able to override a vote of two thirds of the elected regional councillors.

And it even goes further than that. That’s not undemocratic enough for this government because, remember, the Supreme Court said we don’t have a right to democratic municipal elections, so they’re going to be appointing the regional chairs; they’re going to be saying that the regional council won’t be governed by majority-vote decision-making.

There’s one other step in this bill. It says that there’s going to be a weighted voting system determined by the minister, and there’s no criteria for what that weighted voting system will be. So the minister or the Premier may say, for example, in St. Catharines, “I’ve appointed the regional chair and I don’t like the councillor from St. Catharines, so his vote is going to count for one vote, but the councillor from Niagara Falls, I like him, so his vote is going to count for four votes.” So it’s not even going to be one elected councillor, one vote. It’s going to be some indeterminate number of votes, depending on what the minister says.

I know; it could not get more absurd, right? It’s just so undemocratic that it’s appalling. It’s an appalling assault not only on our intelligence but on our democratic rights. I will say to the members here, we can disagree on a lot of things. I got into politics to fight for public education, first and foremost. That was the number one issue. I hate what this government is doing to public education. It’s being completely undermined.

Public health care is another thing, and housing—we’ve got 85,000 people homeless. Those are issues that

we can disagree on, but the thing that we should all be working on—and I’m speaking to the members as individuals—we have to leave our democracy intact. Many of us in this chamber have children; some of us have grandchildren. The legacy that we have to leave them is democratic rights: the right to vote, the right to have that vote count, and the right to boot out the person that we voted in if we don’t like what they’re doing.

That is how we have created Canada as one of the strongest economies in the world, one of the strongest democracies in the world. I see this government taking us down the road that many, many Western democracies are now following, into authoritarianism. This bill is another step into authoritarianism.

I will just go back to Durham region for a second, because that’s one of the regions that’s going to be affected by this. I grew up in Oshawa. That’s part of Durham region. So if you’re a taxpayer in Durham region, you pay \$2 billion of taxes towards the Durham region council. The council determines where that money goes, like what it will be invested in, what services: police, fire, and whatever other services it’s going to be invested in.

With this bill, if this bill passes, the people of Durham region will no longer have the right to vote for the person who’s the chair of the regional council. They won’t have the right to vote for the person who will be determining how that \$2 billion is spent. This is taxation without representation.

In the 1800s, when people were fighting for democratic rights in the former colonies of Upper and Lower Canada, they were arguing for no taxation without representation. That was the call for democracy: “Hey, if the government is going to take our money, then we have to have a say on who forms the government.” This government is saying, “We’re going to take your money and we’re going to determine where it’s spent.”

This government’s record on spending our tax dollars at the provincial level has been absolutely appalling. I mean, there’s a \$2.2-billion tax-funded donation to a private spa at Ontario Place. There’s \$1.3 billion in the Skills Development Fund—80% of that money went to Conservative donors. Some of those Conservative donors were, for example, the Premier’s dentist, who got \$2 million of our taxpayer dollars for staff training, and \$10 million went to a friend of the Premier’s who owns a strip club—again, for staff training. Although, he said it wasn’t for training at the strip club; it was another business that the same person owned. Anyway, that’s what they said.

Interjection.

Mr. Chris Glover: The member from Sudbury has got to stop keeping me laughing.

Anyway—oh, the other \$100 million: This government gave \$100 million to clients of the Premier’s campaign manager, who’s now a lobbyist.

For the people of Durham region and also these other regions—Halton, Muskoka, Niagara, Peel, Waterloo, York and Simcoe county—your regional tax dollars are going to be handled directly by an appointee of this provincial government. Where that money is going to go,

how they're going to divert those billions of dollars in taxes that you're paying, I wouldn't count on it actually going to things that you care about, like roads, police, fire and hospitals—you know, the services that we actually need—or maybe bringing an end to homelessness, which would be a nice thing to do.

Interjection.

Mr. Chris Glover: No, I'm okay. I lost my page.

Okay. So I want to talk a little bit about—I was talking about taxation, how they've been wasting our taxes—some of the abuses of power that this government has used over municipal governments. For example, one of the things that this government does—because they don't really believe in consultation—is they make a decision or they make a backroom deal and then they announce the decision and then they realize that this was a really dumb decision so then they reverse that decision.

1730

For example, the government decided to dissolve the region of Peel, break it up into several municipalities. They never consulted with the people of Peel to see if this would be a good idea or not, but they introduced Bill 112 in 2023. Then, about two months later, they realized that this was really a dumb idea. So then they passed another bill to undissolve the region of Peel in, again, 2023.

Let's see, most recently, they've been passing a bill to force municipalities to transfer their water assets to private corporations. That, to me, is really frightening because the last Conservative government in the late 1990s privatized water treatment systems, and the outcome of that was that you had unqualified people managing water treatment. In Walkerton, it led to the deaths of seven people and the illness of 2,300 people. Now this government is saying, "Oh, well, you know, private corporations will be able to manage our water system better than municipalities," but the last time you tried to privatize our water treatment system, it led to a massive health crisis.

Another abuse of municipal power: the Ontario Place deal—I mentioned it earlier—the 2.2 billion taxpayer dollars for a private spa there. The government passed the Rebuilding Ontario Place Act so that the province can break any law, provincial or municipal, on that site. They don't have to pay attention to environmental laws, heritage laws, labour laws. They can break any law at Ontario Place.

Let's see, the greenbelt: The government overrode the municipalities. Without any consultation, they were going to remove greenbelt protections on 6,800 hectares of land which had recently been bought by friends of the Premier and would have increased the value of that land from the \$300 million that they paid for it to \$8.3 billion, so they stood to make an \$8-billion profit.

More recently, the government's actually talking about seizing control from the people of Toronto of Billy Bishop airport so that he can put jets at Billy Bishop airport—hasn't consulted with the people of Toronto, hasn't consulted with anybody about this, but he's planning on doing this, and my fear there—and this is the riding that I serve—is that we have, over the last 60 years, in the city of Toronto, redeveloped that waterfront. My father talks

about going to the CNE when he was a child. When he was a child, he said, when you were driving into the CNE and driving along Lake Shore Boulevard, you plugged your nose because it smelt so bad because along the waterfront were all these soap factories and abattoirs. There were just these horrible smells as you drove along Lake Shore Boulevard.

We have redeveloped the waterfront in Toronto with Love Park, with the Harbourfront Centre, with the music garden, with the ferries going out to the islands. It is Canada's number one tourist destination, the downtown Toronto waterfront—18 million visitors a year, generating \$13 billion in economic activity—and this government wants to seize control of the Billy Bishop airport and have jets fly over the waterfront every five minutes.

The Premier said he wants eight million people to be using that airport every year. The airport's at the end of a dead-end street on Bathurst. At the south end of Bathurst Street, they're going to have somehow eight million more people coming through that dead-end street every year in the most congested area of the city of Toronto, which is, I believe, the most congested city in Canada. They're going to add another eight million people coming into this airport. It doesn't make sense. The Premier has made no consultation whatsoever. It's just another one of these things, just like the dissolution of Peel, where he makes an announcement and then he's going to have to backtrack because it could potentially be so destructive to the waterfront.

So what have we been doing in the NDP? What have we been doing as this government—as I mentioned, over the last eight years—has passed bill after bill after bill that has eroded our democratic rights? We've been fighting back. We've been organizing communities.

I introduced a bill in December to create a commissioner of democratic rights, Bill 78. The goal of Bill 78 was to create an independent commissioner in the Legislature who would keep an eye on things. Just like the Auditor General keeps an eye on the accounts and the money that's being spent by the government, this commissioner of democratic rights would be keeping an eye on our democratic rights. And the government voted it down. It concerns me that they've done this.

We've also been fighting back. I've been organizing town halls about this and trying to raise awareness because it's really difficult to get it in the news that our democracy is being eroded and our democratic rights are being overridden.

I will say, too, that it's not just this provincial government that's overriding our democratic rights. I know Prime Minister Carney is very popular right now. I would agree that he's a brilliant person, and maybe the right person to be taking on Trump at this moment in time. But I am deeply concerned—

Interjections.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay, I hear disagreement about that too. Because a lot of the things he's doing, the economic policies that he's pursuing and the anti-democratic

policies that they are pursuing, are very similar to what this government is doing.

For example, they passed Bill C-5. I mentioned Bill 5 earlier. This government passed Bill 5 that allows the Premier or any minister to declare any part of the province a special economic zone, where they can break any provincial or municipal law.

So the federal Liberal government has passed Bill C-5, and this also allows cabinet ministers to override existing laws, regulations and guidelines to facilitate investment. Okay, to facilitate investment and building of projects—but why can't you build those investments? Why can't you build the things we need to build and still follow the law? It doesn't take that long to follow the law.

Bill C-15, again, allows cabinet ministers to exempt individuals or corporations from specific regulations for up to six years. Again, the federal government is also giving their ministers the power to override laws.

The threat here is that under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, we have the right to rule by law, which means that we have a set of laws and they're supposed to apply to everybody equally. Nobody is supposed to be exempt. And so if a cabinet minister, either provincial or federal, can just say, "Oh, you know what? This person over here is building a housing development. I'm going to exempt them from all the laws. But this person over here is building something but I don't like it, so I'm not going to exempt it"—that's favouritism and it's not democracy because it's not rule by law.

If the government, federal or provincial, wants to change the laws, they certainly have the power to change the laws. They come in here, they introduce a bill, we have a debate, we have votes, and then the government can change the laws. But for the cabinet ministers to just decree that "the laws apply to you but not to you," that's an incredibly dangerous attack on our democratic rights, just like this Bill 100 is an attack on our democratic rights.

Bill 5 here at the provincial level, Bill C-5 at the federal level: These are all dangerous bills, and they're eroding our democratic rights in the province of Ontario and across our country.

I've got 10 minutes of questions. I look forward to hearing questions from my colleagues.

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member opposite for his remarks. Some news that I came across just this week from my hometown was a decision—it actually reiterated a decision that Mayor Dilkens had put forward in Windsor involving Transit Windsor. He used his strong-mayor powers to eliminate an international transit service, fearing that it would accumulate a large deficit because of the federal sick days. In fact, that came to fruition. It was announced it was about \$8 million that was added to the tax burden of the people of Windsor for that. So he used his strong-mayor powers and vetoed council.

I know there's a motion on the table from the member for Windsor West—motion 17 to rescind those powers. Given the \$8-million hit that the mayor very much forecast

and was proven, is there some wisdom in allowing an at-large person to look beyond the politics and make sound decisions for the finances of a government?

1740

Mr. Chris Glover: It's incredible to hear this government talk about government waste when this government is investing \$2.2 billion in a private spa at Ontario Place, and \$1.3 billion, most of it going to Conservative donors, with no evaluation of how that money is being spent.

The \$8 million that you're talking about in your riding—of course, nobody wants to see our tax dollars wasted, and the people need to be informed about what's happening. They elect the councillors and the mayor in that community, and if the councillors and the mayor are wasting \$8 million, well, then, they should be electing somebody else. They need to be informed of that so that they can elect somebody else.

But should we strip them of their right to majority-vote democracy, to majority-vote decision-making in that municipality? No, absolutely not. There are ways to save that money. In fact, a better way to prevent government waste is through transparency and open and democratic elections.

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

MPP Alexa Gilmour: It's an honour to rise on behalf of the people of Parkdale–High Park, though I some days start to feel like I'm no longer in the Legislature and I am in Nineteen Eighty-Four, the George Orwell novel. "Local democracy is simply being refocused"—as opposed to being taken away from the people—sounds like Orwellian doublespeak or something out of Trump's playbook.

My question to you is, when non-partisan groups like Tribunal Watch sound the alarm about the political appointments being individuals without the experience to adjudicate tribunals, without the experience to take over the boards that they're on, what concerns do you have that these new appointees will actually be individuals who are qualified in any way to do the tasks that they're being brought to do?

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member from Parkdale–High Park for the question and for the work that you're doing in your community, and also about raising the alarm about our democratic rights in this province. I am deeply concerned about what this government is doing at every step, that they are eroding our democratic rights. This Bill 100, which strips the voters of eight regions of the power to elect the chairs of their regional councils who will be spending their tax dollars—this is a real assault on our democratic rights.

I thank you for the question. We absolutely need to fight back against this.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Somebody else brought up George Orwell, so I have to go back to George Orwell. Last night, we were having a debate and I said that Animal Farm was an allegory and it was a criticism of the socialist system, which always descends into chaos. The member

from Humber River–Black Creek took an opposite view. He said that *Animal Farm* was actually not a criticism of socialism but, rather, the author was actually a lifelong socialist supporter himself.

My position is, *Animal Farm*, a critique of socialism. The member from Humber River–Black Creek says, *Animal Farm*, a critique of extreme totalitarianism. What's your view?

Mr. Chris Glover: I would agree with my colleague from Humber River–Black Creek that *Animal Farm* is a critique of authoritarianism, because if you have an authoritarian government, there's no limit to the amount of authority and the amount of power they try to consolidate in the one person, in the one leader, and that is an incredibly dangerous thing.

That's what's happened with George Orwell in the *Nineteen Eighty-Four* book as well, that they had double-speak, that people would say one thing when they knew that it was absolutely false. It's the kind of thing—it's that world that we are living in now. This government is becoming more and more Orwellian, and George Orwell wrote those books, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm*, to warn us about authoritarianism and about things like Bill 100 that's here right now.

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

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I'd like to thank the member opposite for his remarks. But I do want to ask a question. Can you explain how housing targets, infrastructure expansion and growth planning will realistically be achieved without improving co-operation between mayors, municipal councils and regional governments working within a coordinated framework?

Mr. Chris Glover: How do you build more housing in Ontario? Well, the one thing I think this government should do is look at what every other province in Canada is doing, including the British Columbia government—the NDP government in British Columbia. They're building two homes per capita for every one that they're building here in Ontario.

This government has the worst record of housing starts per capita in the country. It's around 60,000 housing starts. Whereas what the government said their goal was, was to reach 1.5 million homes by 2030—the government would need to be building at least 170,000 homes. The \$5 billion that they've given away to developers has not helped. In fact, this government has passed legislation—the “building homes slower act” is what some of the municipalities called it, because they took away the development charges that municipalities need to provide services, to provide sewers and roads and water systems to new developments. So this government has actually really hampered—they've tried to hand out money to developers, but at the same time they've hampered the ability of communities and municipalities to build the housing that we need.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocvic: Since this is George Orwell day 2—I have had an epiphany: I believe that the collective

work of George Orwell was in fact a warning against the authoritarian Ford government that we've been experiencing over the last eight years. In fact, doublespeak, that you spoke of, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* reminds me of literally all of their bills—the names. They have bills that are about democracy that do the opposite, student achievement that do the opposite—all of this.

Did you know—another Orwellian protagonist play here—they now have this investment fund that they want to create, this \$4-billion protect Ontario investment fund? They've taken the mistakes of SDF—meaning they get their hands slapped when everyone sees what they're doing—and now they move it off the books. They give it to private investors and they say, “Hey, make this part of our friends-and-family plan.” Did you hear about that? What do you think?

Mr. Chris Glover: It is definitely becoming more and more Orwellian here. It's frightening to see what is happening with this.

The reason that we hate authoritarian regimes is because they have taxation without representation, so you don't get to have a say in how your tax dollars are spent; if you disagree with the way a government is spending your tax dollars, you don't get to boot them out.

Well, this government had the \$1.3-billion Skills Development Fund scandal in the fall. Now, in this budget, they've just introduced a \$4-billion slush fund that will be handled by an external party, and this external group will not be—their documents will not be FOI-able. The reason that we were able to uncover the scandal of the Skills Development Fund is through freedom-of-information requests—we in the opposition and the journalists were able to expose it. Now, with this new \$4-billion slush fund, we won't be able to put in—

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

Further debate? I recognize the member for Don Valley North.

Interjections.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Thank you for that round of applause. At quarter to 6 on a Thursday, it's nice to see that our spirits are still high in the chamber.

Interjection.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Oh, 10 to 6—even better.

I rise today to speak to Bill 100, and I want to be very clear from the outset of this speech that I am not against building more homes; in fact, I strongly support it.

In Don Valley North, housing is not an abstract issue; it's personal. It's deeply personal. It's the young family wondering if they'll ever be able to actually afford a home. It's the recent graduate forced to move in with their parents because they can't afford rent. It's the senior who wants to downsize, but can't afford something that's affordable and still in the community that they've spent their entire life in.

1750

We need more housing. We needed it yesterday. But, Speaker, supporting more housing does not mean supporting bad policy, and it certainly does not mean accepting a

government rewriting its own records. But let's remember: This government made it very clear. They made a very clear and very public commitment, and that was to building 1.5 million homes by 2031. That was the number. That was the promise. That was the standard that they asked the public, the voters, my residents of Don Valley North to hold them to and judge them on, and today they're not on track. They're not even close to being on track. They're so far from the track, it's a little dot to them.

Housing starts are lagging behind anywhere close to what they need to meet their goal. Affordability hasn't improved in any meaningful way for any families and the gap between what was promised and what is being delivered is growing exponentially every single day. You simply need to look at the budget document that this government put forward. Its own numbers show that there is no way they will meet their own number of 1.5 million by 2031.

Families in Don Valley North were promised, again, 1.5 million homes by 2031. That was the commitment. Today, that promise is slipping further and further out of reach, and instead of owning that failure, instead of being accountable, instead of fixing what's not working, this government is trying to change the rules and take more control, more power away from municipalities and into their own hands.

Speaker, my constituents are not asking for spin; they're asking for results. Where are the homes? Why are the prices so high, and why is this government trying to rewrite its own promises instead of delivering on them? That is the context in which we must consider Bill 100 and that's the lens we must use to judge what the government is trying to accomplish through this piece of legislation, because this bill is not just about governance. I think we need to be absolutely clear-minded about this fact. This bill is about control.

When a government is confident in its housing plan, it works with municipalities. When a government is falling behind, it starts looking for ways to force outcomes, and that's what we're seeing happening through this bill.

Bill 100 gives the province new powers to do the following: reshape regional councils, control how votes are allocated and influence who leads councils—not because municipalities asked for it, not because voters asked for it, not because Ontarians asked for it, but because the province wants greater control over how decisions are made.

Let's call this what it is. If you can't meet your targets, you start trying to control the people who are supposed to help you meet them on your terms, on your timeline, without the same level of accountability or public transparency. And that should concern every single member of this House, because it fundamentally changes the relationship between the province and municipalities. It turns partnership into subordination.

Now, this government will say, "Well, member from Don Valley North, you're from Toronto. That doesn't affect you. Why are you so concerned?" But, Speaker, the people of Don Valley North know that this is not how

reality works. Our community sits right at the boundary with York region. Every morning, thousands of people travel south into our community. They use the 404. They connect through Finch. They rely on Line 1. Those systems, Speaker, are already under significant pressure.

So what happens when development in neighbouring regions is accelerated without matching investments in transit, in roads, in schools or in health care? It doesn't stay north of Steeles, Speaker. It comes directly into our community, into our riding, into our neighbourhoods. It shows up as heavier congestion along the 404 corridor, longer travel times at Finch and Sheppard, more crowding on Line 1 headed into the core, and more strain on local infrastructure that is already stretched thin.

Speaker, this is what happens when growth is not coordinated properly, when you force a top-down model. And this is the risk when decisions are centralized and pushed through without significant local input. Because local governments understand the needs of the local community. They understand local capacity. They understand where infrastructure is needed and they understand how growth should be phased in. But this bill moves us in the opposite direction. It concentrates decision-making power at the provincial level, further away from the people who actually live with the consequences of the decisions made by people here at Queen's Park.

But this bill—this is what we're debating today. So, Speaker, I want to return to the housing issue a bit, because that is what this government claims this is all about. If the government truly had a credible plan to build 1.5 million homes by 2031—which, again, they promised. They set that standard. They created that number. They put it out to the public. If they truly, truly had a credible plan, it would not need to do this. It would not need to restructure councils. It would not need to control voting systems. It would not need to intervene in how local governments operate. Strong plans do not require this level of intervention. Strong plans deliver results. Clearly, this government did not have a plan.

In Don Valley North, people are still asking, "Why is it so hard to find an affordable home? Why are rents so high? Why does it feel like supply is not keeping up with demand?" Bill 100 does not answer any of those questions. It does not build a single home on its own. It does not speed up approvals in a way that guarantees affordability. It does not ensure that infrastructure keeps pace with growth. But, Speaker, what it does do: It changes who gets to make decisions.

Housing policy should not be about shifting responsibility, the favourite game of this government. It should not be about redefining targets after the fact, and it should not be about concentrating power when things go off track—and clearly, Speaker, things have gone significantly off track with this government. It should be about delivery, it should be about accountability, and it should be about working with municipalities, not overriding them. Because the reality is simple, Speaker: You cannot build strong communities by weakening local voices.

In Don Valley North, my constituents are practical people. They're non-ideological. They understand we need more homes. They support responsible growth. But they also expect that growth comes with certain things, like proper transit, adequate schools, accessible health care and infrastructure that actually will keep up. They expect their voices to matter in those decisions.

Thank you, Speaker. And that—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. I'm sorry to interrupt the member.

Seeing the time on the clock, it is now time for private members' public business.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

Report continues in volume B.

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Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	
Firin, Mohamed (PC)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
Flack, Hon. / L'hon. Rob (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Premier / Premier ministre Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario Leader, Third Party / Chef du troisième parti
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gilmour, Alexa (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Gualtieri, Silvia (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Hamid, Hon. / L'hon. Zee (PC)	Milton	Associate Solicitor General for Auto Theft and Bail Reform / Solliciteur général associé responsable de la Lutte contre le vol d'automobiles et de la Réforme relative aux mises en liberté sous caution
Hardeman, Hon. / L'hon. Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Hon. / L'hon. Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Hazell, Andrea (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Holland, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin (PC)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	Associate Minister of Forestry and Forest Products / Ministre associé des Forêts et des Produits forestiers
Hsu, Ted (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Trevor (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et de l'Agroentreprise
Jordan, John (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC)	York Centre / York-Centre	Solicitor General / Solliciteur général
Khanjin, Hon. / L'hon. Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Minister of Red Tape Reduction / Ministre de la Réduction des formalités administratives
Kusendova-Bashta, Hon. / L'hon. Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Leardi, Anthony (PC)	Essex	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Energy and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie et des Mines
Lennox, Robin (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	
Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Sport / Ministre du Sport
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	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
McCrimmon, Karen (LIB)	Kanata—Carleton	
McGregor, Hon. / L'hon. Graham (PC)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiques et du Multiculturalisme
McKenney, Catherine (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York	

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Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
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
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pinsonneault, Steve (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Northern Economic Development and Growth / Ministre du Développement et de la croissance économique du Nord
Quinn, Hon. / L'hon. Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security / Ministre des Collèges et Universités, de l'Excellence en recherche et de la Sécurité
Racinsky, Joseph (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation / Ministre des Affaires autochtones et de la Réconciliation économique avec les Premières Nations
		Minister Responsible for Ring of Fire Economic and Community Partnerships / Ministre responsable des Partenariats économiques et communautaires pour le développement du Cercle de feu
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Rosenberg, Bill (PC)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Chris (IND)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Skelly, Hon. / L'hon. Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Speaker / Présidente de l'Assemblée législative
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre associé des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Smyth, Stephanie (LIB)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
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

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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	