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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 5 November 2026

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 5 novembre 2026

The House met at 0900.

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

Prières.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTING ONTARIO'S FOOD INDEPENDENCE ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 VISANT À PROTÉGER L'AUTONOMIE ALIMENTAIRE DE L'ONTARIO

Mr. Oosterhoff, on behalf of Mr. Jones, moved third reading of the following bill:

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

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

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: It is a great privilege to be able to rise on behalf of the good people of Niagara West, on behalf of agri-food workers, farmers and the agricultural sector across this great province to speak to this legislation. This is the first piece of legislation that I will have had the opportunity to speak to in my new role as Ontario's Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness.

I want to thank the Premier for the opportunity to work with farmers, with egg workers and with this great province to deliver a more sovereign, secure and self-reliant agri-food economy here in the province of Ontario.

I do want to acknowledge and thank several people for their work, but I have to begin by saying that I will be sharing my time with the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, the newly elected member, and the MPP for Algoma–Manitoulin, a strong champion for northern Ontario.

Speaker, I have to also begin by thanking and acknowledging the incredible amount of work that has gone into this legislation by my predecessor the member for Chatham-Kent–Leamington, a true advocate, a fierce worker and a protector of farmers here in the province of Ontario, Trevor Jones. I have to thank him for his leadership over the years and all of the work that he did to bring this bill forward. I want to acknowledge that he is continuing that excellent work in a new ministry, the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, but I know he will continue also in that new ministry to be a fierce advocate for agri-food and the provincial needs of farmers and agri-food workers.

I also want to thank the former parliamentary assistant to Minister Jones—and for a few weeks there, also my parliamentary assistant—the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, for his leadership, his work, his tenacity and his vision. He is indeed someone who I believe has done fantastic work for farmers, as someone with an agricultural background himself, and of course representing farmers from not just that community but working with those from across the province, has made a big difference for this legislation. I want to acknowledge that as well.

I am so grateful today, Speaker, to have the privilege of interacting and speaking to legislation that I hope this chamber will support, this House will support, as we reflect on the fact that it is the reflection of a collective effort, a collective partnership with many, many farmers, farm organizations, businesses, stakeholders and entrepreneurs from across the agri-food sector who have come together to provide their advice and their input on this legislation.

Premier Ford has always said that it is vitally important that our government gets out into communities both large and small in this province to make sure that the legislation that's coming forward isn't an ivory-tower, downtown-Toronto idea, but is one that is reflected by main street Ontario, by everyday citizens and by those who actually work in the sectors that we are legislating on.

I can tell you that this legislation does reflect what farmers have been asking for, what agricultural organizations have been asking for, and I can tell them as well, those who are listening, some who are even here today in the gallery watching who I want to acknowledge from the dairy advisory council for their incredible contributions and using their voice—I can assure them I will continue to listen, I will continue to work on their behalf and to bring forward policies that reflect their needs and their priorities.

Direct communication and collaboration with those who feed our province is absolutely integral to the development of any good legislation, and I'm happy to say that the measures of the Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act were informed by the province's farmers and food processors, the producers who have actually come forward to say, "This is what we need to develop strategic measures to support agri-food competitiveness and resilience."

We worked closely with farmers to understand their needs, and we will also be taking more actions in addition

to this legislation as part of our ongoing efforts to ensure that stakeholders in the agri-food sector are directly informing our work. I appreciate these strong working relationships and will never take them for granted.

To back up a little bit, I don't think it's any surprise to those who are in the chamber this morning and those who are watching via livestream that this has been a year with significant global uncertainty and ongoing trade challenges, and we need to be real about that. In the 2026 provincial budget, the budget is built to respond to those needs, to respond to that uncertainty with strategic investments to strengthen sector competitiveness and protect jobs during a time of economic uncertainty.

A number of these investments include protecting Ontario's agricultural and agri-food industry; for example, strengthening agri-food supply chains, enhancing competitiveness and attracting and growing our sovereign agri-food talent through the Grow Ontario Strategy.

As one example, this year's budget commits to agri-food research and innovation. There is an additional $61.5 million into Agricultural Research and Innovation Ontario. Just a few weeks ago, I had the privilege of joining the outstanding member for Wellington–Halton Hills as we announced the groundbreaking of an over $30-million poultry research facility to protect the incredible feathery friends that of course end up on many of our plates but also in so many ways provide thousands of good jobs across this province. It's a demonstration of continued investment into research and innovation, which builds on an additional $41 million that was announced last year as well—a little over a year ago. That is over $100 million over the next 10 years that will be rolled into research and innovation here in the province of Ontario specifically to support strategic agri-food research infrastructure: 14 special research stations, 5,600 acres, more than 200 buildings of research excellence delivered by people who work in them and care for them.

Now, we know that research and innovation are crucial to delivering solutions for farmers and they're crucial to protecting Ontario's food supply chains against emerging threats from invasive species and pests as well as animal diseases, which can be incredibly disruptive and can take all sorts of forms. We have seen reports recently of the spotted lanternfly out in Windsor, and we know the damage the spotted lanternfly can have for tender-fruit growers and on tender-fruit industries.

More recently just across the border in the United States to the west of us, we've seen where avian influenza knocked out millions and millions of chickens, and that had a direct impact on consumers and, in their case, on the prices that were being paid. So we need to make sure that we are doubling down on research and innovation that deals with these emerging threats and that it's responding to them for the sake of the livelihoods of those who are dependant on them, and also, ultimately, for the sake of those who rely on that strong, stable supply chain of food that of course we take for granted whether we go to a cafeteria or are packing our lunch pail. We can't take these things for granted. We need to continue building relationships and investing in innovation against these types of threats.

0910

The budget also built out and identified relationships with retailers and food service companies throughout Ontario. I want to talk about that because it is incredibly important that we look at how we can diversify our markets, and that's a key area of focus.

The Premier was very candid with me. He said we need to make sure that we're expanding access to new markets, that we're not as reliant on the United States, that we are doing more domestic production but also more domestic consumption. It's one thing to grow products here; it's another to what I call "grow and go." You may have heard of the concept of ripping and shipping of critical minerals. This is something that we hear the Minister of Energy and Mines talk about regularly. He talks about how, here in Ontario, we've had this history of extraction of critical minerals and resources, and then we ship them in many cases to the United States, and then we purchase back the value-added goods.

We need to change that in that sector. But in agriculture, I call it "growing and going," where we have products—as an example, let's take something like soybeans or corn—that are incredibly important commodity groups. We're never going to stop that export. We know how important those export markets are. But if we're able to diversify the offtake agreements for those farmers for more markets—so they're able to get better prices for their product and also be able to provide more domestic consumption.

For example: You look at soybeans, you look at soy milk, you look at tofu as an example of a product that is being consumed globally in vast quantities. If we're able to produce more of that here, not just on the growing of the soybeans but also the jobs and the security that comes with the value-added work that goes into making tofu—just as one example—that's good for Ontario jobs. It's good for Ontario farmers.

That's why the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership is so important. It's a plan, in collaboration with the federal government, that says we need to be strategic. For the future of agriculture and food in Canada and in Ontario, as we face trade disruptions, we need to be focused on protecting food independence. We want to make sure that our agri-food sector is self-reliant, that our supply chains are domesticated and are resilient, and that farmers are also empowered.

Because we do have what the world needs. The amount of respect that there is internationally for our agricultural products is unparalleled. One example I'll give—and maybe this is just a fascinating little story. I'm sorry it's not in my notes, and I told the Minister of Sport I was going to try to stick to my notes today but I'll give an example—is Canadian corn. You might not realize this, but one of the fastest-growing markets for Canadian corn is Ireland, because Ireland has a lot of dairy production. And what do Irish dairy producers like? They like Ontario corn. Some of that is because of our excellent growing conditions, which actually means we have lower rates of vomitoxin in the corn, which is good. It's good for cows if

they're able to eat essentially very clean, very healthy corn. Okay, so what happens? They end up producing—sorry, it's just a little story. So Ontario corn goes to Ireland, gets consumed by Irish milk cows, which then gets sold—the milk—to a place like Italy, who then produces parmigiano. So what happens? We all love our Parmesan. We then import the Parmesan, which comes from Ontario corn.

So you look at the cycle of global markets and the importance of diversifying our trade away from just the American markets into new markets—it's a fantastic story, and it's one where next time you eat Parmesan, you're going to start thinking about Canadian corn and Ontario corn. But I can tell you, that's just one little example of the incredible supply chain and the opportunities that farmers have built up over time, and that they need government partners to be able to broaden those markets and increase that access.

I think of Hensall, just as one little example, again going back to the bean conversation—I know I talked about tofu and soybeans—but as an example of global markets. So if you go to the UK and you eat Branston beans—Branston beans is the number one brand in the UK. Heinz is number two. I think Heinz is number one in Scotland, if my memory is correct. Where do all those beans come from? They come from Huron–Bruce, from Hensall Co-op. So next time you're there and you're thinking, "This is as British as baked beans," remember they come from Ontario.

That's just one example. It's millions of tonnes, right? It's an incredible story, but it's an incredible story because it takes time to go to those shows to bring those connections. Farmers are doing that, agricultural commodity groups are doing that, but governments need to be partners along the way. That's why efforts like the market diversification and trade initiative, which is an important program that was funded through the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, matters because it gives the resources, the tools for folks in those businesses to be able to go around the world and to close purchase orders at the end of the day, which is good for domestic jobs and ultimately good for our economy.

I apologize about going into some of those stories there, Minister, but I'm just very proud of the work of our farmers, and we need to make sure that they understand that that's what we're trying to safeguard. We're trying to support and protect that kind of dominance in agricultural excellence under this legislation.

We need to maintain control of our foodland. We need to maintain control of the acreages that we have here in the province, which, you know, the good Lord is not making a whole lot more of. We need to make sure that which we have is being treated with respect, that we are stewards of the land we've been given and that farmers also can know that they're going to have protections when it comes to our foodland.

The concept of protecting local ownership of farmland is not a new one. We know that five other provinces already have legislation in place which actually restricts the amount of farmland that foreign entities can acquire. Manitoba, Quebec, Saskatchewan, Alberta, PEI: They all have protections in place for farmland, and we want to do the same thing.

What we don't want to do—and I want to be very clear about this in this legislative process—we're not trying to stop people who come from other nations with a vision of becoming farmers here in Ontario. My family came here after the Second World War. My great-great-grandfather was a dairy farmer, my great-grandfather was a dairy farmer, my grandfather was a dairy farmer, became a turkey farmer, then my dad became a pig farmer. Anyway, there's a whole bunch of agriculture. What's the point? The point is they came from overseas. They came here because—as we approach Remembrance Day, we'll acknowledge that the Canadians liberated the Netherlands. And when they liberated the Netherlands, people like my grandparents said, "I want to go to a place where people, like those people, are willing to go across the sea to people who they can't communicate with in the same language, they don't know their language, but they are willing to go and fight and die and be willing to stand up for their freedom." That was why they came to Canada, because they saw how Canadians were when they liberated the Netherlands and how incredible those contributions were. When they came here, they came to work hard and to farm. They were able over time to purchase farmland and to be able to begin that process.

I can tell you there are many, many of those stories, because if we're not Indigenous, we're all from somewhere at some point, and we came here, and that includes our farming communities.

I want to just acknowledge that what we're not trying to do is stop that kind of a success story. We want people who have a vision of a brighter future to come here from wherever you are coming in the world. You are welcome to come here to invest, to build, to grow and to get involved in agriculture. We need more people in agriculture.

What we do not want is large, foreign, multinational entities, who don't have a vested interest in the success of this province, purchasing land to sit on land. Because I can tell you, if you look at history, farmland in Ontario is a great investment. Farmland in Ontario has gone up, historically—I mean there are ups and downs like with any market. MPP Vanthof was speaking about this in his community and the history of some of the land prices in your area. It goes up and down, but overall, if you look over a 40- or 50-year time frame, there's a fantastic return on farmland because, again, God is not making any more of it, we need it to be able to produce incredible crops, and we have incredible entrepreneurs. But the reason it's valuable is because of those entrepreneurs and those visionaries, those risk-takers, those farmers who invest in their land and add value to that. We want those people to be able to continue to do that.

But we don't want people to come in, purchase land, bid up the price against domestic producers who are going to use that land for a good reason and have it lie fallow,

just have it there as a—"You know, we're going to hold onto it for 20, 30, 40 years and eventually, who knows what we're going to do with it." We can't have that kind of speculation. We need domestic ownership for our food security, for our food sovereignty and for our self-reliance as a province.

So that is what we're proposing in the Farmland Security Act. It's legislation that would enable the province to restrict foreign ownership of farmland.

I do want to be clear, we have this legislation in front of us as a House, but it's enabling in nature, which means you're still going to see regulations come forward about the specific details of how that would be operationalized, and we want to make sure we get it right. We're going to cross our t's, dot our i's and consult on proposed regulations before it comes into effect. I want to assure people who have questions about, "How is this is going to be operationalized?" "What would this mean in practice?" that you will see very clearly the proposed regulations. We're very open to feedback, and we've been talking about that, the parliamentary assistants and I, even just this week.

0920

Now, because we value the insights of farmers, of farming organizations, of municipalities and of people from around the province, we did consult on this legislation, which will also inform the development of the regulatory framework to follow. We received 30 submissions from members of the public this spring. We held significant hearings. Between July 28 and August 12, the members of the Standing Committee on the Interior held public hearings across this province.

I have to acknowledge and thank again the MPP for Algoma–Manitoulin, who I know was, I think, at almost every single one of those meetings, if my memory is correct, and just led the charge in terms of fantastic questions for the public, asking them to build out their thoughts at times, and also encouraging colleagues from all sides who had great questions about that. I want to acknowledge and thank the committee members. In the middle of the summer, to go out and to do that type of engagement with the public is so important, and I know that there were many comments that we've been reviewing as well as a result of that.

Now, this is forward-looking legislation. It's going to take effect once the regulatory framework is complete. It will apply to farmland acquisitions at that time, which means once the regulations are in place and the act is in force, we will have the requirement to comply with this act, and we'll need to ensure that anyone acquiring farmland confirms that they meet the requirements of the act. Without confirmation, bluntly, the land transfer registration wouldn't proceed. It's that simple. If you can't demonstrate that you are able to meet the requirements, you can't transfer. However, this will not apply to Canadian citizens or permanent residents, and we will also clarify how this act applies to corporations, to partnerships and other entities.

I want to be clear that this act would not impact current owners of farmland. I've had folks reaching out who already own farmland wondering what this would mean. This will not impact current owners, and we will recognize that there's some flexibility that is needed in certain instances, and that's why we're going to actually bring forward a plan that will allow for certain exemptions to the restrictions. We need to be reasonable. We can't just be dogmatic; we have to be practical. So we're going to see some of those exemption processes articulated through regulation, perhaps around items that would be smaller parcels of land or that type of transaction, and we're going to make sure that we're making those decisions in the best interests of the people of Ontario.

More generally, this act will also set out a framework to support the administration and the enforcement of the legislation, including requirements related to the collection and use of information, as well as inspection, investigation and compliance.

You've heard about the why—why we need to do this to protect those incredible products that we rely on coming from our amazing farmers here in the province—but it is really part of an agenda that the Premier has articulated for self-sovereignty, of recognizing Ontario within a strong, united Canada as a place where we really do kind of have it all.

I was thinking this again—the Premier has talked about this—but we all watched the mid-terms, I'm sure, and you see the various states, and you have the peach state, the auto state, the corn state, and they all have their own thing that they're known for. You drive around Ontario, and you have all of it; you really do.

If you're driving from New Liskeard to Niagara to Windsor to the port of Goderich and everywhere in between—I forgot eastern Ontario; I apologize—up to Glengarry-Prescott, that area as well, you're going to have a fantastic diversity of commodity groups, a fantastic diversity of production capacity, and it is really unique. There are not a lot of places, at least from what I can tell, anywhere in North America that have that level of diversity, and we need to protect that.

Now, another way that we are showing as a government that agriculture is a priority for this Premier and our province as a whole is through the Grow Ontario Strategy. It was first launched in 2022, and I want to acknowledge the former minister from that day, Lisa Thompson, for her leadership and her hard work in bringing that forward. While I'm at it, I have to say, I know Minister Rob Flack had a tremendous role in enacting and bringing forward more of the policies that would inform that strategy.

It's an aggressive timeline, 8% a year—one 8% doesn't sound like that, that much, but I'm telling you—we all know about compound interest and how that works: you do 7%, I think you double every 10 years or something like that, so you look at the math on 8% and that is a massive amount of increase. We're seeing success already through those targets and making sure that we're being nimble. Now, we are reviewing that strategy. We're in a different era—2022 doesn't feel like that long ago to some

of us, but it was a different era. We didn't have Trump; we didn't have those trade threats.

We were in a different geopolitical era when it came to even energy. Look at the world that we're in, for example, with the war in Iran, and even with our partnerships with the federal government. The federal government is now more responsive and understanding of the needs, I believe, of agriculture here in Ontario, but of other industries as well. We need to make sure we're working with them as they seek to support provinces.

PA Rosenberg, the member for Algoma–Manitoulin, is going to be speaking more about the northern Clay Belt and the incredible opportunities that exist in the north, but I do want to just highlight it in glowing terms for a moment if I may, Speaker, because it's something not a lot of people know about. In the northern Clay Belt, the opportunities that exist there are absolutely massive. There are millions of acres in the north that have potential. I think of beef farmers who I met with who were talking about grazing opportunities. Some of that has been held up because it can take a really long time to get your lease.

I believe 84% of the land in northern Ontario that would be deemed under the Clay Belt is considered to be crown land, which means there's a process by which the MNR would consider your eligibility, and it takes a while. Let's be honest, it takes a long time. We need to cut that down, we need to have a condensed timeline, and we're going to be working very closely with the Ministry of Natural Resources to ensure that we have a process that's still robust, that respects the need for consultation, that respects Aboriginal rights and the importance of respecting First Nations, but also strengthens our rural economies in the north and brings more folks into northern Ontario, as well as respecting the value that's already there, for example, in mining claims, forestry uses, existing land uses. We recognize that, but we do see huge advantages.

I can tell you, the heat unit changes that you see, not just in northern Ontario but other parts—eastern Ontario again. There are crops there that are growing that never used to be able to grow 15 or 20 years ago. And so there are negative consequences to that in some parts of the province. There's a reason why our government is investing tens of millions of dollars into irrigation infrastructure in Niagara, out in west St. Catharines and Lincoln and Niagara-on-the-Lake, as well as tens of millions of dollars into southern Ontario, in Leamington and some of those areas, bringing water from our Great Lakes and from water sources to our farmers so they're able to produce because we have had more droughts over the past couple of decades.

So there are downsides, but there are also opportunities, and we can't be closed-minded to that. We need to be looking forward to how we can take advantage of those opportunities to grow the jobs and prosperity of our great province.

So with the Clay Belt, we're going to simplify the rules, we're going to establish guidance and create a one-window contact to allow applicants to better unlock the potential the land offers, and I want to thank both the Ministry of Northern Economic Development and Growth and the Ministry of Natural Resources for their collaboration.

I will say, Speaker, there are a lot of grants I could run through here about the various investments that have been made in a whole number of areas, including the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp., which has invested, since 2018, in over 700 agri-food projects, $165 million in additional outside investment being brought in through those. But I'm going to go back to the specifics of Bill 109 because that is in fact what we are debating and I'm running close to time.

The Beef Farmers of Ontario is an organization which represents 19,000 beef farmers. It's a lot of beef farmers. Every—I was going to say every one of our ridings, but I realized that's probably not true for a number of our ridings. Most of our ridings that are outside of a large urban centre would have beef farmers, and they could be small. There are folks who are registered beef farmers, right? They have two, three, four, five steer, maybe, that they're growing. It's not always big. I think we think sometimes of beef farmers as the large feedlots. You might see that in some parts of the province, but there are a lot of small producers. I think in my riding, if my memory is correct, and I'd have to go back, I heard there were 300 producers just in my riding alone, which is a substantial number of producers. Their dedication is evident: 55,000 jobs are tied into the beef supply chain and $3 billion in GDP.

In this legislation, the BFO has requested a change to how the organization's licence fees are collected, which was voted upon by the membership of this organization. They're asking for these changes to the fees, and so these fees are being used to advance promotional marketing, identify opportunities in new trade markets—we talked about the importance of supporting diversification in trade. But right now, when beef farmers process some or all of their own cattle or have someone else do it, they actually don't have to have the licensing fee collected for that animal. What it really means is that some farmers are paying in; all the farmers are getting the value. All the beef farmers would be getting the benefit of the fees that only some of the producers are paying in. So this is really about levelling the playing field and making sure that everyone is paying their fair share into the beef cattle marketing fees. This will ensure that we have a more equitable collection of those fees. That's also going to be part of this legislation. I hope folks will support that.

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I will say, an additional measure that we're bringing forward and one that the Premier talks about all the time is the need to cut red tape and streamline administrative processes. I love the Minister of Red Tape Reduction's important comment that she makes regularly, which is that we can't buy people time. There's a lot of things that governments can do, but we can't buy people time. But we can save them time if we're able to streamline the amount of hours that they have to spend on paperwork. That's one of the reasons we are consolidating the Agriculture, Food

and Rural Affairs Appeal Tribunal and the Normal Farm Practices Protection Board into one tribunal called the Agriculture and Agri-Food Protection Tribunal. Why is this needed? What's the problem that we're trying to solve? Currently, if there's a resolution in a dispute between parties, if there's a need for a resolution for a dispute—it could be perhaps a neighbour and a food processor, as an example—you would have to go through two processes, and you wouldn't actually be sure who is going to hear your concern or complaint. We heard about this. We heard about confusion—"Are we going to the agriculture, food and appeal tribunal? Are we going to the Normal Farm Practices Protection Board? Which one is it? Who am I supposed to go to? Am I supposed to do both simultaneously?" We're going to clear that up. We're going to make it straightforward. Those two boards and quasi-judicial bodies are now going to be one. So that's part of this legislation, as well, which I believe will improve efficiency and ultimately save people time.

Speaker, I have to tell you this: A little over a hundred years ago, there was a fellow by the name of Ernest C. Drury who was elected as the Premier of Ontario, leading the United Farmers of Ontario—the UFOs. It was 1919. Ontario was coming out of the Great War, the war to end all wars. And who did they look to? They looked to the farmers. They looked to the agricultural workers. They looked to the producers of this great province to lead them into a brighter future, to build out a strong economic powerhouse here in the province of Ontario. And I think they did a really good job. You look at the foundation of our industrialization, you look at the foundation of our economic might here in the province—a lot of that was laid in the early 1920s by the United Farmers of Ontario. Look it up. It's a fantastic history.

We're a little over a hundred years later, and although we can be thankful that we are not coming out of a shooting war, we are coming out of a trade war. We are in a trade war, and once again, coming out of this kind of war, the people of Ontario look to the farmers; they look to the agri-food producers; they are looking to the leadership of agriculture and to the agri-food sector—one in nine jobs, 852,000 jobs in that sector, $53 billion of economic input. They are going to be the leaders who once again are going to lead us into a brighter future; a stronger, a more prosperous and a more free Ontario. That won't happen without support from all members of this Legislature.

And with that, I want to acknowledge one of those members, a champion for the north, a champion and a friend—Bill Rosenberg, the MPP for Algoma–Manitoulin—to continue debate this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I will remind all members that we refer to each other by our ridings or ministerial titles.

I recognize the member for Algoma–Manitoulin.

MPP Bill Rosenberg: Thank you, Minister.

It's always a pleasure to listen to him. It just gives us all energy when we're listening to the minister speak. And I'd just like to congratulate him on his new ministry. We have a great team, and that shows in just the first few meetings that we've been involved with.

I'm glad to have the chance to stand here today to continue the conversation on the Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act and to build on what my colleague has already shared. When you look at this act, it is really about fairly straightforward goals: making sure Ontario can feed itself, support the people who grow our food and stay strong in a world that's becoming more unpredictable every day. We're seeing global pressures, supply chain disruptions and rising costs. In this kind of environment, we can't take our food system for granted. We have to be intentional about protecting it and making it stronger, and that's exactly what this legislation will do.

Ontario's agri-food sector is already a major strength in this province. As the minister said, it contributes $53 billion to our economy and supports one in nine jobs. The goal here is simple: Keep our agri-food system strong; modernize regulations and processes, where we can improve them; and make sure our farmers and producers have the right tools and the support they need to succeed.

Today I'd like to describe some of the key pieces of this bill, including its actions on dairy modernization, veterinary services modernization and drainage infrastructure.

I'll start with dairy. I have deep roots in the sector. My grandfather started a dairy farm and, like many of the farms in my riding of Algoma–Manitoulin, celebrated being a century farm. The processes have certainly changed significantly since that time—genetics and robotics, just to name a couple. However, one thing remains the same: Our farmers are committed today, as they were, and remain proud of what they do. And they are not afraid to go out and work in the dirt every day.

The dairy sector plays a significant role in Ontario and it is one that the people across the province take a lot of pride in. One of the proposed changes is to update the definition of regulating products under the Milk Act so it includes more types of milk products, including ingredients such as milk powders. That might seem like a small, technical matter, but it matters significantly. In Canada, milk is priced based on what product it's going to be used for, whether that is cheese, yogurt or butter.

For instance, the system seems to keep prices fair and predictable for both farmers and processors, but over the years the industry has evolved. For example, some processors use fresh milk or liquid milk, while others use components or ingredients. That has created situations where similar products aren't always treated the same way, because these milk ingredients can be purchased at a changing market price, effectively outside our supply management system. In this situation, you start to lose that sense of fairness in the system.

What this proposed change would do is to create a more level playing field across the board. It will make sure that no matter what product is made, the same pricing rules apply to them. That helps increase fairness for producers and helps protect the integrity of the supply management system. What does this mean for the rest of us? It means continued stability and delivery of high-quality milk from Ontario farms for processing right across the province.

Ensuring there is consistency in how milk products are priced across Canada also aligns with our broader commitment to remove interprovincial trade barriers. It is important to get this right, because the dairy sector isn't small. We're talking roughly 115,000 jobs and $7.4 billion in GDP tied to that value chain. That includes farmers, processors, transporters and retail that make up the ecosystem.

Making sure the rules are fair and consistent across the board really matters. Again, we do not want things to be complicated. This proposed change would make sure the system works in the way it is supposed to.

While we are on the subject of dairy, we also have a proposal to modernize a matter under the province's Milk Act. This act has been around since 1965, and while it has served its purpose, the industry today looks very different from how it did at that time. Part of what we're proposing is to move the food safety and quality elements of the Milk Act to be under the Food Safety and Quality Act, in short because safety requirements belong under the legislation that is designed specifically for food safety.

Right now, that responsibility sits with the body focused on marketing, not food safety standards. This change puts the responsibility for this crucial work under the right authority. It will create a more consistent system, align dairy with how other foods are regulated and make sure things are easier to understand for producers and processors. It will bring all types of milk—whether cow, goat or sheep milk, for example—under one framework.

This clarification is important because the industry has expanded today to include so many more types of milk than it used to. To put it simply, these updates are about keeping the reputation and high standards of our dairy system strong.

People trust Ontario food. They trust its quality and its safety. This proposed change will help make sure we keep earning that trust.

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Now, shifting gears from dairy to another important component of our agri-food system, I'd like to talk about veterinary professionals. Veterinary professionals play a crucial role in supporting Ontario farmers, and their work in protecting the health and welfare of farmed animals is essential to the success of the agri-food sector. That's especially true in rural and northern communities, like my riding of Algoma–Manitoulin where access to veterinary services can be more limited and the need is often greater.

That is why our government has been taking steps to support the profession and to build capacity where it's needed most. Through the Veterinary Incentive Program, for example, we are helping increase the number of veterinarians in underserved areas by providing support to newly licensed vets who choose to practise in our communities, helping to address ongoing shortages in food animal services.

We have also launched the collaborative doctor of veterinary medicine program in partnership with the University of Guelph and Lakehead University, which expands training opportunities and helps build a stronger pipeline of veterinary professionals.

Through the Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance, a partnership between the ministry, the University of Guelph and Agricultural Research and Innovation Ontario—ARIO—we continue to support veterinary education and research through the Veterinary Capacity Program. And we have the Veterinary Assistance Program, led by the Ministry of Northern Economic Development and Growth, which helps offset costs for large-animal veterinary services in eligible communities, including travel, continuing education and temporary coverage.

The need for large-animal vets is felt all over Ontario, but it is magnified in the north where long travel distances can create challenges to accessing veterinary services. This is really important, especially in the north for continuing our herd health as we move forward.

The Veterinary Professionals Act helps modernize veterinary care by reflecting the modern, team-based approach to veterinary practice. This includes the formal recognition of veterinary techs and the role they play in providing animal care. Our government has been working since late 2024 with the College of Veterinarians of Ontario to explore updates to the regulatory framework of that profession. Through that process, we saw that parts of the Veterinary Professionals Act could be updated to support the implementation of the legislative framework and future regulations.

The proposed changes to this act, if passed, would make rules clearer and strengthen how the profession is regulated in the public interest. Most of these changes simply set the groundwork for more detailed rules to come later through regulations. With continued discussion and continued communication together with our producers and stakeholders, we can make it right for today's producers. At the end of the day, this is about making sure the system can keep up with how the profession is evolving and that veterinarians are supported in providing the care that farmers depend on.

Next, I want to touch on something that may not immediately come to mind when thinking about agriculture, but is incredibly important to our farming communities, and that's drainage. Good drainage makes a big difference when it comes to crop yields, protecting the environment and making sure farmland stays productive and financially sustainable over our time.

Through the Agricultural Drainage Infrastructure Program, the province supports major investments right across Ontario, helping to bring together about $40 million each year from municipalities and landowners. These projects help reduce flooding, improve safety and avoid costly damage to farmland and infrastructure.

Last year, at the Rural Ontario Municipal Association conference, the government announced an additional $18 million over three years, $6 million each year, to help extend the program and keep up with demand. With our government's continued investment in drainage, more than 74,000 acres of farmland are improved every year.

Drainage is a key part of the infrastructure that supports farming and food production right across the province. It plays an important role in both environmental and eco-

nomic sustainability, and it's becoming even more important as farmers deal with more extreme and unpredictable weather.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness will keep working closely with our farmers and municipalities to better understand the future needs of the program to protect our farmland and keep it productive.

Reviewing drainage infrastructure is also a key part of the Grow Ontario Strategy, which focuses on making long-term investments in this sector. Good drainage infrastructure helps make sure farmers have the tools they need to handle both dry conditions and heavy rainfalls while continuing to improve productivity on our farms.

In my own riding of Algoma–Manitoulin, because of tile drainage, we have seen several farms now resort from being beef pastures—and they're growing production of a lot of grains substantially, like corn, beans and canola, that just less than five years ago was not even a thought to grow up in northern Ontario.

Moving on, our government also understands it's important that legislation be reviewed from time to time to ensure it reflects the current environment. That is why we will be consulting on three statutes relating to livestock and poultry that have been on the books in Ontario for many years. These are the Protection of Livestock and Poultry from Dogs Act, the Pounds Act and the Innkeepers Act

Laws like the Protection of Livestock and Poultry from Dogs Act or the Pounds Act may not come up often in this chamber, but they do matter to people right on the ground. These statutes deal with a range of real-world situations, from animals wandering off and causing damages, to cases where animals are being boarded, to instances where livestock may be injured or killed by domestic dogs.

Our goal in consulting on these laws is to hear directly from the people affected so we can update them in ways that reflect how things work today. That feedback will help us improve clarity and fairness and make sure that the language in these statutes is current, practical and easier to understand.

At this time, Madam Speaker, I'd like to turn the final remarks over to the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek to continue the presentation on Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Jeff Beattie: I'm pleased to rise today in support of Bill 109, Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act. This legislation represents another important step forward in our government's work to build a sovereign, secure and self-reliant agri-food sector.

I want to offer a special thanks to the minister for his work on this file. It's great to be part of the farm team. I know sometimes the farm team is the second tier, but we are the top tier, and I'm looking forward to working with the minister on this file.

With the Premier's mandate, we are strengthening Ontario agriculture, supporting Ontario farmers, protecting our food supply and ensuring that future generations can continue to build successful businesses in one of our province's most important sectors.

Before I speak about the details of the bill, I want to begin by explaining why agriculture is so important to me personally. Long before I entered public service, agriculture was my livelihood. My family and I operate a greenhouse and garden centre operation in Stoney Creek, a business that my grandfather started 73 years ago in 1953. It gets better: That's on land that my great-grandfather purchased in 1890, and we've farmed ever since, alongside other growers, suppliers, landscapers, truckers, logistics experts, retailers and other farm families who depend on a strong and successful agricultural economy.

Those experiences have shaped my understanding of what agriculture means to Ontario. When you work in the sector, you quickly learn that farming is more than a profession, it is more than a business; it is a commitment, it is a lifestyle and it's built around hard work, resilience and a willingness to adapt to challenges that are often far beyond your control.

Farmers cannot control the weather. They cannot control global markets. They cannot control disease outbreaks or invasive pests. Yet, with all of these uncertainties, they continue to get up every single morning and do the work necessary to feed our province, our country and consumers around the world.

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Over the years, I've met countless producers who take incredible pride in what they do. They were the innovators, they are the problem-solvers, they are the entrepreneurs. They've invested in new technology, adopted new production methods and constantly look for ways to improve their operations. But what always stood out to me, Speaker, was their optimism. Even in difficult years, Ontario farmers continue to look ahead. That spirit is one of the reasons Ontario agriculture remains one of the strongest and most diverse agricultural sectors in North America.

Speaker, agriculture is not simply another part of Ontario's economy; it is fundamental to our economy, it is fundamental to our communities and it is fundamental to our food security. The agri-food sector supports hundreds of thousands of jobs across the province. It drives economic activity in rural communities, northern communities and urban communities alike. Whether it's someone that works on the farm, at a processing facility, in transportation, in wholesale, in retail, in research, in equipment manufacturing or foodservice, agriculture touches nearly every part of the Ontario economy.

But more importantly, agriculture provides something every Ontarian relies on every single day, and that is food. That is why supporting agriculture is not only an economic priority, it is a national priority. And as we know, a country who cannot feed itself cannot hope to defend itself.

Madam Speaker, if we want Ontario agriculture continuing to thrive, we must think not only about today's challenges but also about tomorrow's opportunities. One of the most promising opportunities for future agricultural growth can be found in northern Ontario's Clay Belt. And as the minister stated earlier, the good Lord is not making

any more land. However, the Clay Belt contains millions of acres of fertile land stretching across the northern regions of our province. And for many years, farmers and agricultural experts have recognized the significant potential this land holds for agricultural expansion and economic development.

Expanding agricultural activity in northern Ontario has the potential to create jobs, attract investment, support local communities and increase our domestic food production capacity. And I can tell you, Speaker, I've personally heard from farmers who are excited and optimistic for the opportunities that can be realized in this region. It can provide opportunities for new entrants to agriculture who may be otherwise finding it difficult to access farmland. It can help to diversify regional economies, and it can contribute to Ontario's long-term food security.

The reality is that as our population continues to grow, the demand for food will continue to grow. At the same time, global supply chains have become increasingly vulnerable to disruption. Over the last few years, we have seen how international conflicts, transportation challenges and economic uncertainty can affect access to products and materials. Those experiences demonstrate why maintaining a strong domestic food supply is so incredibly important. The more food we can produce here in Ontario, the stronger and more resilient our province and Canada become. That's why supporting responsible agricultural expansion is such an important part of the conversation about Ontario's future.

Speaker, at a time when countries around the world are placing greater emphasis on domestic food production and supply chain resilience, Ontario must do the same. Food security is increasingly recognized as an important component of national security. A jurisdiction that cannot produce food for its people becomes vulnerable to disruptions that originate far beyond its borders, and we owe it to the consumers who are depending on a strong, reliable, locally produced food supply.

The principles of growth, protection and long-term sustainability are reflected throughout Bill 109. This legislation contains practical measures designed to strengthen Ontario's agri-food sector and improve its ability to respond to the challenges both today and in the future.

One important component of this bill addresses plant health, and I can tell you, as someone who has spent years working in the horticultural sector, I understand how important plant health is to agricultural success.

Ontario grows approximately 200 different agricultural commodities. This incredible diversity, as was mentioned earlier, is one of our greatest strengths. It allows producers throughout the province to participate in a wide range of domestic and international markets, as was mentioned. However, the same diversity can also create challenges. Plant diseases, invasive insects and emerging threats can spread very quickly if they are not properly addressed.

When plant health is compromised, the impacts can be significant. Producers may experience lower yields, input costs may increase, market access can be disrupted and entire sectors can face economic consequences. Anyone who has worked in agriculture understands that prevention and preparedness are far less costly than reacting to a problem that has already taken hold.

That's why Bill 109 contains measures to strengthen Ontario's ability to respond to plant health risks and improve overall preparedness. By providing stronger tools and a more effective framework that responds to threats, we can better prepare producers, preserve economic opportunities and support a resilient food system.

Madam Speaker, supporting farmers also means ensuring that they can participate in a fair and reliable marketplace. Agriculture requires significant investment. Long before a producer receives any payment for their crops or livestock, they have already invested in substantial resources for their operation. For many producers, months can pass between making those investments and receiving the return on those investments through their commodities. That's why confidence in the marketplace is essential. Farmers deserve to know that when they enter into a business transaction, the system is working fairly and effectively.

Bill 109 includes measures to strengthen producer protection programs and support greater confidence across the agricultural marketplace. These measures will help protect these producers from financial uncertainty while enhancing fairness throughout the supply chain. That stability encourages investment, that stability encourages growth and that stability supports the long-term success of Ontario farmers.

Speaker, there's another component of the Ontario food system that deserves some important recognition, and that is the Ontario Food Terminal. As someone who has spent many decades in the industry, I know first-hand that producing is only one piece of the puzzle. Farmers also need access to efficient and reliable distribution networks to connect their products with consumers.

The Ontario Food Terminal plays a critical role in making that happen. It serves as one of the most important food distribution hubs in the province and helps move fresh produce from growers to retailers, restaurants, institutions and consumers. Its importance cannot be overstated. Every day, products move through the terminal and into communities throughout Ontario. The facility helps improve efficiency within the food supply chain and supports both producers and businesses that rely on access to fresh food.

Bill 109 contains measures that will support the continued effectiveness and long-term success of this important institution. By strengthening critical infrastructure within Ontario's food system, we are helping ensure that our supply chains remain reliable and resilient.

Speaker, when we look at all the measures contained within Bill 109, a common theme emerges: This legislation is about strengthening Ontario's food independence. It is about ensuring that Ontario remains capable of producing, protecting and distributing food efficiently and effectively. It's about supporting farmers. It's about creating opportunities for growth. It's about protecting farmland. And it's about preparing for future challenges.

Throughout my career, both in business and now in public service, I've had the privilege of working alongside some of the most hard-working and innovative people in this province, and I'm proud to call them my friends.

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Ontario farmers continue to demonstrate resilience in the face of challenges. They continue to invest in their operations, and they continue to adopt new technologies. They also continue to provide the food that all of us rely on every single day. They deserve a government that understands their challenges and is prepared to be a strong partner in their success.

And that's exactly what Bill 109 seeks to achieve. It strengthens food security. It supports economic growth. It protects our agricultural resources. And it helps to ensure Ontario remains a global leader in agriculture and food production.

As the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and as someone who has spent my entire life working in this sector, I am proud to support this legislation, and I encourage all members of the House to join me in supporting Bill 109, Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: I want to start by congratulating my colleague from Niagara, from the neighbouring riding, for being appointed minister. Niagara has over 1,600 farms, over 208,000 acres, and they support over 24,000 jobs, so I know there was a lot of excitement in the region in having a minister from Niagara.

We have a lot of greenhouses in Niagara, and we also have some vertical farming and other kinds of farming. We have a pretty big vertical farming operation in Welland. I'm just wondering, with the foreign ownership component of this bill, how does that affect those operations in making sure that we maintain domestic ownership over those kinds of farms?

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: I want to thank the member from Niagara Centre for his question. I worked in a few different nurseries and greenhouses in Vineland and Jordan and Beamsville as a teenager, so deep appreciation and respect for our agricultural community in the covered space. The greenhouse sector is one that's growing.

Great question—I would say this: We're going to make sure that there aren't unintended consequences to this legislation through the regulatory process to make sure that folks who are in that sector who may have investment that is coming from across the world into those facilities are able to continue. This won't impact existing ownership or anything like that. So if you're already working in partnership—I know that there are investors from various places in the world who have passive ownership, for example, in some of these types of greenhouses—that would still be able to continue.

But if someone was going to come in and purchase a large amount of land and sit on it and not be productive in the use of that land, we're not going to allow that. We want to see productivity gains from our investments and from also those who are supporting these types of industries.

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

M^me^ Lucille Collard: I understand that this very important bill for farmers contains some important protections from foreign ownership, and I think that's very important. But also, we heard during the hearings that this is only part of the solution because in the bill, there are apparently no protections from domestic speculation and development. Having heard those concerns from farmers and community representatives, why is it that the government is not protecting farmland ownership from domestic development and speculation?

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: I want to thank the member for Ottawa–Vanier, a riding where I know there probably aren't too many farms, but there is definitely agribusiness and associated.

Look, at the end of the day, the emphasis on this piece of legislation is, to your point, foreign ownership. If the member has ideas around what we should be doing to avoid unintentional consequences of other speculative practices—happy to hear from you. I don't think we're ever going to stop land speculation when it comes to just individuals in a market, as we've seen in the condo market in Toronto, as we've seen in other markets.

The MPP for—from northern Ontario, the opposition critic—

Mr. John Vanthof: That's okay. John's okay.

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: I apologize—Timiskaming–Cochrane spoke about some of the speculative practices that he had seen, and I understand that is a concern. I think there are market forces that do correct some of that when you have a domestic group of farmers or others who are looking at land in a particular area. But if you have ideas that came out of those hearings, I'd be more than happy to sit down and hear them.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to thank the minister for his remarks. I really enjoyed the information about corn ultimately becoming Parmesan cheese, which is fantastic. Ontario corn being a part of that—I'm very grateful for that information.

Agribusiness is very real, especially in my community. It provides a lot of prosperity for the community. And also there's something that the minister is a huge supporter of, which is market diversification and the trade resilience fund. I wonder if you'd give us a few comments or a bit of information about how this is growing jobs across the province of Ontario.

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: I have to say to the member from Thornhill, you are a fantastic example of a riding that, again, doesn't necessarily have farms—

Interjection.

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: One farm. But I can tell you this: It has a massive amount of employment that is added the agri-food sector. We're going to go and meet some of those businesses, I know.

But I can tell you that the Market Diversification and Trade Resiliency Initiative is fantastic for a number of

reasons. A $22-million fund was able to leverage 130 projects, 970 new jobs and tens of millions of private sector investment. That is called investment in new and emerging jobs.

The other side of that is, again, a lot of those businesses actually take products that come from primary producers, turn them into higher valued-added products and then are exporting those both domestically to other provinces and also internationally. That's good news for local jobs and it's good news for producers, because they have off-takers for their primary production. I think that's the kind of fund that's going to really enhance our sector as a whole and protect jobs.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question is to the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. Thankfully, the government is finally recognizing the strategic and economic importance of farmland, but this bill does nothing to protect farmland itself from its biggest threat, which is the Conservative government and their connections to developers.

A case in point is Hamilton, in fact. The Premier clearly broke his promise to Hamiltonians when they overruled our firm urban boundary. We've now been allowed to expand into the boundary, 1,600 hectares in the member's own area. If we are so worried about food sovereignty and protecting farmland, why are we allowing this farmland—this critical, limited resource—to be gobbled up by developers and paved over, when we agree that farmland is important for our food sovereignty, for our provincial sovereignty? Losing it in this way is certainly a shame. Why does the member think that that's okay?

Mr. Jeff Beattie: Speaker, through you: Thank you for the question from my colleague from the other side of Hamilton. I think what we are talking today about in Bill 109 is protections for foreign speculation on farmland. I know that the minister extended to continue that conversation.

What we're trying to do is protect foreign owners from investing in Ontario in a way that doesn't lead to productive outcomes for our local producers. The more we can do to ensure that there's a stable landmass for those producers continuing to expand up into the Clay Belt, as was mentioned, to offer new opportunities for producers to grow and expand into those areas—that's, I think, the focus we're trying to make today, and I look forward to continuing those conversations.

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

MPP George Darouze: Thank you to the minister for his remarks today. I look forward to seeing the great work he does in his new role as Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness.

When Bill 109 went to the Standing Committee on the Interior for public consultations this summer, a well-respected farmer in my riding, Mel Foster, provided a delegation speaking about the importance of protecting our farmland. Can the minister elaborate a bit more on the proposed changes in schedule 3 that would prevent certain foreign-national people or corporations from acquiring farmland and the benefits it would have on preserving our farmland?

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you, again, and I want to thank the member from Ottawa for his incredible advocacy for all farmers in the Ottawa region. There's a massive number of farmers in your riding, but also across the whole national capital. I don't think it's always what people think of when they think of Ottawa, but there are a ton of farmers in the city of Ottawa. I know you have been a fierce champion and advocate for them. Thank you for being a voice for Mel Foster, and I look forward to meeting him.

1010

Listen, the protections we've talked about—and we articulated them this morning. We're not trying to stop folks who have a vision and a dream of coming to Ontario, coming to Canada, investing in a farm, building up a livelihood for them and their family and contributing. That's great. What we don't want is large, multinational corporations coming in, bidding up the price of land or farms that they then sit on and they lie fallow. We cannot have that.

We need to protect the land that we have; God's not making any more of it. Let's keep what we have and make sure it's being used well.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): There is not enough time for another question and answer.

Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to stand in this House and particularly so today as the opposition critic for agriculture and agrifood—I think there's something else in that title, but anyway—and as a farmer by trade. I really appreciate the opportunity to have time to talk about agriculture and talk about this bill.

I'd like to start by congratulating the minister on his new post. I look forward to working with him as I've worked with all the previous ministers. I'd like to thank the previous minister particularly for presenting this bill as an agricultural bill; that way, we can actually talk about the issue, about the industry, about the sector, about our food, as opposed to sometimes, as in other bills—Bill 140 had all kinds of things in it. Some were divisive; some were not. As a result of that, you don't have an actual debate about what's really important in the bill. This bill is not like that.

If you want an example of how to make government work, regardless of your philosophical bent, it's presenting bills that are on one issue—lots of schedules, but the main core issue is the same. I'd like to really recognize the previous Minister of Agriculture for presenting this bill as that. It makes a big difference. When someone asks me, "What difference? The Legislature doesn't sit as much as it used to, but it's much more efficient." Actually—

Hon. Steve Clark: Quality, not quantity.

Mr. John Vanthof: The government House leader just said, "quality, not quantity," but actually, he doesn't have quantity and he doesn't have quality either. That's the

problem. If Bill 140 had been five bills and we would have talked about—disagreed on some parts and agreed on others. If that had been five bills, you would have come up with five much better pieces of legislation. You wouldn't have had to—as in some cases, your government has had to—rescind bills. Anybody remember Bill 124, the bill that never was? That wouldn't have happened if you had actually taken the time to use the Legislature for the job that it was created.

We—the left and the right and the middle—might never agree on some things, but I think we can all agree that Ontarians deserve to have good legislation. That's what this place is for, and Bill 140—although it's going to pass, likely, at the will of the Legislature, I think deep down we all know that that isn't good legislation. It isn't. It's a mishmash. You're hiding a few things. Wait till the good farmers of southern Ontario find out, in Oxford county, that they once again might be in line for a garbage dump. Wait till they realize that.

The reason that that was stuck in Bill 140, as opposed to actually having a real discussion about what to do about recycling, because your recycling system isn't working that well; what to do about garbage disposal; what to do about incineration—if we had a real good discussion about that, it would be much better for everybody. But that's not what we have. We have a mishmash bill—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Sorry to interrupt the member.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

WEARING OF PINS

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member for Essex on a point of order.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Madam Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for members to wear forget-me-not pins in the House in recognition of people living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias across Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member for Essex is seeking unanimous consent to wear forget-me-not pins. Is there agreement in the House? Agreed.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

VETERANS

MPP George Darouze: As we mark Veterans' Week from November 5 to 11, we honour those who served, remember those who never returned and thank the veterans and members of the Canadian Armed Forces whose sacrifices secured the freedoms we enjoy today.

I'm grateful to the veterans and military families of Carleton. Their courage, resilience and service continue to strengthen our communities.

This year, I was honoured to join the Legion branches in Manotick, Richmond, Greely and Stittsville in celebrating the Royal Canadian Legion's 100th anniversary, marking a century of supporting veterans and preserving remembrance.

I would also like to congratulate Eric Coles of Osgoode Legion Branch 589 on receiving the 2026 Ontario Veterans Award for Community Service Excellence. His dedication to veterans, the Legion and the community embodies the spirit of service we recognize during Veterans' Week.

Throughout Veterans' Week and on Remembrance Day, we stand together in gratitude and remembrance.

To all veterans and military families, thank you for your service and sacrifices.

Lest we forget.

AUTISM SERVICES

MPP Fatima Shaban: Care delayed is care denied, and that's exactly what has happened to families waiting for autism funding in Scarborough Southwest and across Ontario.

Parents come to my office, exhausted. They have filled out every form. They have made call after call. They have done everything they were told to do, and they are still waiting years for funding.

Meanwhile, their children are growing up. They need help communicating, participating in school and getting through the day. They can't put their lives on hold until this government gets around to funding their care.

So parents try to make it work. They ask themselves, "Can we afford another month of private services? Can I cut back my hours and still afford to pay rent? What happens when I just can't keep doing this?"

No parent should be pushed to that point. And the workers supporting these families are stretched to the limit, without fair pay and reliable funding to keep doing this work.

Speaker, a wait-list is not a service. An acknowledgement letter is not support. Telling a family to keep waiting is not a plan. This government has the power to act. Every year it fails to do so is another year it makes children and families pay for that failure.

MISSING BLACK BOYS

MPP Andrea Hazell: Today, I dedicate my statement to Ontario's missing Black boys, their families and the organizations fighting to bring them home.

Across Ontario, Black boys as young as 12 are being lured, groomed, exploited and dismissed as runaways.

Jay'siiah Webb-Long from Brampton was just 16—missing for over a year. He was found dead in Saskatchewan. To his family: We grieve with you, and we will keep saying his name.

As a Black mother, this pains my heart. Many families are desperately praying for their boys to come home.

On February 25, I wrote to the Solicitor General by email, hand delivery and Canada Post, requesting a meeting with him, myself and organizations that are

working on this file. I crossed the floor three times to ask him personally.

On May 26, I sent another letter. I finally received his response on June 2 at exactly 3:18 p.m., on the very day this House rose for 147 days.

Our young Black boys are not simply running away. They are being targeted, groomed and exploited by criminals.

My message to the Solicitor General today: I will not stop asking for this meeting. These families and organizations deserve to be heard. Our Black families matter. Our young Black boys matter.

1020

RIDING OF NEWMARKET–AURORA

M^me^ Dawn Gallagher Murphy: It was a phenomenal summer in Newmarket–Aurora, with more than 250 events, meetings and announcements in which I participated—and, trust me, there was never a dull moment—starting with my third annual Seniors' Expo, with a record number of visitors of over 400 coming through the expo. Thanks to the Newmarket Very Useful Theatre Company, who acted out a skit that the seniors really enjoyed. Thank you so much. And it was officially Seniors' Month, so it was wonderful to announce $238,000 in seniors' active living local programs for my community.

Thanks to Experience Ontario, the province supported some amazing festivals with a total of $130,000 for York Pride, the Newmarket Summerfest and the Newmarket multicultural Asian heritage festivals. All were so successful. Tourism was at its peak in Newmarket–Aurora through the summer.

Other announcements included $2.8 million in local non-profit organizations across my community, funding supporting Community Living Central York, Kerry's Place Autism Services, Cornerstone to Recovery, John Howard Society and many more.

It also included a visit to World War II veteran Jeff Reynolds, who turned 100 years young at the end of June. I would like to recognize his service and all veterans for their support in strengthening our great province. Lest we forget.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I've received 75 emails from St. Catharines residents, each sharing what access to local pain clinics means to their everyday lives. For some it means getting out of bed and going to work; for others it means driving without excruciating pain, caring for their children or simply buying groceries without spending the next two days recovering.

Yet, this government is proposing changes to OHIP-funded pain treatments, including severe limits on numbers of treatments patients can receive each year. Not only does this threaten their quality of life; it puts the very clinics they depend on at risk of closing.

One resident shared how, after a workplace accident, they struggled with oxycodone and addictions before finding relief through OHIP-funded nerve-blocking injections. Another wrote that these treatments help her get out of bed and overcome the depression that came with being confined there for chronic pain.

These clinics provide very timely treatment while helping keep patients out of our already overcrowded emergency rooms. If these clinics close, where exactly does this government expect those patients to go? We are already facing an opioid epidemic, addictions crisis and hospitals stretch beyond their limits.

I am calling on this Conservative government to pause these proposed OHIP cuts, consult directly with patients and pain specialists and guarantee that no patient loses access to medically necessary pain treatment today.

PROTESTS IN IRAN

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I rise today with a heavy heart to remember the thousands of innocent lives lost during the violent crackdown on protesters in Iran, which began on January 8 and 9, 2026.

We stand in solidarity with Ontario's Iranian community as they mourn those who lost their lives in the pursuit of freedom, human rights and democracy.

As we approach this solemn anniversary, we honour the memory of those whose lives were taken away by the Iranian regime, including the many students, academics, professionals, and women and children. We also remember the families whose lives were forever changed by these heartbreaking losses. Their stories remind us of the importance of human dignity, freedom, peace and social justice. While time may pass, our responsibility to remember won't.

I would like to recognize the efforts of the Iranian Eternal Heroes Remembrance, a non-profit organization, and all those who work tirelessly to preserve the victims' memory through education, storytelling and community engagement, ensuring that future generations never forget.

Those who continue to carry this loss, please know that Ontario remembers. We mourn with you, we honour those you lost and we stand with you. May the memories of these innocent lives continue to inspire us to build a world rooted in compassion, understanding and respect for human rights.

SPEAKER'S REMEMBRANCE DAY DISPLAY

Ms. Sandy Shaw: This Remembrance Day, I want to bring attention to a very special exhibit that was curated by our own Speaker, Donna Skelly, to mark Remembrance Day. It's a special exhibit in the east hall, and I think all of us should make sure to check it out because it features personal artifacts from members' families that were collected over the years.

The exhibit showcases artifacts from the families of MPP Dowie, Attorney General Doug Downey and MPPs

Lee Fairclough, France Gélinas, Alexa Gilmour, Laura Smith, Jennie Stevens and Kristyn Wong-Tam.

My Shaw family contribution is a memorial plaque that was awarded to my great-uncle Adam, who was killed in the First World War. These plaques were issued to all families who lost loved ones, and it is commonly referred to as a "Dead Man's Penny." My family has dutifully preserved Adam's medal and his memory for over a century.

I want to thank the Speaker, and I want to thank Erin Budra from the Ontario Legislature for her work researching and curating this display. She found information about Adam that my family didn't know until this day, so it's fitting that I end with her own words:

"These items reflect the enduring importance of remembrance. They honour a young soldier whose life was cut short by war and whose memory has been carried forward through generations. We shall remember them."

HOUSING

MPP Susan Lahey: I have great news for the residents of Bradford West Gwillimbury. Under the leadership of the Premier, our government, in partnership with the federal government, has awarded the local municipality funding through the Development Charge Reduction Program, a program that will reduce development charges and fund the critical infrastructure required for new homes.

Under this program, the town of Bradford West Gwillimbury can receive up to $94.8 million. The town, in turn, can reduce development charges by up to 76%, which is estimated to reduce the purchase price of new homes by up to $36,500 per home. When combined with up to $130,000 in savings through our expanded HST relief on eligible new homes, families in Bradford West Gwillimbury could save over $166,000 off the cost of a new home. Alongside our government's investments in housing-enabling infrastructure, this could unlock more than 29,000 new homes in Bradford West Gwillimbury.

But it doesn't end there; this investment will also support infrastructure projects in communities across Bradford West Gwillimbury. It will support the upgrade of plant D at Bradford Water Pollution Control Plant, increased municipal water storage at the John Fennell reservoir and the widening and reconstruction of the Line 8 corridor from Sideroad 10 to Barrie Street.

Speaker, our government is investing in Bradford West Gwillimbury to support residents by making home ownership more affordable and strengthen local infrastructure to ensure that our community has what it needs to sustain growth.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm honoured to rise today to speak to our government's commitment to supporting Whitby students and their families by building new schools. Our government is supporting Whitby's continued growth by investing up to $85.6 million to build a new west Whitby secondary school. Additionally, we're investing $54.8 million to build two elementary schools, also in west Whitby.

Speaker, with these investments, Ontario is creating 1,384 new secondary student spaces and 1,268 new elementary student spaces as well. For hard-working Whitby families, this will help ensure every child has a place to learn, grow and succeed.

1030

With the leadership of Premier Ford and the Honourable Paul Calandra, our Minister of Education, our government is committed to keeping pace with growth and ensuring Ontario families have access to the schools they need.

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Hon. Steve Clark: If you seek it, you will find unanimous consent that immediately after the moment of silence this morning, members be allowed to make statements in recognition of Remembrance Day, with five minutes allotted to the government, five minutes allotted to the official opposition, five minutes allotted to the third party and two minutes allotted to the independent members as a group, and the Redeemer University choir be permitted to sing In Flanders Fields and O Canada following the statements.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent that immediately after the moment of silence this morning, members be allowed to make statements in recognition of Remembrance Day, with five minutes allotted to the government, five minutes allotted to the official opposition, five minutes allotted to the third party and two minutes allotted to the independent members as a group, and the Redeemer University choir be permitted to sing In Flanders Fields and O Canada following the statements. Agreed? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It is an honour for me to be able to introduce the Redeemer University concert choir. It's an unprecedented performance that we're going to hear today. They are spectacular. I know that we are in for a great treat. They perform annually at the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum in Ancaster, and it really is genuinely an honour for this House to hear them today.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Please join me in welcoming Cathy Barrick, CEO of Alzheimer Society of Ontario, along with representatives from 26 local Alzheimer societies across Ontario. Please welcome them to the House.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I want to introduce Cathy Barrick as well, CEO of Alzheimer Society of Ontario, along with Teena Kindt, CEO of Alzheimer's Niagara, who are here with us today. Teena is a fierce local advocate who I have had the pleasure of working alongside with. Welcome to Queen's Park, Teena.

Hon. Stephen Crawford: I'm pleased to have a good constituent of mine from Oakville, Sahand Pouladi, in the members' gallery. Welcome.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I appreciate that in the Speaker's Gallery today, I am pleased to welcome my stepdaughter, Janelle Arnold. Welcome.

Hon. Ernie Hardeman: I would like to welcome the Alzheimer Society Southwest Partners to Queen's Park.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Good morning, Madam Speaker and everyone. I would like to welcome some residents from super Scarborough Southwest and beautiful Beaches–East York: the radiant Raposos, Jason and Jessica; outstanding Owen Carey Griffin; effervescent Ellis Ford—no relation, Mr. Premier—and jovial James Dann. Welcome to your House.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I too want to welcome everyone from the Alzheimer Society of Ontario and give a special shout-out to CEO Cathy Barrick who grew up in Guelph.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I would also like to welcome to their House the Redeemer University choir. I have a special connection to this school as my youngest, Carter, is a student there, although he doesn't sing. Welcome to the choir, enjoy your day at Queen's Park and all the best in future endeavours.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It gives me great pleasure to welcome the CEO of the Alzheimer Society Southwest Partners, Steph Ouellet. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'm delighted to welcome to Queen's Park Abraham Reyes, who is the father of today's page captain, Andrea Reyes Martinez. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I am very happy to welcome my church members. They are Mr. Stanley Ha, Mrs. Elly Ha and Dakyung Jung.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Today, I would like to welcome my OLIP intern, Elijah Aedo-Castillo, to the House.

Hon. Mike Harris: I thought today would be very fitting to give a quick update on a former page of ours, my son, Jaxon Harris, who is currently an aviator recruit at basic training with the Canadian Forces. We're very, very excited and very proud in our family, and I thought everyone might like to hear that on a day like today.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I would like to welcome my mentor at George Brown, Dr. Khalid Danok; his daughter, Lames Danok; and his son, Youssef Danok.

Ms. Laura Smith: It is my very great pleasure to welcome Lisa Levin, CEO of AdvantAge Ontario, a Thornhill resident.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I would like to welcome Susan Martin from Iranian Eternal Heroes Remembrance. Thank you for your leadership and compassion for humanity. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jeff Beattie: A special welcome to my friend Connor Gibson, who knocked on doors with me in Hamilton East–Stoney Creek this past August and has just returned from beautiful British Columbia to help deliver the first Conservative government in BC in nearly 100 years.

M^me^ Lucille Collard: I want to welcome the OLIP interns who are here with us today, but a specific welcome to Jacob Colatosti, who's my intern and is starting today.

REMEMBRANCE DAY

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Members, if I could have your attention.

In recognition of Remembrance Day, the House will now pause and observe two minutes of silence in honour of those who died serving their country in wars and peacekeeping efforts.

I ask members to rise.

The House observed two minutes' silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): You may be seated.

I now invite members to make their statements.

Hon. Doug Ford: As Premier of Ontario, it's an honour to stand in this House to remember, to reflect and to give thanks to those who have served in Canada's military. On November 11, at the conclusion of Remembrance Week, we pay tribute to the brave Canadians who answered the call to serve. We remember the courageous men and women who served in both World Wars, the Korean peninsula, the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan, as well as those who participated in international peacekeeping missions, protecting those who were unable to defend themselves.

1040

This year is especially poignant following the devastating fire at CFB Wainwright, which claimed the lives of four service members while leaving dozens more in critical condition. I want to thank all the heroic Ontario health care workers who were deployed to support the recovery efforts, and we continue to pray for those impacted by the fire.

In a world still marked by conflict, the Canadian Armed Forces play a vital role in protecting our nation and contributing to peace and security around the world. Remembrance Day is a reminder that freedom and democracy are not guaranteed. They must be safeguarded to be passed on to future generations.

To our veterans, on behalf of the people of Ontario, I offer our deepest gratitude. To the men and women serving today, thank you for your dedication and professionalism. To the families and friends of those who serve, thank you for your support and sacrifice. And to those who gave their lives in service to Canada, we will continue to honour your memory and gratitude so that we can build a better province and country worthy of your sacrifice.

Every year, Ontario also honours our First Nations, Inuit and Métis service members who have served and continue to serve our country with distinction. On November 8, National Indigenous Veterans' Day, to preserve the legacy of Canada's veterans and our country's contributions to the Second World War, the Ontario government is honoured to donate $200,000 towards the Juno Beach Centre's campaign to help preserve the history of Can-

ada's sacrifices and maintain the heritage lands of Juno Beach in Normandy, France.

And this year, to encourage the people of Ontario to attend their local Remembrance Day service, Ontario is highlighting the stories of remarkable members of the armed forces and true Canadian heroes, including Air Marshal Billy Bishop, Sergeant Aubrey Cosens and Private Jess Larochelle, each of whom went above and beyond the call of duty in the service of their country.

To Canada's veterans, to every active service member and to all who never came home, Ontario will never forget your sacrifices. As Remembrance Week begins, I encourage everyone in Ontario to wear a red poppy in honour of our soldiers, to attend a ceremony and observe the moment of silence and to never take for granted the freedoms we are blessed to have today.

To every veteran, service member and military family in our province, thank you. Ontario is proud of you. Canada is proud of you. Lest we forget. Thank you, and may God bless our men and women in uniform.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for St. Catharines.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: At the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month, the guns fell silent. But for thousands of Canadian families, the silence was only the beginning: a son who would never walk through the front doors again, a mother who would wait for the letter that would never come, a child who would know their father only by a photograph, a family left to carry a lifetime of unanswered questions. That is what we remember—not simply wars, not simply battles, but the people, the lives, the families and the extraordinary cost for our freedom.

When we remember the First World War, remember the trenches, the mud, the cold, the relentless rain, the fear of the young Canadian who lay there wondering whether they would ever come home again—they were someone's child, someone's brother, someone's sweetheart, someone's entire world.

More than 118,000 Canadians have made the ultimate sacrifice in military service throughout our history, from the South African War to the First World War and the Second World War, Korea, Afghanistan and the many peacekeeping missions and conflicts in which Canadians have served. We remember them all.

We remember our First Nations, Inuit and Métis veterans, whose courage and service helped defend this country, even when they returned home to a country that did not afford them the equality they deserved. Their service must never be overlooked. Their stories must never be forgotten.

We remember those we have lost this year, including the four Canadian soldiers who lost their lives during training at CFB Wainwright. Their families expected them to come home. They will not be coming home. We will remember them.

We remember that service and sacrifice are not simply a part of the past; they are part of the present. To those serving overseas today, to those carrying visible and invisible wounds, to those training to serve for tomorrow and to every family waiting for their loved one to return safely, we see you, we honour you and we stand with you.

Speaker, for me, this is very deeply personal. My grandfather served. My father served. And today, my son, Jonathan Lindal, serves as chief petty officer second class in the Royal Canadian Navy.

When I think of my Jonathan, I think of the generations before him, of the promise that he has carried throughout our family to stand up for this country, to protect its people and to serve something greater than ourselves.

I know that members in this House have their own stories—a parent, a grandparent, a spouse, a son or a daughter who served, who serves today or who is preparing to serve our country. To every one of those families, this remembrance belongs to you.

Speaker, I want to recognize the member from Kanata–Carleton. Karen, you have donned the uniform. You understand the commitment and the sacrifice of service. Thank you. Thank you for what you have given our country and for continuing to serve in this House.

And as the Royal Canadian Legion marks its 100th anniversary, we thank every member, we thank every volunteer and every branch that has spent a century keeping our promise to remember.

One day, the voices of those who witnessed these wars will be gone, and when that day comes, it will be up to us. It will be up to us to tell the stories, to speak their names, to teach the children and to make certain that remembrance is not reduced to a ceremony, a wreath or a moment of silence, because remembrance is a responsibility. To those who fell, we owe our remembrance. To those who returned, we owe our gratitude. To those who serve today, we owe our unwavering support. To those who will serve tomorrow, we owe a country worthy of their courage.

I stand here as a proud Canadian. I stand here as a daughter of a military family and a mother of a son who serves. I know that the freedom we enjoy was not freely given; it was protected by ordinary Canadians who did extraordinary things, by people who left everything they loved, not knowing whether they would ever return.

So let us never take that freedom for granted. Let us never forget the families who waited, the lives that were lost or the generations who carried the weight of that sacrifice. Let us make one promise here in this House, and to those who have donned the uniform: Your service mattered, your sacrifice mattered and your life mattered.

We remember the past. We honour those who serve in the present. We have the duty to protect the future they fought to give us.

May we never forget who paid the price for our freedom. May we always be worthy of their sacrifices. And may every generation that follows know without hesitation that Canada remembers; that we gratefully, that we profoundly and fiercely are proud to be Canadian, and that we will never ever forget.

Lest we forget.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Kanata–Carleton.

1050

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Every year on November 11, Canadians pause to remember those who served, those who sacrificed and those who gave their lives so that we could live in freedom. It's a time for reflection, for gratitude and for honouring the extraordinary courage of ordinary Canadians who answered the call when their country needed them.

Behind every service member is a family whose life is changed forever—thank you, Jen. I've always believed that when a member of the military serves, the entire family serves and worries. For some of these families, that worry becomes an unimaginable loss. We were reminded of that terrible reality just recently with the tragedy at CFB Wainwright with the loss of Sergeant Morgan Wong, Private Shaun Farrell, Private Aidan Goulding and Private Hayden Lykkemark and the serious injury of so many more. All of them were Canadians who stepped forward to serve their country.

We must retell the story of Private Aidan Goulding. His mother shared that Aidan had left a steady job as a mechanic to join the Canadian Armed Forces. He told her that he had only one life to live and he wanted to dedicate it to protecting his country. Speaker, think about that. A young Canadian with his whole life ahead of him deciding that protecting his country, his fellow Canadians and the freedoms we enjoy was worth dedicating his life to. What an extraordinary sense of duty, what an extraordinary commitment to something greater than oneself, and what a heartbreaking reminder that the courage and sacrifices we honour on Remembrance Day are not confined to the history books; they are alive in the hearts of young Canadians today.

As we remember all those who served, whether in the trenches of Europe, on the beaches of Normandy, in Korea, Afghanistan, on peacekeeping missions and on operations around the world or here at home, we must remember what they were fighting for. They fought for a country where people could live in freedom; where the rule of law would prevail over the arbitrary exercise of authoritarian whims; where people would be treated fairly, with dignity; where the rule of law prevails whether one is rich or poor; where power would be exercised with competence, fairness and compassion; and where future generations could live in peace and security.

These are all extraordinary gifts, but they came with an extraordinary price. So, Speaker, I believe Remembrance Day demands something more of us than remembrance alone. Here in this chamber, remembrance demands that we ask ourselves some difficult questions: Are we serving the people of Ontario with the same integrity, commitment and courage as those who have served us? Are we doing everything we can to keep faith with those who sacrificed so much for us? Are we protecting the democracy, the freedoms, the rule of law and the way of life that they gave everything to defend? I believe that is a question every one of us should carry with us, not just on Remembrance Day, but every day we have the privilege of serving in this House.

Speaker, they gave up their tomorrows so that we could have ours, and we have a responsibility to make those tomorrows count to the best of our abilities. We cannot repay their sacrifices, but we can honour it through our actions, through the choices we make, the values we defend, the priorities we set, the way we serve our fellow Canadians. Democracy and freedom are not guaranteed. They must be protected, defended and renewed by every generation.

Those of us who have the privilege of serving in this House have a particular responsibility to lead by example. Surely the least we can do is bring that same spirit of duty, integrity and selfless service to the responsibilities entrusted to us in the service of the people of Ontario.

We must never forget their sacrifice. We must never forget why their sacrifice became necessary, and we must never forget that it is our responsibility, not only to remember, but to honour that legacy by leading today with courage, compassion and integrity.

Lest we forget.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, it is a deep honour to pay tribute to veterans who have sacrificed so much for all of us. On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, we all gather to remember those who selflessly served, who paid the ultimate sacrifice.

I encourage each and every one of us to live by the words of Guelph's Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae in his famous poem that said, we must not break faith with those who fought and died for our freedom. I'm a proud member of our Royal Canadian Legion Branch 234, named after John McCrae, and this is the 100th anniversary of the Legion.

I encourage all Ontarians to not only wear your poppy but to donate to the Legion to support the good work they do, because no veteran should be homeless, no veteran should struggle to access mental health services or go hungry. We owe it to them as our debt of gratitude.

Lest we forget.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Haldimand–Norfolk.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: There is a quote by Winston Churchill, that the further backward you look, the further forward you can see.

On Remembrance Day, we look backward to honour those who served in the Boer War, the First and Second World Wars, Korea, peacekeeping missions, the Gulf and Afghanistan.

But we must never become so focused on remembering the soldier of yesterday that we fail to recognize the soldier who stands among us today. The uniform may have changed, the equipment may have changed and the nature of warfare may have changed, but the courage to serve and the willingness to put the safety of others before oneself have not. Today, Canadians continue to serve in a world where peace cannot be taken for granted.

I believe we as policy-makers have a responsibility to protect the freedoms, our democratic institutions and

principles that generations before us have secured. We honour their service not simply by remembering their past, but by accepting our responsibility for the future.

Lest we forget.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Members, this morning, in the west public gallery, I am delighted to welcome Hamilton's Redeemer University Concert Choir. Under the direction of conductor Andrea Van Pelt Pereira, the choir will now perform In Flanders Fields.

Singing of In Flanders Fields.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Members and guests, please rise and join the choir in the singing of our national anthem.

Singing of the national anthem / Chant de l'hymne national.

1100

QUESTION PERIOD

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, yesterday, the Premier said that low-risk career colleges will be cleared by this government, then his minister contradicted him. Under that minister's watch, close to a billion dollars of public money went to fraudulent institutions, a boondoggle that is upending people's lives.

I have heard from students who are training for the jobs we need, like PSWs, paramedics, dental assistants. They did everything right, but their dreams are shattered because this Premier left the door wide open for fraud.

Can the Premier tell these students exactly when their OSAP funds will be released?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

As the Premier and I have repeatedly stated, we're working as quickly as possible to ensure that we can restore the integrity of the OSAP system under the private institutions.

But we need to ensure that we're driving home the seriousness of these allegations of fraud towards the taxpayers of Ontario, Speaker. We take this very seriously. That's why we brought it forward to the Ontario Provincial Police and also notified the Auditor General of the serious nature of these allegations.

I need to ensure that I have confidence back in the OSAP system, and that is why we brought forward KPMG, the forensic auditors, the experts when it comes to this topic, to ensure that we have confidence in the OSAP system before we release another Ontario taxpayer dollar. One taxpayer dollar going towards fraud is one taxpayer dollar too many, and that's why we take every single tip seriously, and we investigate every single tip very thoroughly.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Students need answers. They need a timeline. They did what the Premier told them to do: They saved money, they enrolled in a program that promised them a good job, they went to school for an in-demand career so they could build a good life. But now they are not only being punished by this government, they are being blamed.

Yesterday, the Premier said students were abusing OSAP when he knows that it was fraudulent career colleges, many run by PC Party donors who, were abusing the system. When will the Premier stop blaming students and start admitting that his government failed?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Speaker, as I've said many times in this House, I understand the impact on the good students, even the students from Redeemer who were just speaking. I am just as frustrated as they are that the Ontario taxpayer has been defrauded. I am extremely frustrated that bad actors and wrongdoers have taken advantage of the Ontario taxpayer and unfortunately utilized OSAP dollars not for their intended use; they used it for fraudulent purposes.

But these are very, very serious allegations. We take every single allegation very seriously. We investigate every single tip that we receive in the ministry, and that's how we got to this point. That's why we understood we needed to bring in KPMG, because it was more widespread than we initially thought. We've done over 3,200 OSAP investigations just since 2020, and we'll continue taking every single tip seriously and we'll investigate every single tip of wrongdoing across the system.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Private institutions like Redeemer and others are not the bad actors. They should not be blamed. Career Colleges Ontario flagged the bad actors. The minister knew who the bad actors were, but instead of doing his job and immediately inspecting the flagged colleges, this minister waited, allowing hundreds of millions more dollars to flow out of public coffers. After it was too late, he cut off every single student in Ontario instead of going after the bad actors.

When will the Premier fire his Minister of Colleges and Universities?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I will repeat myself numerous times to ensure that the time frame is correct. In late 2024, we realized that there was an increased amount of OSAP applications at private institutions. In January 2025, Career Colleges Ontario, a third-party agency, brought forward the same concerns that we had in my ministry. We recognized those concerns, and in May 2025, the federal government completed their own investigation, gave the results of those investigations to my ministry officials, after which we started doing enhanced and targeted inspections to the sector, Speaker.

In July 2025, we brought forward those inspections to the institutions and then, this spring, we removed eligibility from those six institutions. So after two years of

individual inspections and investigations into institutions, once we realized how widespread this was, we knew we needed to act very quickly, and we needed to bring in KPMG to ensure that we bring back confidence into the private OSAP system at private institutions.

But again, we needed to bring in the OPP. This is a very serious matter, and we will not apologize for bringing in the Ontario Provincial Police. This is something that needed to be done because it was widespread right across the sector. Wrongdoers have defrauded the Ontario taxpayer, and we're going to ensure that we have confidence back in the OSAP system.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

MPP Robin Lennox: For weeks now, the Minister of Health has been using health experts as a shield for denying life-saving cancer treatments to Sabrina Apitz-Grossman, Alex Shved and others trying to access treatment. Today we learned, through a freedom-of-information request, that coverage for Sabrina's treatment was recommended by health experts, and it was in fact this ministry who denied approval.

Speaker, this is outrageous. Alex took this Conservative government to court and won. Sabrina had to submit an FOI. Why is this Premier making cancer patients spend their time fighting this government in court instead of giving them the cancer treatment they need to live?

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

1110

Hon. Sylvia Jones: You know, it actually surprises me that they are politicizing this issue. We all feel very deeply for families and patients when they are going through these very challenging times. But we have always and we will always continue to make these decisions based on evidence-based decisions made by experts, not by politicians, as it has always been and it should continue to be.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Hamilton Centre.

MPP Robin Lennox: Speaker, what the minister just said does not hold up. We have the evidence. We know what the experts said. It was a politician or a bureaucrat that interfered in this case, which is why Sabrina is not getting the treatment that she needs.

Sabrina deserves a chance at life. Alex deserves a chance at life. The countless other patients who have been wrongfully denied over the past 15 years deserve a chance at life.

We need to know. Will you admit that you wrongfully denied Sabrina coverage for her cancer treatment, and will you reverse that decision and give her a chance at life today?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Evidence-based decisions that do not have a political approval process included in it—I'm not sure why the member opposite does not understand that these decisions are made based on evidence, not through the political process.

What I would like to share with the member opposite is we are working very hard to make sure that Ontario-based approval processes continue to be sped up and expedited. In fact, we have a fast process that now includes nine new cancer drugs that would have taken an additional year. Through our process that did not exist prior to Premier Ford and our government taking office in the province of Ontario, those nine cancer drugs are now available in Ontario for Ontario patients a year earlier, as I said.

We have other processes that I will talk about in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Hamilton Centre.

MPP Robin Lennox: Madam Speaker, this is absurd. The minister is scapegoating experts, but we have the evidence. We see what they've said. We have their literal emails and their recommendations. This minister denied Sabrina her life-saving treatment.

Can you imagine if a doctor intentionally withheld a life-saving treatment that was recommended for their patient? It would be called malpractice, and this minister should be held to the same high standard.

We need to know how many other patients have been wrongfully denied access to treatment or died because of this minister's decisions.

My question to the Premier: Will you finally admit that this minister is lying? She has lied, and people have—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I'll ask the member to withdraw.

MPP Robin Lennox: I cannot withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Withdraw.

MPP Robin Lennox: Speaker, it's clear.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): You've been warned. Withdraw.

MPP Robin Lennox: I cannot withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Robin Lennox, you've been named.

MPP Lennox was escorted from the chamber.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Adil Shamji: Sabrina Apitz-Grossman is 31 years old. She has cancer. Twelve months ago, her doctors said she had roughly 12 to 18 months to live.

There is a treatment in the United States that could save her life. We've learned today that Ontario Health's doctors have said she needs it and have recommended paying for it, but the Ministry of Health has said no.

When Sabrina went to court to fight for her life, the ministry had proof their own experts were on Sabrina's side. They never shared that proof with her. She found out afterwards from a freedom-of-information request.

Withholding proof from a cancer patient like this is just so, so sinister, and withholding it from a court is inexcusable. Sabrina is fighting for her life.

Why did the Minister of Health keep this information from Sabrina and from the court?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, my responsibility as the Minister of Health is to ensure that all Ontario patients get

access to Health Canada-approved innovations. We are doing that with the FAST program that has now ensured nine additional cancer drugs are available in the province of Ontario for cancer patients in the province of Ontario 12 months earlier than would have been the case previously.

We have a health innovation pathway. Again, when Health Canada has approved new innovations, we are there at the forefront leading Canada to make sure that those innovative medicines and procedures get approved in Canada and ultimately in Ontario. My role is to ensure that we have those innovations happening here in Canada. That's what we're doing with the FAST program. That's what we're doing with the health innovation pathway. And as I've said many times—incredibly challenging stories to hear, but ultimately, they must be made by experts, not by politicians.

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

Mr. Adil Shamji: FAST isn't fast enough. The health innovation pathway isn't delivering the drugs. And for weeks now, the Minister of Health has told Ontarians that these decisions are made by doctors, by experts, not politicians. But now we know that the ministry's own experts and doctors are being overruled, even though she claims that they're not.

People are supposed to be able to trust that their Minister of Health will have their backs, but this Minister of Health does not. Every one of the minister's excuses to reject Sabrina has now crumbled. The minister said doctors decide. Well, the doctors said yes. The minister said she's following a policy established in 2011, but in fact, she established it last month. She claimed the producer of Sabrina's drug would apply in Canada. It said it won't. She said paying would undermine price negotiations. There are no negotiations. She said she can't disclose details due to patient confidentiality, but she didn't even disclose details to the patient.

What's the minister's excuse now?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: To be clear, the member opposite is suggesting that a therapy that has not received Health Canada approval should be funded through the province of Ontario—an unproven therapy.

Ontario is home to world-leading research centres like Princess Margaret Cancer Centre and the Ontario Institute for Cancer Research. We lead the world in ensuring that cancer treatments are available here in Ontario for Ontario patients. That is my role. That is what I will continue to do, pushing to make sure that approvals get through the federal process quickly; pushing to make sure that we get access to those cancer treatments earlier in the province of Ontario, as we have with the FAST program; and pushing that innovative procedures and innovations that are happening across our hospital systems are available to all Ontario residents.

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

Mr. Adil Shamji: Madam Speaker, I'm not endorsing the treatment. Her doctors are endorsing the treatment. That's the point. But her ministry is overruling its own experts who want Sabrina to have the treatment. Her ministry withheld evidence from Sabrina and from a court. And when another cancer patient won in court, the minister just rewrote the rules so that no one else could win.

Now patients like Sabrina, like Alex Shved, like Holly Wardlow, like Kevin Nash and others—who I can't talk about publicly yet but will—are being condemned.

Colleagues, this could be any of us. This could be your daughter, it could be your husband, it could be you. Every member of this House should be outraged. Every member in this House has constituents who could be next.

Minister, fund her treatment, please. Do it for her, do it for your constituents and do it for other people like her.

1120

Hon. Sylvia Jones: You just said that you weren't endorsing the treatment and yet you are asking me to get involved in a clinically based decision that is made by experts, not by politicians.

Again, I want to reinforce how Ontario is leading in cancer care treatment. We made a change in mammograms to ensure that individuals could have access and self-referral for mammograms under age 50, from 40 to 50. We've seen almost 500,000 people access that new program. We have seen the highest number of surgeries in the province of Ontario.

What we haven't seen is any increase in the wait times. Why? Because we have world-class hospitals providing world-class care with world-class clinicians and we are going to continue to make sure that is available here in Ontario.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. John Fraser: My question is to the Premier. I've sat on this side for eight years and I've watched this Premier and this government hide a lot of things, but what we heard this morning, well, that's a new low. They're hurting honest, hard-working people by hiding the facts from them, hiding the facts from cancer patients, hiding the facts from thousands and thousands of students who depend on OSAP, hiding by refusing to ask the Auditor General to do a special audit on the ministry's handling of OSAP.

Through you, Speaker: How can the Premier expect Ontarians to believe him when he's hiding so much important information they deserve to know?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I'll continue to push back against the narrative that I am hiding. I am out in front of the media every single week. I am in the House answering almost all of the questions at question period and I've been very, very clear about the time frames.

I will repeat them again because it gives me the opportunity. In late 2024, the ministry had growing concerns about the amount of OSAP applications at private career colleges. In January 2025, Career Colleges Ontario, which is a third-party agency that represents private institutions,

had the same concerns we did and they brought it forward to the ministry.

That following May, we heard from the federal government, who finished their own inspection into private institutions. They had concerns and they gave us the results of their own inspection. We started to do enhanced and targeted inspections to those specific institutions that summer. Then, this spring, we removed eligibility from those specific institutions because we understood that they could not be trusted to be able to have taxpayer dollars go out in OSAP.

Speaker, once we realized it was more widespread than initially thought, we knew we had to act and that's why we brought forward, with urgency—

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

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, they're just hiding the fact that the Premier gave students' money away—money they depended on, OSAP loans they depended on, OSAP grants they depended on. The Premier gave it away. Now their response is "KPMG, KPMG," their hand-picked auditors.

Here's the thing: The minister says, "We're auditing the bad actors." And then the Premier says, "We're looking out for the good guys. We're trying to get them out." So the minister is saying one thing and the Premier is saying something else. We don't even know what KPMG is doing and they're not going to do the thing we need, which is the handling by this ministry and this minister of the OSAP file. We don't even know if an audit has started.

So here's a simple question, Premier: Will you clear this up and give us the statement of work for KPMG, or are you going to hide that, too?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Again, myself and the Premier have been very clear. We're acting with extreme urgency because we understand the good students that are caught up in this. But at the same time, yes, we are inspecting the bad actors. We're going after the wrongdoers to ensure that we can bring confidence back to the system.

We need to allow KPMG to do their work so that when the Ontario Provincial Police decide to move forward with criminal charges against these wrongdoers, we have all of the data that is needed. We've also notified the Auditor General. We know that if she sees fit to inspect this, she will.

But, Speaker, these are very, very serious allegations. They can continue focusing on me, but I've said many times that after two years of individual inspections, we had to act because we realized how widespread it was across the whole private institution sector. That is why we froze OSAP to all of the private institutions and why the forensic audit team is in place right now.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Well, Speaker, I can understand why the Premier wants to hide the fact that he gave hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars away and got nothing. But the reality is nobody believes him. The minister and the Premier are talking in circles.

Here's the thing. We're all going to have to go back to our constituents next week, and you're going to have to answer to those people whose money the Premier gave away: the single mom with two kids who's going to lose her house; the father who wanted to be a paramedic but can't because the Premier gave his loan away; or the 50-year-old who's raising three children and has to drop out in the second year of their program because the Premier gave away her money.

Speaker, why does the Premier think anybody in this province should believe him when he says anything?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I need to clarify the comments of the leader of the Liberal Party. We do not give the money directly to these institutions; it goes to the students that attend those institutions. I think that is a very important fact that he seems to miss from his conversation, Speaker.

But wrongdoers have taken advantage of Ontario taxpayers. The OSAP system is there to assist students with their up-training and upskilling in their future careers—

Interjection.

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

Back to the minister.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Thank you, Speaker. I know the leader of the third party understands the urgency of what we're dealing with right now, and that's why we're bringing forward legislation. I know he will support our legislation once we bring it forward because we need to add those guardrails. These private institutions—the wrongdoers have defrauded the Ontario taxpayer, and we're going to bring forward confidence into the OSAP system with these private institutions so we can bring back the funds that are available to the students.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Speaker, London Health Sciences Centre and St. Joe's health care are cutting 288 and 114 registered nursing positions respectively. Nurses are the beating heart of health care, and RNs play a vital role on a dedicated team of professionals.

My question is to the Conservative Minister of Health: Why are you allowing more than 400 RN positions to be cut?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I think it's important to remind the member opposite that since taking office, our government has actually increased hospital support by over 50%—I'll say that again: 50%.

As we flow that money—a billion dollars for the last three years consecutively—is it not prudent for us to work directly with hospital leadership to make sure that that money is being used appropriately for front-line patient care? That's the work that we are doing with the three-year path to balance. That's the work that we're doing with our regional tables, bringing together those similar-sized hospitals and regional hospitals and saying, "Are you doing all of the best practices?" that we so often see in Ontario hospitals across Ontario.

We will continue to do the work. We will continue to fund our hospitals, but we will also make sure that we are

fiscally prudent in ensuring that they are spending that money appropriately.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Speaker, hallway health care hits new heights, and just when you think this Conservative government couldn't get any worse, they dig even lower. The Minister of Health had the audacity to claim that she loves nurses while at the same time, on her watch, thousands of registered nurses are losing their jobs.

Nobody across Ontario believes her. Will this Conservative minister stop firing RNs, meet with and listen to these front-line heroes and commit to implementing safe nurse-to-patient ratios?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, respectfully, this is a story that the NDP have tried to spin many other times. We heard it first in North Bay where the NDP were saying 40 nurses were going to be laid off. In fact, what happened was there were no layoffs. These were vacant positions, and these were of no impact.

1130

So you can spin your tale of woe, but the truth is, hospital leadership and hospitals are doing exactly what they should be doing, which is assessing their organizations and making sure that the appropriate clinician is serving the patients directly. That's the work we're doing with our regional tables, that's the work we're doing with our path to balance and that's why we have funded hospitals by an additional 50%.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

MPP Andrea Hazell: My question is to the Premier. This government was warned about suspicious OSAP activity four years ago—that's 1,460 days—yet nearly $1 billion of our tax dollars went to career colleges despite warnings of fraud.

Listen to this: Last November, the transportation minister and the member for Brampton West celebrated a new Academy of Learning campus despite the college being under investigation since 2024. Their OSAP enrolment jumped from 74 students to 4,260. The owners donated to the PC Party and to the member for Brampton West. This smells.

Gridlock costs Ontario $56.4 billion a year while this minister is posing for photos instead of fixing the problem.

Through you, Speaker, to the Premier: What is the minister's relationship with the owners, and why did he celebrate a college under investigation?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Again, I don't know how I can clarify—make it any clearer that we have taken every single tip very seriously. I've reiterated and reiterated the time frames. Unfortunately, the member opposite isn't listening.

In late 2024, we recognized there was a growing amount of applications from private career colleges. In January 2025, Career Colleges Ontario acknowledged the same concerns that we had inside the ministry. In May of that year, the federal government concluded their investigation and gave us those results. We took those results, and we started doing targeted and enhanced inspections of those institutions. I'm not too sure how I can be more clear to the member opposite that we have taken every single tip very seriously.

As I've stated, we've done almost 3,300 individual OSAP investigations to make sure that there isn't fraud taking place across the system. But again, Speaker, it was the individual inspections and investigations that got us to the point that we realized it was very widespread. We brought in KPMG.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member from Scarborough–Guildwood.

MPP Andrea Hazell: The minister is saying I'm not listening, but he has been sleeping at the wheel for four years—four years sleeping at the wheel. You're now waking up. It's a bit too late.

Under this government's watch, nearly $1 billion in tax dollars flowed to these private career colleges by that minister, and now this government has the audacity to portray itself as the victim. This government is not the victim; the students are the victims, the families are the victims. The students who want to re-skill to build better careers and to provide a better future for their families—these are the Ontarians paying the price for this government's policy failures.

Speaker, through you to the Premier: You had four years to stop the bleeding, and you failed. Now innocent students are paying the price. When will you stop playing the victim, take responsibility for your failures and stop punishing the very students who failed to protect you and the people that voted you into your position right now?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I think it's very interesting that that member is referencing that we were asleep at the wheel. I'm not too sure who is asleep at that minivan, because that member last week was bragging about going to a career college just a couple of weeks ago. So she has both sides: She's going to the career college and supporting them, but then she's saying I'm asleep at the wheel when I just clarified the time frame.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I'll ask the member from Scarborough–Guildwood to come to order.

I apologize to the minister. Back to the minister.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Thank you, Speaker. I think she's upset that the truth came out that she was just at a career college a couple of weeks ago.

But to say I've been asleep at the wheel when I've clarified the time frames and how we take every single tip very seriously—we've done over 3,200 OSAP inspections. I'm not too sure how that can be asleep at the wheel.

Just this year, we removed the eligibility from those six institutions after we did enhanced and targeted inspections on them—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member from Beaches–East York will come to order.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: We'll continue to ensure that we protect taxpayer dollars. They can continue to trivialize it all they want, but we know the truth. This is a very serious matter, and we'll continue to ensure that taxpayer dollars are used for their intended purposes.

VETERANS

MPP Susan Lahey: Speaker, our veterans have made tremendous sacrifices in service to our country, and when they need support, Ontario must be there for them. For more than a century, the Soldiers' Aid Commission has helped veterans and their families facing challenges such as physical injuries, mental health struggles, housing instability and financial hardship. Our government took action through the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act, 2020, to modernize this important program and ensure it continues serving veterans for generations to come.

Can the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services tell this House how our government has strengthened the Soldiers' Aid Commission and expanded supports for Ontario veterans and their families?

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

MPP George Darouze: Thank you to the member for the question and for recognizing the tremendous service and sacrifice of our Ontario veterans.

I also congratulate the fantastic member from York–Simcoe once again on her recent election to this House.

Speaker, our government will never forget the courage of those who answered the call to serve our country. That's why we modernized the Soldiers' Aid Commission through the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act, 2020, expanding eligibility so that veterans and their eligible family members can receive support, regardless of where or when they served.

More recently, we strengthened the program even further by increasing the maximum amount of financial assistance available from $2,000 to $3,000 annually, making it easier to apply for support and enhancing awareness so more veterans know help is available.

Through the commission, eligible veterans and their families can access support for housing costs, home repairs, health-related expenses, assistive devices, personal necessities and employment-related needs.

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

MPP Susan Lahey: Speaker, I thank the minister for that answer.

As I look around and see the many poppies in this room, I believe it's important to acknowledge the meaningful day coming up next week. Remembrance Day is right around the corner. It is significant to recognize the outstanding service and sacrifices the members of our armed forces face in the line of duty and continue to face once returning home.

But, Speaker, supports are only effective if people know they exist. Many veterans can be reluctant to seek assistance or may simply be unaware of programs that could help them and their families.

Can the minister tell this House what steps our government is taking to raise awareness of the Soldiers' Aid Commission and ensure more veterans can access these important supports?

MPP George Darouze: Thank you to the member for raising such an important question.

Speaker, to ensure veterans know about the assistance available to them, we have worked closely with the Soldiers' Aid Commission, Veterans Affairs Canada and Royal Canadian Legion branches across Ontario. We launched a province-wide social media campaign in 2024 and 2025 that reached more than one million Ontarians and conducted extensive outreach directly with veteran-serving organizations and communities.

As part of our recent legislation enhancements, commissioners now have an expanded mandate to actively promote the program across the province. In 2025-26, the commission supported 362 applications, representing a 115% increase compared to 2023-24, and the amount of assistance provided has more than quadrupled over the same period.

I've visited all Legions in my riding this year for the Legion's 100th anniversary. I encourage all members to do the same and promote this important program.

Our message is simple: Ontario veterans served us, and our government will continue working to ensure they receive the support they have earned.

CHILD CARE

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Speaker, did you know that getting a daycare spot in Ontario is an Olympic sport? People sign up for wait-lists as soon as the strip turns pink. This Premier made a commitment to $10-a-day child care, and that means staffing 86,000 net new child care spaces at a time where 40,000 ECE workers have left the profession. And this minister's fix? Freeze child care workers' wages, because yes, right, that will fix it.

1140

Premier, why have you decided to leave parents with no option for their kids?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: In fact, I haven't done that. You will recall, going back to 2018, we inherited a system that was the most expensive in the entire country, if not North America. There were no spaces being done. The NDP didn't seem to care about parents then, Madam Speaker. In fact, when they held the balance of power, they had a stretch goal for auto insurance, and that was it.

When we came in, we immediately set to work on improving access to child care in the province. We introduced the child care tax credit in our very first economic update to start to make it more affordable. We then negotiated with the federal government to be part of their CWELCC—Canada-wide early learning child care system—but we didn't accept the first deal, like the NDP

wanted us to do. We held out for a better deal for the people of the province of Ontario, and now we have done exactly the same thing in the renegotiated deal that we have.

And what have we done? We have seen the fees for parents come down every single year, dramatically, from over $100—when the Liberals and NDP were in power—to, on average, $22 a day while increasing wages for our workers—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Parkdale–High Park.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: If the minister had taken time to go out on the front lawn, he would have heard what an overbearing, dictatorial, unmitigated disaster this minister has been to people—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I'll ask the member to withdraw.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Withdraw.

A daycare spot for your child means being able to go back to work to put food on your table. It means having the peace of mind that your kids will be cared for by professionals in an environment that will help them grow. It is heartless to deny families this basic service.

You have to be really out of touch to deny child care workers a $1 wage increase. I do know that the Premier may not be feeling this cost of living with the silver spoon in his mouth, but families are feeling the pinch.

Through you, Speaker, to the Premier: Will you freeze this wage—pardon me—will you thaw this freeze, for heaven's sake? Give child care workers what they deserve.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I don't know if a member of the socialist NDP calling me a dictator is more offensive than asking me to freeze wages for child care workers when this government has actually increased them by 40%.

So no, I will not listen to you. The reality is that while we were increasing rates for child care workers, you voted against every single one of those initiatives—every single one of them.

The NDP would have had us accept the very first deal on the Canada-wide early learning and child care. We said no, we want billions more. In fact, we held out and received $18 billion more. And do you know who's congratulating us? The former NDP government in BC said, "We want the same deal that Ontario has." Alberta is saying the same thing. Across Canada, other jurisdictions are looking to what Ontario has done and said, "We want the same deal because we know it gets us more spaces, it gives us more certainty, and we like what Ontario did under Doug Ford."

We reduced the rates from 100 bucks a day, when they had the opportunity, to, on average, $22 a day. So no, I won't listen to you. I'll keep—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Being a minister means that you are responsible for everything that happens within your ministry. In some ways, it's not much different than owning a business, other than perhaps the scale, in some cases.

I know the Minister of Colleges and Universities was a small business owner before being elected. I respect him for that and for giving back to his community when he was. I'm certain that he would notice if there was a couple of hundred dollars missing in the till at the end of the night, or if his accountant alerted him to an extra $30,000 in expenses.

When we have 385 million taxpayer dollars going out the door to seven private career colleges already under suspicion, and his ministry was told to call in the cops two years ago, I don't understand why the minister didn't put a stop to it right away.

My question is to the Premier: Did the minister look the other way, or does he not know what's going on in his ministry?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Well, Speaker, I'll thank him for acknowledging I used to be a small business owner, because small business owners drive the Ontario economy.

But again, I was referencing every single time we've taken this very seriously. In late 2024, we had a growing concern of the amount of applications at career colleges. As I've said many times in this House and to the media, in January 2025, a third-party agency, Career Colleges Ontario, had the exact same concerns we did. The federal government did their own audit, and in May 2025, gave us the results of those audits, which again we moved forward with enhanced and targeted inspections to those institutions.

We have been acting very seriously on all of the tips and all of the inspections we've been given. We've done over 3,200 OSAP investigations since 2020. That is a significant amount of OSAP investigations.

We'll continue to take every single tip seriously, but again, these are wrongdoers who have taken advantage of an OSAP system that is there to support students. We're going to bring back confidence before we release another taxpayer dollar, Speaker.

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

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: What I see from this minister time and time again is a minister playing whack-a-mole. Oh, there's an issue here; try and deal with it. There's an issue there; try and deal with it.

Speaker, if one of your employees told you that someone was stealing from you and you might want to call in the cops, wouldn't you deal with it right away, not two years later?

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities was informed in 2023 of questionable activity, advised to call the police in 2024—the same year that this minister was appointed minister. And we know, with some of the Academy of Learning campuses, the minister sat on his hands and the ministry delayed investigations, allowing even more taxpayer money to go out the door—money that

we don't even know the total amount of yet. So the minister was either told to look the other way or, frankly, he's out of his depth.

My question to the Premier: If this was your business, would you have allowed people to steal from you for three years?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I'm not sure the member from Ajax got the memo that the person sitting right in front of him went to the Academy of Learning graduation just a couple of weeks ago.

Speaker, we've taken every single tip seriously. Wrongdoers have defrauded the Ontario taxpayer, so we brought forward the Ontario Provincial Police, and we notified the Auditor General. That is also why we're acting very urgently. As myself and the Premier have said many times, we're acting with urgency so that the good students can be re-released into the system.

That is why we're bringing forward legislation this session, and I know they will support the legislation we're bringing forward because they understand the urgency of the good students that are caught up in this.

But these are bad actors that have defrauded the Ontario taxpayer, and I take that very seriously. And, Speaker, that is why KPMG has been brought forward. They're forensic experts. They're ensuring that we have the confidence before another taxpayer dollar is released to students.

HOUSING

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. While our partnership with the federal government to remove the HST on eligible new homes is providing significant savings for homebuyers, we also know that development charges can add tens of thousands of dollars to the cost of constructing a new home and, indeed, that cost is passed on to the homebuyer.

That being said, for municipalities, development charges are an important tool to help fund growth-related infrastructure. But high upfront costs can make it more difficult for housing projects to proceed.

Can the minister tell the House how our actions to reform development charges are helping municipalities lower development charges while continuing to invest in the infrastructure needed for growing communities?

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

Hon. Graydon Smith: Thanks for the question.

Listen, our government is taking action to address one of the largest upfront costs associated with building new homes; it's a municipal charge that new home buyers have to face. That's why, in partnership with the federal government, we launched the Development Charge Reduction Program, a historic $8.8-billion investment over 10 years helping municipalities reduce development charges while continuing to build the infrastructure that communities need.

By reducing those development charges, we're helping municipalities to lower the cost of new homes by tens of thousands of dollars per home, improving project viability and supporting the construction of more homes in communities. Speaker, our government, through this program—the Development Charge Reduction Program—is building on the work we've done to create the conditions needed to get more shovels in the ground and build stronger communities across Ontario.

1150

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

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to the minister for that answer. Our government recognizes that housing and infrastructure must go hand in hand, and that is the goal of the Development Charge Reduction Program. Families need homes, but they also need roads, transit, water services, recreation facilities and community amenities that support growing neighbourhoods.

Our government has made it clear that reducing housing costs should not come at the expense of municipal infrastructure. At the same time, development charges cannot be funded on the backs of Ontario families who want to buy a new home. Can the minister explain how the Development Charge Reduction Program is helping municipalities build the infrastructure needed for growth while supporting our goal of increasing housing supply across Ontario?

Hon. Graydon Smith: Again, thanks for that fantastic question.

Listen, our government knows that building more homes requires more than just reducing costs; it requires the infrastructure that makes communities strong, complete and livable. That's exactly why the Development Charge Reduction Program was designed to support both objectives. Through this program, municipalities that commit to meaningful development charge reductions receive funding for critical housing-enabling infrastructure projects, including roads, bridges, transit, water and waste water systems, fire stations, libraries, recreation facilities and more.

Speaker, this approach ensures municipalities have the resources they need to accommodate growth while reducing one of the major costs associated with new housing construction. Combined with our government's efforts to streamline approvals, cut unnecessary red tape and eliminate the HST on eligible new homes, this Development Charge Reduction Program is helping to create the right conditions for more homes to be built faster and at a lower cost.

SMALL BUSINESS

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Ontario's small businesses are being squeezed from every direction, and when they turn to the law for protection, the deck is stacked against them. Since June 8, Rayah Cafe in Cabbagetown has been facing unsubstantiated demand payments, lockout and eviction threats from their landlord, Kareem Sethi.

The Commercial Tenancies Act is now nearly 30 years old, and it gives landlords an enormous advantage while

small business tenants face unfair lease terms. Neighbourhood businesses like Rayah Cafe pay their rent on time, create jobs and keep their main streets alive, yet this government protects the interests of commercial landlords instead of standing up for small business owners. Speaker, when will the Premier reform the act to level the playing field?

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

Hon. Doug Downey: It's really quite unbelievable to hear the member opposite talk about protecting small business. There has been no government before this government that has cut so many taxes and so many input costs for business and individuals across this province. We can go to the tax rate that the Minister of Finance has cut. We have taken care of red tape in the tens of thousands and millions of dollars. We're talking decades of red tape that is, right before the House now, going to committee in the red tape bill.

Madam Speaker, we are doing so many things to help the small business people in this province: providing supports through the small business associate minister, whether it be through—every single department here, Madam Speaker—providing supports, training, tax cuts, every sort of support we can think of. We're open to suggestions on how else we can support. I am shocked the member opposite voted against every single thing I mentioned.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: The truth of the matter is that the law advantages the powerful and wealthy and disadvantages the small business owners, and the government can change that. Downtown Toronto is watching its small businesses disappear. La Bartola, La Boulangerie and Buvette Pacey have all closed their doors.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business reports that in recent quarters, small businesses are closing faster than they are opening. Small businesses need commercial rent relief, protection against excessive rent increases, mandatory disclosure of additional rent, utility costs, maintenance charges and safeguards against arbitrary eviction and lockouts.

Speaker, how many more businesses must close before this Premier reforms the Commercial Tenancies Act and gives small businesses a fighting chance to survive?

Hon. Doug Downey: Let me create a stark contrast: One thing that we are doing to help small businesses do business is take out bike lanes on Bloor Street, yet they fight against every single part of that. The downtown businesses, the Bloor Street businesses, were begging us to do that; they were fighting against it—and the Danforth. It goes on and on because that party does not understand small business, and they don't know where to go with it. We are cutting taxes, cutting red tape, taking infrastructure seriously to make sure that customers can get to their businesses, do business and enjoy themselves.

They fight against every single thing that we do. It is unbelievable. And now that member and that party wants us to intervene in court matters just so that they can have performative outcomes.

We're doing real things for real people, real businesses in Ontario. We will not apologize for that.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Speaker, there's a saying that goes, "Life isn't fair, but government absolutely should be." Unfortunately, that's not how it works for this government in Ontario. Speaker, remember the greenbelt scandal, when this minister was found guilty of breaching the Members' Integrity Act? How about the skills development scam, when this minister rigged the process to favour insiders and Conservative donors? The Ford family stag and doe, the Ontario Place—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I apologize to the member.

Would the government side please come to order?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Education will come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The government House leader will come to order.

I apologize. You may continue.

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Speaker, you can tell how excited they are and how their backs get up when you mention these things. They know what's wrong, and they know it stinks.

The lack of shame is absolutely astounding from these benches. You have an entire government making a mockery of our democracy and spitting in the face of hard-working taxpayers who are struggling to get by. The Premier has turned this government into a circus, and taxpayers are paying for the show.

To the Premier: Has he or his minister or any of their staff met with the Academy of Learning's lobbyist, and what exactly did they ask him to do?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Can you really imagine, colleagues, a member of the Liberal Party talking about anything when it comes to anything in the province of Ontario? Anything. We inherited a government that was at the lowest of lows, right? Health care funding, down billions of dollars: What did we do? Some $50 billion more of health care funding—and you know what we needed—

Interjections.

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

Will the opposition side come to order.

I apologize. You may begin again.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'll start all over, colleagues: 15 long, ugly years under the Liberals, and they literally accomplished nothing—nothing. Did they build hospitals? No. We had to build hospitals. Not only did we have to

build hospitals, we had to staff those hospitals with thousands of PSWs, thousands of nurses, billions of dollars in investments.

They built 600 long-term-care beds across the province of Ontario. For the Liberals, two hours of care was too much for our seniors. You know what we did? Four hours of care. You know how we did it? By hiring thousands of PSWs in our system.

The Liberal leadership candidates sat quietly for 15 years. Did the member for Don Valley say anything when health care was being cut? No. Did the member for Etobicoke Centre say anything when health care was being cut? No. Because for them, it's politics over people; for us, it's people every single day.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

I recognize the member for Don Valley North.

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Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Speaker, you've got to know that the scandal's getting bad when they make the Minister of Education get up and give that kind of response.

Speaker, the records show that Career Colleges Ontario, led by Conservative Party insider and former chief strategist to this Premier, met with the government about OSAP four times. And guess what? The dollars kept flowing to bad actors like the Academy of Learning. Then the Academy of Learning hired its own high-priced lobbyists, and—you guessed it—also former Conservative Party insiders who worked for the Premier.

Look, Speaker, the students at Tyndale University in my riding deserve to know who this government is really working for and what was said in those backroom meetings.

Speaker, through you, will the Premier—the Premier, not the Minister of Education—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Response?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, let's look back. He wants to know who we work for? We work for the people of the province of Ontario. We haven't stopped doing that since 2018. Do you know why? Because we inherited a government from the Liberals that was an absolute mess. Health care was being underfunded. Education was being underfunded. Not only was it being underfunded, but our students weren't succeeding.

We then moved into a pandemic almost 18 months into our administration. What did we find? That the underfunding of the Liberal Party had left our health care system so vulnerable. So what did we do? We built. We built more hospitals. We built more long-term care. We're investing in schools. We're investing in roads and bridges. We're investing in the infrastructure to keep people working.

You know why we're doing that? Because they refused to do it, Madam Speaker. They have a whole cadre of people there who sat on their hands and did nothing.

Why did we turn to career colleges? Because we needed to hire thousands of nurses. Why did we go to career colleges for PSWs, for ECEs? And do you know what? We're delivering for the people of the province of Ontario in a way—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Mississauga–Erin Mills.

RING OF FIRE

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Our government knows that unlocking the Ring of Fire represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to advance economic reconciliation, create good-paying jobs and deliver lasting, shared prosperity in partnership with First Nation communities. That's why, over the past several months, our government has made significant progress, working directly with First Nations to move major legacy infrastructure projects forward.

My question is to the Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation. Can the minister update this House on the latest progress on the Ring of Fire and how our government is working with First Nations to advance these important projects?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Brandford–Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you to the member for the question.

Speaker, under the Premier's leadership, our government is making historic progress on the Ring of Fire, and we are working in true partnership with First Nations.

On June 25, we broke ground on the 107-kilometre Webequie Supply Road alongside Chief Lorraine Whitehead and Webequie First Nation. On August 24, we celebrated major upgrades to the Anaconda and Painter Lake Roads with Chief Sonny Gagnon and Aroland First Nation. On August 31, we broke ground on the 184-kilometre Marten Falls Community Access Road alongside Chief Achneepineskum and Marten Falls First Nation.

Speaker, these are more than just road projects. They represent better access to essential services, better access to better-paying jobs and enhanced economic opportunities. With all access points to the Ring of Fire under construction, we're delivering on our promise of accelerated timelines, building legacy infrastructure and advancing economic reconciliation with First Nations as full partners every single step of the way.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I would now like to ask the pages to please assemble.

It is time to recognize and to thank this outstanding group of legislative pages who have served at Queen's Park over the past two weeks. To our pages: Thank you for your enthusiasm, your dedication and professionalism, everything that you have brought to your roles each day. You have each made a valuable contribution to the work of the assembly, and it has been an absolute pleasure having you here.

As you prepare to return home and resume your studies, I hope you take with you a deeper understanding of our parliamentary democracy, lasting friendships and, of course, wonderful memories of your time at Queen's Park. I wish each of you a safe journey home, continued success

in your studies and all the very best in the exciting opportunities that lie ahead.

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

Applause.

DEFERRED VOTES

PLAN TO PROTECT ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2026 (NO. 2)

LOI DE 2026 SUR LE PLAN POUR PROTÉGER L'ONTARIO (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES) (NO 2)

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

Bill 143, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 143, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

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

The division bells rang from 1206 to 1211.

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

On November 2, 2026, Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved second reading of Bill 143, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes.

On November 4, 2026, Mr. Clark moved that the question be now put.

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

Ayes

Allsopp, Tyler	Ford, Doug	Pierre, Natalie
Anand, Deepak	Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Pinsonneault, Steve
Babikian, Aris	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Quinn, Nolan
Beattie, Jeff	Gualtieri, Silvia	Racinsky, Joseph
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Hamid, Zee	Riddell, Brian
Bouma, Will	Hardeman, Ernie	Rosenberg, Bill
Bresee, Ric	Harris, Mike	Sabawy, Sheref
Calandra, Paul	Holland, Kevin	Sandhu, Amarjot
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Jones, Sylvia	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Ciriello, Monica	Jones, Trevor	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Clark, Steve	Jordan, John	Saunderson, Brian
Coe, Lorne	Kanapathi, Logan	Scott, Laurie
Cooper, Michelle	Kerzner, Michael S.	Smith, Dave
Crawford, Stephen	Khanjin, Andrea	Smith, David
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Lahey, Susan	Smith, Graydon
Darouze, George	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, Laura
Denault, Billy	McCarthy, Todd J.	Surma, Kinga
Dowie, Andrew	McGregor, Graham	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Downey, Doug	Oosterhoff, Sam	Tibollo, Michael A.
Dunlop, Jill	Pang, Billy	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Firin, Mohamed	Parsa, Michael	Vickers, Paul
Flack, Rob	Piccini, David	Williams, Charmaine A.

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

Nays

Bell, Jessica	Glover, Chris	Shaban, Fatima
Bourgouin, Guy	Gretzky, Lisa	Shamji, Adil
Bowman, Stephanie	Hazell, Andrea	Shaw, Sandy
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Hsu, Ted	Smyth, Stephanie
Burch, Jeff	Kernaghan, Terence	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Cerjanec, Rob	Mamakwa, Sol	Tsao, Jonathan
Clancy, Aislinn	McCrimmon, Karen	Vanthof, John
Collard, Lucille	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Vaugeois, Lise
Fraser, John	Pasma, Chandra	Watt, Tyler
French, Jennifer K.	Rakocevic, Tom	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
Gates, Wayne	Sattler, Peggy	
Gilmour, Alexa	Schreiner, Mike	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 66; the nays are 34.

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

Mr. Bethlenfalvy has moved second reading of Bill 143, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

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

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1215 to 1220.

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

On November 2, 2026, Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved second reading of Bill 143, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes.

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

Ayes

Allsopp, Tyler	Ford, Doug	Pierre, Natalie
Anand, Deepak	Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Pinsonneault, Steve
Babikian, Aris	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Quinn, Nolan
Beattie, Jeff	Gualtieri, Silvia	Racinsky, Joseph
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Hamid, Zee	Riddell, Brian
Bouma, Will	Hardeman, Ernie	Rosenberg, Bill
Bresee, Ric	Harris, Mike	Sabawy, Sheref
Calandra, Paul	Holland, Kevin	Sandhu, Amarjot
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Jones, Sylvia	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Ciriello, Monica	Jones, Trevor	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Clark, Steve	Jordan, John	Saunderson, Brian
Coe, Lorne	Kanapathi, Logan	Scott, Laurie
Cooper, Michelle	Kerzner, Michael S.	Smith, Dave
Crawford, Stephen	Khanjin, Andrea	Smith, David
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Lahey, Susan	Smith, Graydon
Darouze, George	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, Laura
Denault, Billy	McCarthy, Todd J.	Surma, Kinga
Dowie, Andrew	McGregor, Graham	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Downey, Doug	Oosterhoff, Sam	Tibollo, Michael A.
Dunlop, Jill	Pang, Billy	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Firin, Mohamed	Parsa, Michael	Vickers, Paul
Flack, Rob	Piccini, David	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

Bell, Jessica	Glover, Chris	Shaban, Fatima
Bourgouin, Guy	Gretzky, Lisa	Shamji, Adil
Bowman, Stephanie	Hazell, Andrea	Shaw, Sandy
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Hsu, Ted	Smyth, Stephanie
Burch, Jeff	Kernaghan, Terence	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Cerjanec, Rob	Mamakwa, Sol	Stiles, Marit
Clancy, Aislinn	McCrimmon, Karen	Tsao, Jonathan
Collard, Lucille	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Vanthof, John
Fraser, John	Pasma, Chandra	Vaugeois, Lise
French, Jennifer K.	Rakocevic, Tom	Watt, Tyler
Gates, Wayne	Sattler, Peggy	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
Gilmour, Alexa	Schreiner, Mike	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 66; the nays are 35.

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.

Would you like the bill referred to a committee?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I would, Madam Speaker. Please refer the bill to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): It will be referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

There being no further business, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1224 to 1300.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): You may be seated.

Orders of the day? I recognize the member from—introduction of visitors; my mistake.

Would anyone like to introduce anyone—people watching from home, friends you haven't spoken to in a while? John, do you have friends you want to mention?

Mr. John Vanthof: I have no friends.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated November 5, 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

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. John Vanthof: I have a petition here, brought to me by Jim O'Brien and several other people, regarding the cobalt refinery in my riding. It is still fully licensed, but it has been derelict for years. I have written to the minister, and he sent me a letter back that, yes, they know contaminants are moving off the site, but they don't think they're hurting anybody.

The residents who signed this petition are asking for both the records and for the ministry to start to remediate the site, and I fully agree. I would like to add my signature and give it to page Tyler.

ONTARIO FARMERS

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: I have a petition here asking the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support Bill 109, the Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act. This has been signed by over 100 of my constituents.

I'm very proud to be from a part of the province where agriculture is a tremendous part of our economy, supporting many, many people. So I'm very happy to support this petition and support this bill. I'll affix my name to it and pass it to page Marcus.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I have a petition here to raise the social assistance rates.

Recent data has come out about food bank usage in this province. It is now over a million people in this province that are relying on food banks, for a total of 8.7 million visits to food banks last year alone. That number has increased 165% since this government formed government.

We are seeing that about two thirds of children in this province are accessing food banks. About a quarter of the people who are accessing food banks are working people—some are working two jobs and are still unable to get by with the cost of housing, groceries and utilities. And yet we still continue to see this government spending money on luxury private jets and hotel rooms for their Toronto MPPs and so on.

This petition, which was signed by over 230 organizations, and then a letter that was sent to the government, is calling on the government of Ontario—the Conservative members—to raise social assistance rates to above poverty rates so that people in this province have an opportunity to have safe, stable, appropriate housing—a roof over their head—put food on the table, and actually can afford to participate in the economy of our province.

I fully support this petition. I will sign my name and send it to the desk with the page.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Peggy Sattler: As everyone in this House knows, we are in the midst of an affordability crisis, and the cost of housing, whether owning and paying a mortgage or renting a home, is certainly one of the biggest financial challenges that families face.

This petition calls on the Legislative Assembly to take action and help ensure that affordable housing is available for families throughout Ontario.

We have seen consecutive Liberal and Conservative governments allow housing costs to spiral out of control and allow speculators to make fortunes. Meanwhile, families have had to put their hopes of owning a home on hold.

We know that housing is a human right and that all Ontarians should have access to safe, affordable housing. Whether they rent or they own, whether they want to live in a co-op or a condo, affordable options should be available to them. So the petition calls on the Legislative Assembly to prioritize the repair of Ontario's social housing stock, to commit to building new affordable homes, to crack down on housing speculators and to make rentals more affordable through rent controls and updated legislation.

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

LABOUR LEGISLATION

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition before me that calls on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to take action against scab labour. We have seen how scab labour undermines workers' collective power. It unnecessarily prolongs labour disputes, and it removes the ability of workers to withdraw their labour, which is intended to apply economic pressure on employers when there is a labour dispute.

We have seen evidence of scab labour contributing to higher-conflict picket lines, undermining workplace safety and destabilizing normalized labour relations between workers and their employers, and it removes the employer's incentive to negotiate and settle fair contracts.

So the petition calls on the Legislative Assembly to prohibit employers from using scab labour during a legal strike or lockout, and specifically to ban the use of scab workers to perform the duties of bargaining unit employees, to include significant financial penalties for employers who defy anti-scab labour and to allow for the very limited use of temporary workers only to undertake essential maintenance work to protect the integrity and safety of the workplace, but not to contribute to the ongoing normal operation of the workplace.

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

TENANT PROTECTION

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I have a petition here titled "Stop Ford's Attack on Tenant Rights." This petition is talking about the skyrocketing housing costs, whether that is to purchase a home or for rent. It's talking about how, oftentimes, those that are renting homes are discriminated against under this government's rules at the Landlord and Tenant Board. Many are being excluded from participating in hearings that could see them being evicted by way of their calls being cut off; or they're only allowed to participate remotely through electronic means, but they do not have the access to be able to do that; or calls are dropped, the connection is dropped and a ruling is automatically made against them in that case. Many of these folks do not have access to legal supports, either, to have legal representation to support them at these hearings.

Again, we are in a housing crisis. There are about 80,000 people in this province that are currently unhoused, and that number is continuing to climb. The government likes to talk about historics—we have a historic number of people that are unhoused. We have a historic number of people, including children and seniors and working people, accessing food banks in this province. We have a historic number of people—over 2,000 a day—waiting for health care in hospital hallways. We are in a cost-of-living crisis, where people can't afford groceries, and the food bank numbers are increasing.

So the very least that this government could do is bring back rent control in order to ensure that people can afford a place to live. The very least that they could do is that when there is a dispute between a tenant and a landlord, that there is a fair, equitable and accessible process in order for that to be dealt with in a timely manner. The very least that this government could do is ban above-guideline increases, which are being abused by large corporate landlords—not little mom-and-pop landlords, corporate landlords.

1310

These are the very minimum things that this government could do immediately. Most of these would be reversals of policies they brought in. They could reverse those policies and really protect tenants, protect landlords and make life truly more affordable, accessible and equitable for everyone in the province of Ontario.

I fully support this petition, will sign it and send it to the desk with page Tyler.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTING ONTARIO'S FOOD INDEPENDENCE ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 VISANT À PROTÉGER L'AUTONOMIE ALIMENTAIRE DE L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 5, 2026, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

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

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to speak in the House. Agriculture and agri-food and agribusiness are

one of my favourite topics, and I've been in this career most of my life.

I started this morning, but I'd just like to repeat something, that I'd like to thank the previous Minister of Agriculture, who put this bill in the House.

One thing that sets this bill apart from almost anything else that's been put through the Legislature is it's a bill on one subject. It has schedules, and it touches different things, and that's fine. But it's a bill on one subject, on agriculture, agri-food, so that if there are disagreements, you can have an actual debate about it. There's no poison pill. We're all in favour of this bill. There's things that I think should go farther, but there's nothing really in the bill that raises a huge red flag, and there's no poison pill—I've said it before—and I appreciate it.

Actually, this is a really good example, and Bill 140 is a really bad example, because it's about the same size, but it's got multiple—some things we very much agree with and some things we disagree with, some things that we will never agree with philosophically. But we're not even really having a good debate on it because we're debating it as one bill as opposed to—there should be a whole separate bill on how we deal with waste, recycling, landfill. It should be a whole separate bill.

The people in Oxford county shouldn't have to wake up and realize that the Beachville quarry is on the landfill list again. And the Minister of the Environment can say it's not, but it is, because this current government took out their own regulation that gives municipalities the final say.

And then, the Highway 69—we all know where Highway 69 is, how important it is to finally finish the four-laning of the highway, but four-laning Highway 69, gutting the Environmental Bill of Rights and changing landfill regulations are three different things. Why are they in the same bill? That's an example of why people get frustrated.

But this bill is an example of how the government should work.

Before I go any farther, we don't talk about agriculture enough in the House, actually. We talk about it a lot, saying it is the number one or number two industry in this province for GDP, job creation, and it feeds us.

It's a big deal, but sometimes, honestly, you have to wonder if it's really seen that way. And farmers ask me sometimes. A former director of Grain Farmers of Ontario, Leo Guilbeault, asked me one time at a debate, and he said, "John, if we are such a big industry, how come we're not treated that way?" There are a few reasons, but farmers are very individualistic—and something else, that farmers are different and agribusiness is different than almost any other business.

I have a lot of mining in my riding, a lot of forestry. Right now, the gold price is great. Jobs in my riding—oh, man, we cannot find people. But when the gold price dropped, those mines closed. That was it. They left.

Farmers don't do that. Farmers, regardless of what they grow, agribusiness, regardless of what they do, they will do anything—anything—to keep that farm running, to keep that business running, to keep the legacy going.

I think government knows that, and, as a result, government doesn't act—I'm not being partisan—as quickly because they know that if there's a way that the farm community can find a way to suffer it out, they will. I am not saying that agriculture doesn't get any funding, but if you look, agriculture is the second or the biggest job creator in this province. But if you look at how much they actually get funded from the government, compared—you're putting a billion dollars into the road to the Ring of Fire—a billion dollars. I'm not complaining about that. And the feds are putting in another billion. You know what? If you went to agriculture and said, "Okay, if we could put in a billion and process here and do all these things here, how many jobs could you create?" But nobody ever asks agriculture that, right?

When I got elected, it was 2011. It was when the economy and the housing market crashed, everything crashed and people looked around and, "Wait a second. There's only one sector that's still chugging along, still growing every year." You know what it was, Speaker? You know what it was. It was agriculture; it was agri-food. That's the first time that people went, "Wait a second." But in my opinion, government still takes it for granted. And farmers and agribusiness, well, they live with it, but it is an issue.

I'll give you an example. Even small programs would make a big difference. Did you go to the grocery store lately and check the price of beef? It's pretty expensive. We have a shortage of beef in this province. We have a shortage of cow-calf, the bottom end—not the bottom, but it's a three-tier system, the bottom tier. For feedlots, there's a program in Ontario where the government will backstop its feeder finance. They will backstop a loan so a farmer can buy animals to put into his or her backgrounding or feedlot. That is a very successful program. No one has ever defaulted, so it has never actually cost—it's cost them in administration, but it has never cost the government any money on a default. This is an extremely successful program.

Beef Farmers of Ontario asked for years for a breeder finance program, so if you're a young farmer or you want to expand you can get a loan guarantee from the government. The government doesn't give the loan; the government backstops the loan, basically from the bank, so that you can buy cattle to increase your herd. It is a no-brainer. It will work as well as the feeder finance program. It's a no-brainer. They've been asking for it for years, and what have they got? Platitudes—platitudes.

"Oh, we want a billion dollars for the Ring of Fire," again, but when you have an industry that actually can improve the economy, can actually ensure we—I heard the minister, and I'm looking forward to working with the minister about supply chains and food supply chains. But when you can solidify the food supply chain by producing your own cattle, by breeding your own cattle, and this program would go a long way to do it—nothing, crickets. Maybe I'm waking up somebody up now, again. But that's what they've heard: crickets. This isn't going to cost, basically, anything.

I wasn't planning on going here, Speaker, but I'm going to go on a bit of a tangent. We have the Ministry of Agriculture. I didn't bring my glasses—agriculture, food—it will always be the Ministry of Agriculture to me, but agriculture, food and agribusiness.

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We've also got the Ministry of Rural Affairs, and that's a great ministry. I fully support the Ministry of Rural Affairs. But do you realize how much funding the Ministry of Rural Affairs gets to distribute across rural Ontario to help towns, to help the social fabric of rural Ontario? Do you realize that the government of Ontario has spent five times as much taking out bike lanes in Toronto than they spend helping out rural Ontario through the ministry of rural Ontario? And they say, "Oh, we're going to help you guys because you're the backbone"—platitudes.

If you really wanted to—this is the strongest sector in the province because we all depend on it, the world depends on it, and it's very resilient. But it's often ignored—and I don't think purposely, but often ignored. And there are things that we could do to make it better right away.

I'm going to go back to the bill: an act to enact the Farmland Security Act, 2026. I always like to look at the title of a bill because the title might not actually be what the bill is trying to do, but it's what the government is trying to promote. And I get that. The working title, that's what you want to talk about. I get that. I'm going to—and my idea—the government has got some stuff in here. They want to make enabling legislation, basically to protect our farmland from being purchased by foreign investors, but I'll use the term from the Minister of Colleges, "foreign bad actors or wrongdoers"—people who don't actually have an interest, a true interest, in this, to solidify or promote or hold Ontario agriculture.

And I heard the minister say today when he did his hour—or he did 20 minutes. I'd like to thank the parliamentary assistants for theirs as well. He said something that—a question was asked. Let's be clear: My parents came to this country from the Netherlands because of what Canadians did for the Netherlands in World War II. My dad thought it was the greatest thing in the world—"They must come from the greatest country"—and that's why he came here. So we want people to come to this country to help build this country. We still want that. We need that.

What the government is talking about, I think, is Chinese investment—let's call a spade a spade—or that a country is going to direct how your agriculture land is used. We can debate that, whether that's—I think we don't want states that we don't necessarily agree with controlling our agriculture. Now, I don't know if that's as big a deal as—we don't know; the government has got to look into that. I get that. But if you're really serious about farmland security, it's not just that.

The minister said this morning what he's really trying to stop is people who purchase land and sit on it. Well, okay, that could be a foreign investment. That could also be a developer who buys a farm outside an urban boundary and sits on it and lobbies and lobbies and lobbies so that they can build houses on it. That's exactly the same thing, but this bill doesn't do anything about that.

I am glad that the minister said, "Do you know what? We're looking for ideas because this is just a start." Because if you're really serious about farmland security, you have to actually talk about what is actually threatening farmland.

I'm willing to say that I don't think that foreign actors—and the president of the greenhouse association had a great term at the hearings, I thought: "unaccountable investment." That kind of describes it, right? "Unaccountable," so an investment that is only there to make money but not really to ensure that this land stays productive. That also could be a Bay Street actor. I don't see much difference if you're really talking about what is impacting the security of farmland.

Now, the OFA did some mining of the census, and they use something—that we lose 320 acres a day of agriculture land. Some people dispute that, but I'll go with that. Even right now as we speak—we just went through an issue, and the new member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek would be aware of it, where the municipality wanted to keep the land agricultural. The developer went to the tribunal, and the tribunal quashed it and it was lost. Well, right now, there are 843 acres again before the tribunal. The municipality wanted to protect it for agriculture, and it will likely lose again at the tribunal. So are you really going after what's causing the problem?

Now, there needs to be development. People are going to say, "Well, we need to build houses"—100% we need to build houses. But we need to be serious how we do it, where we do it, and we need to have a program in place where if you have great agricultural land that there is—we have some of the best land in the world.

The best land in the world is not in northern Ontario. I'm really proud to farm in northern Ontario. I'm really proud to farm in northern Ontario, have farmed there my whole life, but, man, if I could trade my land, acre for acre, for something in Perth or Oxford—or two acres for one—I'd go to Perth or Oxford. Let's be true. So why don't we protect the land, the best land in the province? Is there a future for farming in northern Ontario? Yes, 100%, 100%, and I'll talk about that in a little while. But why don't we have anything in place to actually protect land, the best land—some of the best land in the world. Because of where it's situated in between the Great Lakes, the climate is more temperate—that's how come we can grow 200 crops—and we pave it over day after day after day, because we think we have lots. But that's not the case; it just isn't.

And so you've got the Farmland Security Act, and, "Oh, yeah, we're doing something about it." There's nothing in here that's going to protect one acre—nothing. Now, are we in favour of what you're proposing, to look to see what foreign investment is actually doing? A hundred percent. But seriously, if you want to talk about foreign investment, how much agricultural land did the Volkswagen plant in St. Thomas take? That's foreign investment. Again, I want to build electric—we all want

to do that—but if you're really serious, let's talk about what we're doing. We should have something in place.

The NDP has proposed this; you voted it down. In Ontario, we have something called the agricultural impact assessment. If you want to rezone, you have to get an agricultural impact assessment. That's not bad, but you know what you do with the agricultural impact assessment when it's done? Nothing. "This is pretty good farmland." "Yeah, I want to build houses." "Yeah, okay, build houses." It's toothless—it's toothless. It's just to check a box. That's all you're doing; you're just checking a box.

What an agricultural impact assessment should do: If someone wants to rezone a piece of land, the question should be a two-step process. This is what we have proposed. It should be a two-step process. Step 1, the question would be, "Is there a better use for this land than growing food or fibre?" Is there a better use? And there could be.

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I'll give you an example: an abattoir, a livestock processing facility in Bruce county—that would strengthen the agricultural bedrock, would strengthen your supply chains, would make you more self-sufficient. A vegetable processing facility in the Holland Marsh—better use for a couple of acres than actual growing? Yes, it would be, potentially. So if you can do that, then you go to step 2. Step 2 is more complicated because you have to show that it's going to work.

But if in step 1, you're going to take class 1 land, class 2 land, and say, "We're going to build houses on it," it should be, "No, find land that isn't as good for agriculture."

Because if we had a good process, there is—despite southern Ontario having the best land in the world, there are places that aren't as conducive to agriculture as others. But we don't look at that now. Because the best place, the cheapest place—and I don't blame contractors for this. The easiest place to put in new infrastructure and to put in nice lots and to plant trees and to build houses—you know where that is? On the best land to grow crops. But we don't have a system in place.

But if you had a true agriculture impact assessment—we have it, but if you actually had teeth. If you can make an argument that, "Hey, we are surrounded by agricultural land. We need workers so they need someplace to live within"—again, that's a better argument than "You know what? We just want to take these 900 acres before the land tribunal now. You know what? We just want to do urban sprawl; we want to take some quick bucks."

And I don't blame developers for wanting to do that; that's their business. Believe it or not, I am not anti-developer. I'm not anti-private sector. I get it; it's their business. But it's government's business to say, "Okay, but you know what? We can't replace that."

Some day, or even right now, that is the bedrock on what the biggest industry in this province is built—it's on that land. So no, you're going to have to find someplace else, but that's not what we're doing. I'm using the greater "we." You're in power right now, but we haven't done this for a long time.

But that's not what's happening, and that's why we're losing 320 acres a day. That's why there are 900 acres before the land tribunal right now. That's why they lost in Hamilton, because there isn't—it's lip service. For protecting agricultural land in Ontario right now, there's a lot of lip service going on. And if we're serious, there shouldn't be.

So this bill—do we want foreign actors? No. But I challenge the government to tell me what the difference is between a foreign actor and a Bay Street hedge fund or a big development company. Who owns the land isn't as important as how strong the rules are for what that land can be used for.

If we had really strong rules to protect agricultural land, would there still be price escalation? Yes. It would be from farmers, though.

A land developer who thinks they are going to be building houses in 10 years or five years is willing to pay a lot more. That's a much different speculation than my neighbour who—"I'm slowing down and I want to sell off a hundred acres and I've got three neighbours who want to buy the hundred acres." Okay, there's going to be some competition, but much different competition than some big development company who wants to build houses and who knows that if he's diligent enough, he'll be able to convince somebody to change that designation. Until we have a system in place to do that—and we kind have one for parts of the province: the greenbelt. I'm not opposed to the greenbelt. I don't think the greenbelt actually is the way to do it.

But I look at the pressure—and I'm going to be partisan here. Look at how hard you guys have tried to cut up the greenbelt. It's pretty obvious that you're not serious about it, and this bill is kind of the same. It's kind of the same. It does a little, but it doesn't address the problem.

And is everybody going to be happy? No. But we do actually need to address the problem of what do we do when we've paved over too much of our good land. What do we do? I think, in the last few years—and hopefully, a couple of nights ago, the election changed that and brought us back from the brink a little bit—we've learned that we have to look at being as self-sufficient and less dependent on others as we can. Just paving and paving and paving is not the answer.

So is this a start? Actually, yes, it may be a start. It's enabling legislation, so you're going to be very diligent with the regulations, just like you were diligent with the regulations in career colleges, right? You're going to be very diligent.

We really don't know what's going to come out of this bill, honestly. Again, I hope it's not the case, but there's no real indication of what you're going to do.

The other part of this bill that actually isn't in the bill but everyone in the hearings was talking about was in the information package released with the bill, and that was the future of agriculture in northern Ontario. Again, at the risk of repeating myself, I come from northern Ontario. I've farmed there my whole life. I'm super proud to be there. It's a great place to farm. Most of you probably have

been there, but if you haven't, take Highway 11 in the summertime—it's pretty risky in the wintertime—and you'll cross a hill by the town of Temiskaming Shores. You'll have driven through rocks and trees for a good two and a half hours, and you'll cross this hill, and it will look like Oxford county. It's just a total change. That's the Little Clay Belt, which was a glacial lake from the last ice age. It's 400,000 acres. And the lake has all drained except for Lake Timiskaming and the rivers that drain it. It's flat as a table, the majority of it, and it's completely farmed. It's a little bit like the Holland Marsh, except it's not black mud. There is some black mud but—the Holland Marsh, you go into a dip, and you see the Holland Marsh. Well, Timiskaming is kind of like that, too.

But what the government is talking about a lot is the greater Clay Belt. The Little Clay Belt is 400,000 acres, 500,000 acres, and there is some development there. It could happen yet, but it's fairly highly developed. The greater Clay Belt, you go over a ridge of the Canadian Shield, through Kirkland Lake where the gold mines are, and you'll come into Matheson and you'll start into the greater Clay Belt. I have heard the government say there's 11 million acres there that's suitable for agriculture. I don't think 11 million; I think that's a bit of an exaggeration, but there is a lot of land there.

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I heard one of the parliamentary assistants talk about how fertile it is, and it is. That's not a problem of fertility at all. The weather is a problem, right? Tile drainage really helps that. Tile drainage helps it in the Little Clay Belt too. Without tile drainage, you can't really farm in northern Ontario. One of the reasons is—why I talk about Oxford county, I have family who farms in Oxford county, and tile drainage helps a lot in Oxford county, but there's also a natural drainage. There is a rock base, and you can farm without tile drainage. In most of northern Ontario, because it's glacial lake bottom—so on my farm, there's maybe three feet of topsoil—no, maybe a foot of topsoil and then kind of semi-topsoil, and then 100 feet of clay. And you know the unique thing about clay? Water doesn't penetrate. When it rains, it just stays there, so you need tile drainage. And also, because it's a glacial lake, that clay is heavily saturated. So when you put tiles in, the tiles actually regulate the groundwater as well. The groundwater comes up to the tiles. So you need tile drainage.

There's a lot of potential there, but there are a lot of things that people aren't thinking about that we need to think about. There are many farms there already, some very profitable ones. Some people have been farming there for a long time. There were a lot of farms there that are private land that were abandoned because they didn't have tile drainage. They didn't know about tile drainage yet. This isn't the first time that people in southern Ontario and the government of Ontario have said, "Go north and farm." We used to be able to go north and farm, and they'd give you land, and they'd do all these kinds of things. You'd get there, and your kids would starve, and you'd run home. The government of Ontario didn't bother telling you that things are pretty rough in northern Ontario. But one of the things we didn't have was tile drainage.

Another thing—you won't find this in a textbook, but this is what I believe: In Timiskaming, we had forestry and agriculture. If you didn't have a job in a sawmill, you had to get good at farming. You go farther north, and they had big pulp and paper mills, much bigger sawmills. And you know what? When you have a hard time growing a crop and you can make pretty good money in a paper mill, you're going to work—you watched your mom and dad hardscrabble, and you can have a nice house in town next to the paper mill? You're not taking over the farm. So a lot of those farms went derelict. Now people are purchasing them—the ones that haven't gone back to the government—and clearing them, re-clearing them and tiling, and great.

There are millions of acres of crown land there as well that could be cleared and tiled. But that crown land is a public resource. Another big industry in northern Ontario is forestry. Forestry uses that exact same land. So the thing I always tell my farmer friends is, "Quit telling me that that land is sitting there doing nothing." That's not the case. That land, a lot of it, is used by forestry companies, and they manage it. The only difference between farming and forestry is their crop cycle is 50 years, or 60 years, or 70 years as opposed to yearly. And that land is also used by the public. Tourism is a pretty big deal; hunting and fishing is a pretty big deal. Crown land is also Indigenous. Indigenous people have a big say there.

There are many roadblocks. Are they insurmountable? No, I really don't think they are. There is room enough for everyone. But again, we need to be serious about it.

In Timiskaming, in the Little Clay Belt, where I am, it's a great place to farm. I'm proud of being a farmer there, and because I farm there, I've seen the mistakes we've made. Where my farm is, there's probably 4,000 acres without a tree. It's beautiful to farm, but not much for wildlife. If we're going to do that in the greater Clay Belt—okay, it's great; I'm a farmer. I like those big fields. But it's a public resource.

Even in a country like—often in agriculture, we look down on Brazil, or environmental people look down on Brazil, because you know they're clearing the Amazon rainforest and leaving nothing. That's actually not the case. They are clearing the Amazon rainforest, but even on the least restrictive, they have to leave 25% of the natural vegetation. And it has to be in—I don't know the big word for it—congruent blocks so that you don't have five acres here and five acres here and say, "Yeah, that's going to be for the wildlife." Well, the moose are never going to go across that mile and a half. It actually has to be in—we don't have rules like that. Now, we kind of do in southern Ontario where you have conservation authorities. I know you guys don't like conservation authorities, but that's what they're—but in northern Ontario, we don't have that.

We also don't have municipalities in much of that land, so who's going to build the roads? Who's going to do the municipal? Everybody knows what tile drainage is, but tile drainage outlets somewhere, and I haven't met a farmer yet—including me, as environmentally friendly as I am—who wants to pay for any infrastructure past their farm.

The tile drainage lines go into the main and the main goes into the nearest gully I can find, and after that I don't want to pay. Except under the Drainage Act, I have to pay.

But who is going to do that in northern Ontario? Because I don't hear anybody talking about that. When in estimates, I had the minister of northern development, whom I disagree philosophically with on a few things—but he knows his stuff. He has a neighbouring riding to mine. And I asked him. He said, "Well, you know, some farmers want to pay for their own roads." I said, "That's something new. I haven't heard that before." He challenged me that I was misquoting him, but I didn't misquote him. I'm not sure that's what he meant.

So a mine pays for their own road? Well, I beg to disagree. That $2 billion is public money that's going to the Ring of Fire. I beg to disagree. Now, some mines—there are mines in my area who pay for their own infrastructure, 100%. A mine is a huge, huge investment, but so is agriculture in a place that you haven't been before, and you want to do it right. You want to do it right.

Because you know what? When pages are here 30 years from now, I want them to actually be able to go to northern Ontario and see wildlife—and see beautiful farms, but also see wildlife. You don't see much wildlife where the farms are in Timiskaming. Are we planning for that? I don't know. Now, the government House leader is nodding—

Hon. Steve Clark: The minister is planning for all of this.

Mr. John Vanthof: Oh, yes, I'm sure.

Hon. Steve Clark: A great minister.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, I am sure that you are thinking about planning for that. But that's why I'm really appreciative to have this time to actually put this stuff on the record—and I know we haven't got a big audience here—so nobody five years from now is like, "Oh, we didn't know that. We wouldn't have thought that was going to be a problem." Because it's a problem right now in my part of Timiskaming.

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Farms used to be smaller, and there were more people per acre. I don't know if that's the right way to measure it. But now, farms are much bigger. I'm not anti-big farm, but the way the tax system works, land isn't taxed very much; houses and buildings are taxed.

I have an example. One township in my riding used to have 500 people, which is not a lot, but they're down to 100. They're almost fully developed agriculturally. It's owned by two investment firms who want all the municipal drains and they want all the—there's nobody to pay for that stuff. So when you apply for a municipal drain—two people can apply. Then the municipal government has to pay for the studies, the engineering. And then the province kicks in after the fact, but they don't have the tax to pay for the engineering. So the hedge fund threatens to sue them for not doing their job under the Municipal Act. This is going to happen more and more, so those 100 people who are left are going to get out of the township.

It's different in northern Ontario, and I noticed this on the tour. I'd like to commend the ministry and the minister also on the—we actually toured this bill. Believe it or not, before many of you who weren't here as long as I have been, we used to tour a lot of bills. We'd actually go to the places where people were impacted by this legislation and take the time and talk to them like we did with this bill.

But the one thing that I noticed that's different in southern Ontario and northern Ontario is when a bigger farm buys a smaller farm—because the houses are maybe better developed, more stately—the house usually stays and somebody moves into the house. You know what they do in my part of the world? They hire a bulldozer and they flatten the house and the barn to pay less tax.

Again, I don't blame them for doing that. If you run a business, you do everything you can to make that business successful. I don't blame people for doing what they're legally allowed to do. But you have to understand the ramifications. Who is going to pay?

And then I'll have farmers—and again, some of my own farming colleagues might not be happy with what I'm about to say. Farmers will say, "Well, we don't require the services that you did before because there are less people, and we don't need this and we don't need that. So we shouldn't pay. We don't need that." Has anyone seen a class 10 combine, how big a class 10 combine is? How big of a bridge do you need to cross a river with a class 10 combine or with grain trucks?

Agriculture actually needs bigger infrastructure, not smaller, so who is going to pay for that? That's something we need to discuss not just for new land, but for the northern Ontario places that are operating now. Who's going to pay that? I don't know.

In forestry on that same land, the provincial government puts quite a bit of money into forestry roads. I don't know how much the forest—I'm sure my colleague Mr. Bourgouin from Mushkegowuk–James Bay would have these figures off the top of his head; I don't. But I'm sure the forest companies put some money in themselves too.

But the difference with the forest company is they don't own that land; the crown owns that land. They manage that land. The crown puts some money in so they can help access it, but the forest company doesn't own the land.

Most people in agriculture want the crown land, they want to own it, because it's a valuable asset and it will go up in price—and it will. I heard the minister this morning say, when he was talking about farmland, that the good Lord isn't making a whole lot more. Well, it will go up in price. But again, who is going to pay?

If the government is going to put the money in for the road infrastructure for the bridges, they're not doing it now. Small municipalities—I've had two bridges close in my riding so far. There's going to be many more, because municipalities do not have the money to keep up their infrastructure. We're talking about way more agriculture in northern Ontario—great. But that's way more infrastructure. Who is going to pay for the infrastructure? Those are things that we need to talk about.

I can't remember if it was the minister or one of the parliamentary assistants talking about—we talk about farms a lot, but without the processing, without the retail,

you can't have farming. I was a dairy farmer. If I didn't have DFO to pick up my milk and a processor to process it—dairy farming would be a tough job if you can't sell the milk.

We need to look at the whole system. It's interesting. We've got a bill that's talking about limiting control of foreign investment in land. Are we looking at control of foreign investment in processing? Has anybody thought about that? If we look at what's happening with Stelco right now, the same thing could happen with a big foreign agriculture processor. Am I saying it will? I don't know. But it's something we also need to look at.

Again, we are not opposed to looking at this. But it's funny that I see the Minister of Economic Development stand in his place in question period and he's gone across the world and he's got billions of dollars of foreign investment—great. But thou shall not invest in farmland.

Okay, let me get this straight. Are we putting in any safeguards? Do we need to trade with other countries? A hundred per cent. Do we need foreign investment? A hundred per cent. But what safeguards do we have that we don't end up being controlled by that foreign investment? Because that's obviously what someone is afraid of in this farmland bill. But we don't seem to have any worries about it in other sectors, and we should.

Stelco: How much were the feds and the province—I heard the Premier say $8 billion or $9 billion they were going to put into the car sector and the steel sector—critical industries, 100%. Are we in favour of supporting critical industries in this province? A hundred per cent. But you know something, Speaker? When you go buy a car—and not a lot of us can buy a car for cash—we don't go to the province for money; we go to the bank or we finance the car. I get $50,000 financing for my pickup truck. And in three years, I decide to stop making the payments on that pickup truck. Well, you know what? The bank picks up the truck.

But the province gives hundreds of millions of dollars to these multinational companies to get them to create jobs. In the case of—and correct me if I'm wrong. If I'm wrong, somebody can correct me; I'm sure you will. There were 1,000 job cuts in Algoma, and yes, stuff happens.

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If that was a car, they'd pick it up. So why, when governments put financing into private corporations—and I don't even mind multinational corporations personally—why don't they have a stake, just like when you finance a car? I finance a pickup truck to start a business, or I finance a tractor—I'm a farmer. I finance a tractor, and the bank has a stake in my—it's my tractor, and I make money with that tractor, and I've got no problem with that. But if I don't make the payments in that tractor, the bank comes and picks it up to get their money back.

Why don't we do that, as a province? Why don't we do that? I don't understand. We just shovel the money out and hope that we get jobs. This isn't the province doing this—with Stelco, "Well, we're going to sue them after the fact." Oh, come on. Good luck—good luck. I don't understand. I really don't.

Getting back to agriculture, you want to make a difference right away in supply chains, in self-sufficiency and self-dependence? You just mandated that municipalities and the government need to buy so much Ontario or Canadian. Now, it's a bit rough on the municipalities because you're not giving them any more money to do that. But why don't we have a mandate to actually use Ontario food in public institutions? In some cases, it's going to cost more money, but it would make a lot more sense, and then you would have more processing. The processors would be able to invest in more processing because they would have a guaranteed base market. Why don't we do that? There are so many things that we could do.

I'm going back to the start of my speech. All of us stand in our places here and say that agriculture, agri-food is the biggest or second-biggest industry in the province, and then we just go and talk about all the other things we're doing, and we don't pay attention to our own strengths. We don't, or we don't do it enough. We're there, and we don't.

I once met with the consul general of Israel quite a few years ago, and she gave me a book. Countries manage best what they have the least of. Israel doesn't have water, and they invented a lot of irrigation. California doesn't have much water either; they do a lot better with water than we do. We suffer from having a bounty of almost everything, and because we have a bounty of everything, we don't manage it very well. And at some point, when you don't manage something very well, as you've found out with your career college thing, things—

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: I didn't take that—well, it wasn't personally directed at you, government House leader.

But we could do so much better on farmland. We're not managing it well. We aren't. Are we building lots of stuff? Yes. But are we actually managing the resource, the gift that we've been given, that no one else has? Are we managing that? No, we're paving it over as fast as we can—as fast as we can.

In 100 years, if we keep this up, they'll look at us like they look at Easter Island: lots of nice buildings, but they can't feed themselves anymore. "Oh, we'll just go to northern Ontario"—that's kind of where I get what the idea is here. You're paving over 320 acres a day in southern Ontario, so we'll just clear 700 acres a day in northern Ontario and it's a net gain: "Look how great a job we're doing." That's kind of what the idea here is, I think, and it's a huge mistake.

Is there a future in northern Ontario? One hundred per cent, but don't think that it's a replacement for what you've been given here. It isn't. It never will be. It never will be. Go to where I am now, where I farm. You look at what the weather is there now and what the weather is here. There's a reason why there's more people here. I just don't want to be sitting in my place and saying, "Well, I wish." Now, at least you can't sit in your place and say, "Nobody told us," because those kids and other kids are going to wonder why we did that. They're going to look back and wonder why we did that.

In closing, is this bill supportable? Yes, we're going to support it. Are there some really good things in this bill? One thing, I can't remember if I—because as you see, I don't use extensive notes.

Laughter.

Mr. John Vanthof: Hey, that wasn't meant as a joke.

One thing I would like to close with is that I would like to commend the staff at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness—all of them, but particularly anyone who's involved in food safety. They do incredible work behind the scenes to keep our food supply clean and safe. I think a lot of us don't realize how important that is, how much work it is, and I'd like to shout out to those people—all public servants, but particularly the people who ensure that we don't have to worry about our food being safe. Not everyone in the world has that luxury, and we do in this province.

I'd like to thank you for taking the time, and I would be happy to have people correct my assertions.

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

Mr. Jeff Beattie: To the member opposite, there was a lot of reference made in your speaking points about foreign ownership, and I just want to seek some clarity.

Quebec, Prince Edward Island, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba already have foreign-ownership-of-farmland restrictions in place, and being a business person, I understand the law of supply and demand.

With those restrictions in other jurisdictions, would it not stand to reason that that would put increased pressure on Ontario farmland? I'm wondering if you could clarify whether or not you're truly in support of these important restrictions, or if you've got some other ideas.

Mr. John Vanthof: I really appreciate that comment. Actually, there are no restrictions in this bill, right? There's a suggestion. And also, Quebec has a very strong commission about how land is zoned. They have very strong zoning rules in Quebec, way stronger than anything in Ontario. So if you want to look at what Quebec is doing, maybe we should actually look at how Quebec is protecting their agricultural land and not just how they're looking at foreign ownership. Foreign ownership is just a part of what they're looking at.

Maybe we should look at all of what they're doing. I'm not saying we copy everything they do, but they do a much better job of protecting agricultural land than we do. You want to talk about Quebec? Let's go look at what they do.

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

MPP Lisa Gretzky: My question to my colleague is around food bank usage. In my area, the food banks rely heavily not just on the generosity of the community, but of farmers out in the county. They do food reclamation. For those who don't know what food reclamation is, that means it's usually the produce that is blemished or not pretty enough for, especially, major grocery chains to want to put it on the shelves—still great food, very nutritious—that is reclaimed, and it's either given as fresh produce to people in food banks or, in our region, they're now looking at ways of processing it in order for it to be used at a later time by people.

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I'm wondering if maybe my colleague could talk about the importance—we say farmers feed cities, but I don't think some people realize the scope of that, and as he was talking about, the loss of farmland, and also, generations used to be farmers and now the younger folks are walking away from farming. Can you talk about the importance of actually supporting our farmers and farmland?

Mr. John Vanthof: I really appreciate the question from my colleague. There were a lot of questions in there, so I'm not sure I can handle it all.

The food bank: It's very sad that there are so many people who are forced to rely on food banks, but the farm community does a lot, not only with food that is perfectly healthy, perfectly safe but not marketable; they do it on an organizational basis too. Dairy farmers can pledge so much milk per month goes to a food bank, and then the processing sector pledges to process it, and that is donated to food banks. When I dairy farmed, we did that as well. Chicken farmers do it a lot. In a very tough world, it makes a big difference.

One thing Ontario should do a lot better job of—and members talk about other provinces: We have not very many programs to actually get people started in agriculture compared to other states and provinces. It's something we could really look at.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you to the extraordinary member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, who never seems to use notes, because you speak from the heart all the time, which is absolutely a gift. Kudos to your parents, especially your mom. I always learn something from you when you speak, and it's great to have someone with your wealth of experience and someone who has tilled our land and fed us. We're so lucky to have farmers.

I'm just wondering, if you were the Minister of Agriculture, what else you would put in this bill. Or, in addition to this bill, what other bills would you have put forth?

Mr. John Vanthof: If I was the Minister of Agriculture, I would actually take our agricultural impact assessment process and put some teeth in it so that both the farm community and the development community knew what they were dealing with, because also, the development community needs to build. We need development; we need to build not only houses but infrastructure.

If we actually had a very strong agricultural impact assessment process so that everyone knew that the best farmland is protected, then you would actually look for other places, but right now, it's not. It's a strongly worded suggestion. And if it wasn't a strongly worded suggestion, we wouldn't be losing this much a day and we wouldn't have all these things to the appeal tribunal. When municipalities make a decision that this should be kept as farmland and the developers still appeal, what are we doing?

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

MPP Bill Rosenberg: I'd like to address the member. Through this bill, we're going to address some loopholes, like for the milk board, so I think that's going to make it more competitive. For the beef, we're going to address the loophole of the check-off. Veterinarians themselves too: In northern Ontario, we know how that is important to herd health, and we both know, coming from a farm, for large-animal vets, it's a challenge. It's a lot nicer to get run over by a whole herd of little puppies than one beef cow. So the advantages of small-animal vets compared to large-animal vets—can you talk about some of those advantages that this bill is going to bring forward?

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank you very much for the question, my colleague from northern Ontario. I didn't focus a lot on those things in the bill because I'm 100%—there are good things in this bill. The changes to the Milk Act, they're good. That's why we're not—right? You will also notice that the bill isn't titled "changes to the veterinary" or "changes to the Milk Act," right? It's Farmland Security Act.

I've talked about what you're advertising the bill as, but the changes for vets, the changes in the Milk Act and several other technical changes—we're 100% onside. That's why I didn't spend any time talking about them. But they're very important; I'm not discounting it at all. It's hard to get and to keep a vet in northern Ontario. It's something we could talk about as we talk about developing northern Ontario: How are we going to get professionals to come there? It's a really good point. Thank you.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to commend the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane on his very enlightening speech and thank the government for giving our shadow minister the opportunity to talk about agriculture.

One of the things he reminds us all the time about is the loss of 319 acres of farmland daily in Ontario. I wondered if he would share his thoughts on what else the government could be doing to help protect those 319 acres of farmland that we are losing every day.

Mr. John Vanthof: Indirectly, what the government could be doing is, the government could actually be helping the development community, developers and municipalities to rehabilitate land that's been used for other purposes so that it's no more expensive to use a brownfield than to use agricultural land. Because agriculture land—sprawl happens when it's the cheapest and easiest place to build. But how about we take some of the things that we've already used and repurpose them? That doesn't directly help. You don't have to give the money to agriculture, but how about we use land that is never going to be suitable to grow crops? That land exists in this province; it does—

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

Further debate? I recognize the member for Beaches–East York.

Interjection.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Oh, wow. Thank you so kindly for the support. Hopefully that transfers over to my private member's bill coming soon.

Speaker, it's always a pleasure to rise in this House to represent beautiful Beaches–East York. I will be splitting my time this afternoon with the terrific member from Kingston and the Islands, my colleague.

Okay, so I'm happy to rise today to discuss a bill that is necessary for the moment. We are currently living in a period where 24.5% of Ontario's population has experienced food insecurity. That is 3.6 million Ontarians. That is a scary number.

Not everyone who experiences food insecurity goes to a food bank. For many, it is a last resort. Increasingly, however, more and more people are forced into food bank use. Last year, more than one million people had to use food banks. That is a whopping 87% increase from 2019-20. Sit with that.

Some 34% of those who visited food banks were first-time users—food bank use is growing, unfortunately—51% were single-person households, 29% were children, 76% were rental tenants, 61% were social assistance recipients, and 23% of food bank users were employed. Those numbers are truly terrifying. They represent an Ontario where struggle, hunger and poverty are increasingly becoming the norm.

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There was a point in time where the pervasively damaging assumptions painted those who had to use food banks with one brush, and it was only a year ago that the Premier reinforced these beliefs. The Premier said to those who are homeless or in poverty but healthy that they should simply "get off" their butt, fanny, worse, "and start working like everyone else is."

What these numbers tell us—and I hope they put it in perspective for the Premier and others—is that food bank use and hunger do not discriminate. In an affordability crisis, even employment does not protect you from hunger. You just heard the number. This is not only an outdated, backwards and harmful way of thinking, but there is no evidence to support it. For a government that cares about numbers, they should really think about these ones and the stories that they tell.

Many people in our province do not make a living wage. Many studies cite $27.20 as the living wage, yet the minimum wage continues to lag behind by multiple dollar amounts.

Now, even if you do have a job, rent is through the roof, with over a third of Canadians having to spend over half of their income on rent. In Toronto, half of food bank clients spent 100% of their income on housing while grocery prices were soaring and continue to. Canadians spend over 10% of their disposable income on groceries—even the most stable of households remarks on this—and this just covers the cost of basic needs.

Forget about experiencing our province and country through travel, engaging in hobbies and sports or enrolling in school to gain new skills. What these numbers also tell

us is that for many people who must use the food bank, they are experiencing multiple vulnerabilities. People are forced to choose between putting food on the table and buying their medication; putting food on the table and buying winter clothing; putting food on the table and paying rent; or all of those, in many cases.

In Toronto, 67% of parents report sacrificing their own meals for their children, and 73% said feeding their children left no income for activities. These statistics are appalling.

Food precarity is rampant. There is no one look, nor one voice nor one job that belongs to hunger; it affects everyone. This is not the Ontario that any of us should accept. It should not be normal to have to turn to food banks for your meal.

But it is not just about food. As we have seen, food precarity heavily interacts with socio-economic status. Until shelter is affordable, health care is accessible, school classrooms are smaller and special education and mental health supports are implemented, we cannot bring about food security. They are so closely interconnected. So we need a bill like Bill 109 that sets into motion the accessibility and affordability aspects now more than ever.

Our food independence is pivotal. For too long, we have relied on our neighbours to the south. Especially in the last four years, they have demonstrated that they are volatile. It would be foolish for us to continue to put all of our eggs in that basket when we have seen that their leadership will not choose loyalty, diplomacy or even professionalism over reactivity, political stunts and displays, and scapegoating.

Currently, out of Ontario's $20 billion of imported products, over half of that can be grown right here in Ontario. That would also create $250 million for the economy and 3,400 jobs.

Now, this requires a shift in thinking. We may not be able to expect every food and vegetable year-round. Apricots, cherries, field tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and peaches may become summer delicacies, while we can savour apples, pears, potatoes and winter squash in the colder months. However, eating in season offers many benefits, from better nutrition and taste to lower prices—also, many times, less packaging. We can be sure that in doing this we are supporting local farmers. What a remarkable thing that we can grow so much right here in Ontario. We truly are lucky.

Every year we meet with the greenhouse vegetable growers, the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance and countless schools, especially Guelph University, who are champions of growing local, shopping local, supporting local. They bring their wonderful vegetables and flowers, highlighting Ontario's singular capacity. Universities and incubators showcase their latest technologies, innovating solutions to minimize pathogens and pests in eggs and meat and vegetables, to promote soil health, make aquaculture more sustainable and address honeybee losses.

Last year we marvelled at their work on fighting diseases in dry bean yields. This is beyond important. Dry beans are a deeply affordable and protein-packed grocery option. In dry navy beans, a popular dry bean in Ontario, consumers can find 15 grams of protein and 19 grams of fibre per serving. Creating the legislation and shoring up the funding to permit continued and consistent research into these fields are equally important as growing the food in the first place.

If you do not work in our agriculture, this may be over your head. The average person—you and I—do not always think about all the monitoring, course correcting, environment adjusting and hours and hours of research and trial that goes into getting our food on the table. But if we don't ensure good, stable and celebrated jobs in this field and exciting and accessible education, people will go elsewhere or the energy will be pulled between careers as they try to make ends meet.

Earlier this year, my team had the pleasure of visiting GoodLeaf, a leading vertical farmer, at Evergreen Brick Works. What struck us most, beyond their delicious produce, was the amount of effort and precision that goes into it. Despite the vertical farming set-up being fully automated, there is someone always monitoring the plants on countless measures: temperature, humidity, air, irrigation, filtration and light spectra. If something is even one degree off, there is someone there to troubleshoot. There is someone there devoted to keeping our food safe, edible and nutritious.

Now I'll talk about food quality and safety. We do not want to think about the fact that our food, like anything else, is vulnerable. Whether it's naturally occurring pests and disease or external factors like soil contamination from industry, we need people who are dedicated and passionate about feeding Ontarians to make this happen. It is extremely scary to think that a whole crop could be taken out or that contamination can spread to affect a whole harvest and that we can consume that.

The relationship between the consumer and the producer needs to be one of great trust. When it comes to food, things we are bringing into our homes, what we will feed our children and what we will deposit in our compost and then into our soil, there can be no question about the quality of this food. The sad reality is that there are a slew of recalls every day.

Exploring how to ameliorate this we must be looking at our own laws. As legislators it is our job to ensure the strict Canadian and Ontarian standards that are rooted in love for and protection of our nation are central to food policy. There's absolutely no room to slip up here. We cannot pick easy over good or quick over healthy. I repeat: There is no room to cut corners.

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This is another area where growing and shopping locally really does shine. Just last month, I was sure all of us were distraught to find out about the Driscoll's lawsuit. The lawsuit cautions that the American company had sent millions of pounds of fruit containing non-compliant levels of pesticides and chemicals across the border into Canada and sold in Montreal.

David Harada, Driscoll's former food safety and food compliance manager who brought this claim forward,

indicates that even by Driscoll's own measurement, about 50% of all shipments to Canada between 2022 and 2024 consisted of fruit that did not meet our high standards. What's even more alarming was that this cannot be chalked up to simply human error. Harada noted that he reported the non-compliance with his boss and upper management back in 2022, who then swept it under the rug. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency confirmed what David had flagged.

An expert toxicologist stated that while consumption of a few berries may not cause negative effects, we must evaluate continued exposure. And when we consider that Driscoll's was said to have removed their food safety and compliance tracking system to permit more berries to be sold here back in 2022, it becomes apparent that our trust was broken.

This past summer, we saw an outbreak of screwworm in American livestock. Previously said to be eradicated in 1966, there have been periodic outbreaks, which most recently led to a temporary ban of Texan livestock by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. The US and Canada have a two-way cattle trade for a range of purposes. This could have led to catastrophe. Screwworm is detrimental to a herd, and farmers cannot afford to endanger the business they have spent their whole lives building, or the animals that they devoted years to caring for.

The most important point here is that when standards vary and trust to uphold standards that are not your own is shaken, we have a problem. Thankfully, why I support this bill is that we have a solution here in Ontario. Ontario beef alone produces 56,400 jobs and $2.99 billion in GDP. Ontario is an agriculture powerhouse in what we currently produce and our potential for production. Our province is a farm leader in Canada and globally.

Getting food from farm to table is not that simple; there are countless unseen steps in between that do not cross our minds. When we are talking about how we eat locally, we need to think about the full cycle of the plant to produce.

From the first step, vegetables, fruits, beans and grain would need to be planted as seeds, watered, and soil needs to be fed. They are harvested and washed, cut, dried, smoked, fermented or left in their harvest state, depending on the desired final product. Then, this product is packaged in cans, jars, plastic and boxes. Now processed, these goods are ready to be transported via truck, ship, plane or train, where it is essential that the temperature and conditions are appropriate and remain stable. After the food arrives in warehouses, they are transported to grocery stores where we can shop.

Now, think about that fact in Toronto, for example. Food is coming from all around the province—Leamington, Bradford, Chatham-Kent—hours away. While hours may seem like a long way to travel for our food, Canada is the sixth-largest food importer in the world. We import 88% of fresh fruit and nuts and 72% of vegetables, so much of our food may travel days to get to us.

But are all of these services Ontarian or even Canadian? The answer is no. Where do we buy our seeds, our soil supplements, the materials for packaging from? Is the cleaning process completed in Ontario?

According to federal data, we do not process enough of what we grow. A lot of our food, while grown here, is sold to other countries to process, then brought back to us. Some 70% of our soybeans, for example, are said to be shipped abroad for processing. It has been estimated that Canada could add billions in annual GDP through really honing our food processing. Maybe we'll see that in another bill.

This is not because we do not have the talent. Ontario is overflowing with talent, innovative minds and skilful hands that are ready to step up to fill this gap in our supply chain. What we need is infrastructure. This bill is an amazing way to shore up Ontario's agribusiness to ensure that we grow and buy locally, but let's not forget the many steps in between farm to fork. This bill should act as a starting point to ensure that we grow, process, package, transport, distribute and buy locally.

Agriculture is not an easy job. Farmers and everyone across the agriculture sector—researchers, food safety and compliance inspectors and more—all carry the weight of Ontario on their backs. If their harvest does not take, not only can they not afford their bills, but Ontario does not eat. That is why I always say we need better education and awareness campaigns. Children and adults need to understand how their food gets into our grocery stores and onto their tables—we know farmers feed cities—because it is hard and it is back-breaking and it is stressful on the farmers.

The plants and the animals that feed us, they are alive. This is why they are nutritious, because they, like us, have cells and vitamins that we need—that our bodies make us stronger. Research shows time and time again that when we understand where our food comes from, we are more thankful. We take less and waste less. I know this government is very worried about their landfill sites, so they might support my phasing-out-organics-from-landfills private member's bill.

We are smarter with where and how we buy because we know that, in one way or another, someone or something gave their life for this. This is where education, specifically outdoor education, is an extremely powerful tool. Students are permitted to get out on the land, observe how plants grow and the conditions that they have to endure to flourish. They can learn how it affects the environment by removing living things for our consumption. When students are exposed to the environment, they understand how truly remarkable it is and that it is to be revered, and that every meal consumed should be done with gratitude.

Relatedly, urban farming and gardening is a strong method of achieving the goal of gratitude and greater understanding. Communities that garden their own food gain insight into the hard work and dedication it takes to grow what you eat. It brings communities together because you become accountable to each other to care for one another's crops, and you also understand how things that you do with your own plants can affect others. Soil is permeable and roots spread throughout, so there is nothing you can administer to your plant that won't affect others.

Understanding this is a lesson in caring for those around you but also puts things in perspective to the difficulties to success that farmers are up against, knowing that one variable can change everything.

With that, let's talk a bit about the climate emergency and adaptation. Agriculture takes place on the land and depends on the health of the soil, availability of water and is extremely vulnerable to weather patterns. I know how much this government cares about climate action and is very cognizant of the climate emergency we are in.

I think that essential to this conversation, however—and I would be remiss not to mention this—are Indigenous partnerships. Time and time again, we have heard and witnessed how Indigenous peoples' relations to the environment and to food systems are intricate and go beyond a one-sided transaction. They stewarded the land and water and all its inhabitants successfully for centuries prior to colonial settlers. If we want any shot at sustainably innovating, feeding our communities and caring for the environment, Indigenous peoples must be asked not only to share their knowledge in partnership, but there is also the question of land ownership and treaty rights. No amount of time or words can erase the horrific actions of settler colonial power, however, actions that recognize and respect treaty rights as well as proactively and consistently engage in equal partnerships with First Nations.

Reports aptly note, "nearly all land targeted for expansion lies within Treaty 9 territory, much of it crown land (nearly 95 per cent is crown land in northern Ontario) subject to unresolved land claims. Despite this, agriculture in Ontario has historically operated without the clear(er) consultation and consent frameworks that govern sectors such as mining or forestry. Interviews show that there is widespread uncertainty among municipalities and industry actors regarding which First Nations must be consulted and how consent should be obtained. Further, there is little discussion of revenue sharing arrangements, co-governance, or long-term Indigenous authority over converted lands."

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I'm just mindful of my time.

I want to make it clear I'm not in any way, shape or form against the bill or slowing it down. But it has been said countless times inside and outside this House that it is a lot harder to retroactively correct an issue, and in some cases, a mistake creates irreparable damage. I'm just urging this government to go about this bill in a very thoughtful way, a safe way and the correct way so we get it right the first time.

I'm happy to support this bill, especially if those in agribusiness were consulted and feel that the amendments align with their priorities and needs. That is the main concern always. There are so many strides towards a better, more food-independent and secure Ontario in this bill and also many starting points for how we can continue this work. You heard some ideas from the fine member from Timiskaming–Cochrane.

I assert again that essential to this work is climate action. Without healthy soil, predictable—for the most part—weather and adequate access to clean water, we simply cannot grow life, livestock cannot thrive and we as humans will not survive.

I hope that this bill's mention of drainage and the importance of climate-resilient infrastructure to support agricultural processes necessitates a greater discussion of climate action going beyond drainage—though very important—to understand how the fundamental existence of an agriculture industry depends on a healthy planet that is not plagued by wildfires that ravage fields, floods that wipe out soil nutrients and then droughts that dry out the crops. I want nothing more than a safe and secure environment that is a home for agriculture to thrive. I just want it to be done right the first time and to truly benefit Ontarians according to their wants and needs.

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

Mr. Ted Hsu: I want to thank my colleague the marvellous member for Beaches–East York for her remarks and for the unique way that she always contributes to caucus discussions about any issue.

Speaker, Ontario's Liberals support Ontario's agri-food sector, and we will be supporting Bill 109 at third reading.

I'm very glad that the government decided to hold public hearings on this bill, as so many bills skipped public hearings and clause-by-clause consideration at committee in the spring, including the budget bill. So I'm very glad that this bill went to committee and went to public hearings. I'm going to be talking in my speech about the suggestions that were made at committee, and I'm going to be kind of synthesizing what was said in committee by the witnesses.

One thing I want to mention is that I think there were some unexpected things that were brought up at committee, at the public hearings as we travelled across the province, and that really showed the benefits of going out, talking to the public, listening. We would have found that the things that the public wanted to talk about kind of went beyond the scope of the bill, which is interesting, because it tells us what sort of things we should be careful about or planning for in the future. So I'm going to take the opportunity in my speech to make some suggestions going forward based on what members heard at committee in eastern Ontario, southwestern Ontario and northern Ontario.

Protecting prime farmland was a key theme in the committee hearings. This is no longer just a balance between development and protecting prime farmland. Much of Canada's best farmland is now called Toronto or Mississauga. We have had decades and decades of urban sprawl, and it's time, really, I think—and I think farmers know this—to draw a line to avoid going any further down that slippery slope of losing good farmland to urban or industrial development. There are only going to be a few exceptional reasons to cross that line. I think it's important that going forward, we try to establish a line. We have to hold the line.

I think that this government doesn't think long-term, and I think that they're missing the long-term development

pressure on farmland. It's relentless. Unless we draw a line, the pressure is going to keep building. We're going to keep losing farmland. We're going to keep having urban sprawl. We're going to keep losing key ecological resources, like wetlands or even grasslands. I think Ontario only has something like 3% of the grasslands that it started with. That pressure is going to arise from projects like Highway 413.

I have a feeling that the Premier doesn't fully understand the dangers posed by urban sprawl. I think he seems to never ask himself the question, "What does our best farmland look like, not today but in the year 2100?" We will still need to eat in the 22nd century. What we're doing now is we're losing farmland. We need to be careful about that. I think it's about time. We've already lost a lot of good farmland, and it is time to draw the line.

The next point, Speaker, is that we heard in our committees that a simplistic ban on foreign beneficial ownership of farmland will run into problems, and it doesn't even address the main issue, that we're losing our best farmland to urban sprawl, to development.

There are immigrants who come here to farm, and they might need to buy land first. That was one point that we heard. There are capital-intensive parts of agriculture. I'd say any young farmer starting out is going to need a lot of capital, but there are capital-intensive parts of agriculture that would be hampered by lack of access to global capital markets. So foreign beneficial ownership is something that, if you regulate it carefully, if you control it, can actually help with investment in the agri-food sector and help grow that sector.

We also know that beneficial ownership tracing needs some work before it's ready, and I'm glad that the government tabled legislation recently—many, many schedules in the two bills that the government has recently tabled, but one of them is about setting up a framework for being better able to trace beneficial ownership, something that Canada hasn't been very good at in the past.

So my advice to the government is, don't start clamping down on foreign beneficial ownership of farmland just for some populist political gain. Think about what is best—what is best for the public good. Be smart and figure out when foreign beneficial really hurts or perhaps helps the public good.

The third point I want to make is to listen to the debate between small and large dairy processors on the effect of regulations affecting the pricing of imported ingredients containing milk. Again, be smart about it, and make sure that whatever the eventual regulations are we look at the different consumers of that imported milk, the processors that turn it into a higher-value-added product. Be smart about it, and make sure that the eventual regulations take into account the whole sector and are best for Ontario's economy overall.

We know that these days, farms are increasing in size in order to survive. One of the things that was discussed at committee was the selling of crown land for farming. That is something where, potentially, farms could increase in size and become a little more financially viable.

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One thing I would suggest to the government, which came up in committee, is to consider putting a farmland easement on crown land when it is sold to allay fears that that land could some day be lost to development. A farmland easement is basically a legal structure where somebody owns land, but they don't have the right to develop it, and that right is kind of put aside and can never be used. When crown land gets sold, there's always concern that, at some point in the future, that land might get developed and we might lose the prime farmland.

A farmland easement is something that exists in many parts of Ontario already. In fact, this brings to mind when I visited a place called Swan Lake near Caledon. There was a farm right beside, which I was looking at, where the owners had actually put an easement on their land. So whoever owns the land in the future, they can only farm it; they can't sell it to put in a new subdivision.

When I raised this idea at committee hearings, there didn't seem to be any objections to this idea, so I think it might be a good thing to do.

Now, I want to give the government some directions on appointments to tribunals. One of the schedules in Bill 109 merges the Normal Farm Practices Protection Board into the Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Appeal Tribunal. I care about this because I had a private member's bill to depoliticize how adjudicators for Ontario's tribunals are appointed. It was Bill 179 in the last Parliament, Fewer Backlogs and Less Partisan Tribunals Act, 2024. With the merging of the Normal Farm Practices Protection Board into the Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Appeal Tribunal, the government has to make sure that when it appoints adjudicators, the range of experience of adjudicators covers the scope of the two current tribunals. We want to make sure that some of the adjudicators have that farm practices background.

This government has caused some trouble for itself in the past, unfortunately, when it did not fill empty adjudicator positions, for example, in the Landlord and Tenant Board, which aggravated the problem of delays. It did not reappoint qualified adjudicators who wanted to continue, and they waited to fill them with appointments, some of which were patronage appointments. My advice to the government is to please avoid doing that. Make sure that, after the Normal Farm Practices Protection Board is absorbed, the new tribunal always has some adjudicators familiar with farm practices.

Next point is—and I don't need to remind the government of this; I'm kind of saying it for the benefit of everybody—don't forget about the shortage of large animal veterinarians. Bill 109 addresses this, but the problem is not going away overnight. It's not going away because of one bill.

I'm saying this in case somebody lives in an urban area and hasn't heard this before. If you live in Toronto, urban Toronto, downtown Toronto, your attention might be on bike lanes, or if you live further afield in the GTA, it might be on the Bradford Bypass. The shortage of large animal vets is a nagging issue in the farming community, just as

much as being stuck in traffic in Toronto is if you live in the big city.

The next point, and the final main point, is, as the committee travelled across the province and we went to Smiths Falls, Timmins and then several places in south-western Ontario, I got the sense that many of our witnesses, many farmers, wanted to talk about subjects beyond the scope of the bill. And because this bill wasn't particularly controversial, the committee kind of opened up, and we talked about whatever the witnesses wanted to talk about.

There are a lot of ideas out there on how the government could help the agri-food sector grow, some innovative things that we could do to help this sector. The agri-food sector is the biggest economic sector in the province. To help this sector grow and flourish in the coming decades—not today, not next year, but in the decades to come, because this sector is going to be very important to Ontario's economy forever.

So my advice to the government is to listen to producers, large and small. The ideas are out there. They go well beyond the scope of Bill 109, but the direction for government is to keep going out there and collecting ideas, think about them, debate them and put them together into a vision for the future of Ontario.

Nobody has a monopoly on good, innovative ideas, so you've got to continue to go out there and get those ideas. Because of that, Speaker, Bill 109 is not the end of anything; it's a stop on the road. It cleans a number of things up, but I hope that we continue forward with a vision. I hope this government tries to put together a long-term vision for Ontario's agri-food sector, and a vision for the role of this sector in making Ontario the best place to live in the world for generations to come.

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

MPP Susan Lahey: My question is for the member from Beaches–East York.

The Ontario Food Terminal is critical to our produce industry, moving billions of dollars in fresh food every year. Yet the board lacks the modern financial tools needed to manage such a massive operation. Without clear authority to establish a dedicated capital fund for major repairs, we risk the long-term reliability of this essential hub. Our proposed changes would allow the food terminal to plan and remain a world-class facility.

Can the member opposite explain why they would oppose giving this vital board the tools it needs to protect Ontario's food distribution network?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member for—no?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Beaches–East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: See how polite we are over here to each other?

To the new member from York–Simcoe, welcome to the Pink Palace.

I'm not sure where in my speech you heard that I was against the changes to the food terminal. The Ontario Food Terminal is vitally important. It's great. It's located in Etobicoke, but it is vitally important to all of Ontario. It is run fairly well. It's phenomenal, and we absolutely support the changes you're making to the food terminal.

I'm not sure where you got that information, but we're supporting this bill. Thank you for that.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I want to thank and congratulate the members for their great presentations today and also commend them on their truly Canadian moment when they were offering the opportunity to respond one before the other.

First of all, our member from Timiskaming–Cochrane spoke about how great the farmland is that we have in southern Ontario and how it is truly a gem amongst this world when you look at all the places where you could grow. And of course, we have a government that had a huge appetite to get rid of the greenbelt. Perhaps, in their defence, when they accept so much money from these developer friends and donors, it becomes hard for them to want to protect this beautiful farmland. But can you tell them why it is so important to protect this green space and why it's incomprehensible to know that over 320 acres are being lost a day under this government?

Mr. Ted Hsu: What I said in my speech—I'm hoping that the Premier or maybe people in the Premier's office will pass this on to him. You've got to ask the question: In the year 2100, what's our prime farmland going to look like? Where is our food going to come from? I'm hoping the Premier will ask that question.

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When it comes to the greenbelt, it goes beyond that. Southern Ontario has lost three quarters of its wetlands, and these wetlands provide an essential ecological service: purifying our water and ensuring that we have a diverse ecosystem, a diversity of species.

All of this put together, the problem is the trend that we're losing green spaces, and I don't know how people are going to live decades from now if we don't stop that trend.

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

Mr. Adil Shamji: I'd like to acknowledge the insightful remarks of my two colleagues, the member for Beaches–East York as well as the member for Kingston and the Islands. I also acknowledge their truly remarkable collegiality and their enthusiasm for responding to questions during this debate.

This particular question is for the member for Kingston and the Islands, who is our critic for agriculture and whose advocacy for the farming community is truly remarkable and, I know, has been acknowledged by many within the agricultural sector.

To that member: I know you are quite keen to elaborate on the member for Beaches–East York's response to the Ontario Food Terminal, and I wondered if you'd share a few additional insights on that.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Yes, I am a big supporter of the food terminal, a big supporter of markets where there's price discovery. The food terminal is a wonderful place to find out what is the right price now for a zucchini of a certain size and what's the supply and demand of different kinds and sizes of fruits and vegetables.

My colleague the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore, is also a big supporter of the food terminal. In fact, she has been trying to help the food terminal do that kind of expansion in terms of space and making sure that some residences didn't take over some of the land nearby and build, thereby preventing the food terminal from expanding.

The food terminal also helps with affordability. You get fair market prices. That's what price discovery is all about. The Premier was threatening to maybe move the food terminal some day; I hope the Premier never brings that up again.

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

Hon. Mike Harris: To the member from Kingston and the Islands, I appreciate his questions and comments appearing here today. During his speech, he was talking about crown land. Obviously, our ministry oversees crown land here in the province—70% of Ontario's land mass is crown land; it's incredible, the size and breadth of the province of Ontario. One of the things that we're really looking to do when we're talking about agriculture is expanding agricultural lands in northern Ontario in the Great Clay Belt. It is a big piece of what we're going to be doing over the next little while to look at ways that we can become more food secure, look at sovereignty for our food chains here in Ontario, but also making sure that we're able to unleash the economic potential of northern Ontario. Agriculture is a huge player in that space.

I'd be very interested to learn a little bit more about what the member thinks. I heard his comments about crown land, specifically about development in the future—but about whether or not he would support farmers being able to expand their operations in northern Ontario to provide for the economy good jobs right in the north?

Mr. Ted Hsu: One interesting thing is if you look at a map—you could probably do this with Google Earth—and you look at northeastern Ontario and you just go a little bit east, where the political boundary is between Ontario and Quebec, you'll see that on the Quebec side there's already a lot of farming. So I think it's very natural that on the Ontario side we also look at the same thing.

But while I have the minister's attention, I do want to draw the minister's attention to this idea that when we develop the land—and I don't mean building houses. But when we expand farms in that area, consider putting a farmland easement on the land so that we know that land is going to continue as farmland and not be turned into some sort of industrial or housing development at some point in the far future.

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

MPP Fatima Shaban: Thank you, Speaker—

Interjections.

MPP Fatima Shaban: This is just a question, not the speech yet.

I have a question for my colleague the member from Beaches–East York. Of course, our ridings are very close to each other, and in my riding of Scarborough Southwest, there is an increasing number of people who are using food banks. The numbers are staggering—pretty much record-breaking.

I am wondering if the member from Beaches–East York can explain why they think that the government is not taking this crisis seriously.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A quick response from the member for Beaches–East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Well, I'm not in the heads of the government, thank God, but I just feel a universal basic income would be a big solution. It would go a long way to solving a lot of the crises that especially affect our vulnerable populations in both our ridings.

And welcome to the new member. I'm very excited to have you here.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): There's not enough time for another question.

Further debate?

MPP Fatima Shaban: Speaker, it is an extraordinary honour to deliver my inaugural speech in this House as a member of provincial Parliament for Scarborough Southwest.

First, I want to thank the people of Scarborough Southwest for placing their trust in me. Thank you to every resident who opened their door, shared their concerns and gave me the opportunity to represent this beautiful community.

To the hundreds of volunteers who gave their evenings, weekends and countless hours to our campaign, thank you. We have someone in the House here who has worked so tirelessly on our campaign. Thank you. You knocked on the doors after long days at work, made phone calls, put up signs and helped us reach people across our community. I am deeply grateful to each of you.

I also want to extend a very special thank you to our leader, Marit Stiles. Marit, thank you for believing in me, for your encouragement and for showing up day after day throughout this campaign. Your support meant more to me than you know, and I am incredibly grateful to have you as our leader.

I also want to thank our Scarborough Southwest NDP riding association. Your dedication and hard work, not just during the campaign but over the years, have kept the NDP spirit alive and strong in our community. You have built relationships, brought people together and laid the foundation that made this victory possible.

And to my colleagues in the Ontario NDP, thank you for welcoming me so warmly. I am proud to serve alongside you.

To my husband, Jamal, thank you for standing beside me throughout this journey. And to my two beautiful children, Amir Jacob and Violet, who are still young enough that they may not fully understand why their mother is spending so much time at Queen's Park, I hope that one day you will understand what this moment means.

And I want to thank God for the blessings, strength and opportunities that have brought me here today.

Although I am the one standing here today, I did not arrive here alone. I was born in Martin, Slovakia. My mother was Slovak, with Ukrainian and Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry, and my father is Egyptian. My grandfather was a war veteran who fought against the Nazis during the Second World War. He was a fighter, and I take great pride in knowing that courage and determination are part of my family's history. So I grew up with a rather interesting mix of cultures, religions, histories and traditions. As you can imagine, enough different backgrounds in one family can make for some very interesting dinner conversations.

I have always considered that part of my upbringing a gift, and I am grateful to live in a province where so many people have similarly rich and varied histories.

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But growing up in Slovakia was not always easy. Because of my Egyptian heritage, I experienced racism and discrimination on a daily basis. I was born there, but I often felt that I did not belong. My mother saw what I was experiencing, and she wanted something different for me. She wanted me to grow up somewhere I could be accepted, where I would not have to spend my life feeling like an outsider. So in 2008, when I was 14 years old, my mother and I came to Canada.

Our journey was not straightforward. For nearly a decade, our immigration status remained uncertain. I remember being a teenage girl, going to school, making friends, building a life in Scarborough and then being told that I might have to leave the country. I remember being asked to pack my life into a 23-kilogram suitcase. Imagine being 16 years old and trying to decide what parts of your life you can fit into one suitcase: your clothes, your photographs, the little things that mean everything to you. And then, imagine having to do it again because the threat of deportation had returned. For years, that was the uncertainty my mother and I lived with. I was building a life in a country I had come to call home, never entirely certain that I would be allowed to stay.

It took nearly a decade for me to obtain permanent residency, but life continued while we waited. I worked throughout high school and university, sometimes holding multiple jobs at once, doing everything from physically demanding work to administrative and professional roles. I eventually graduated from the University of Toronto, just down the street, where I studied criminology, economics, political science and history. Later, I worked in financial and administrative review, where I developed an appreciation for accountability, careful judgment and the importance of examining results rather than simply accepting good intentions.

But Speaker, some of the most important experiences that shaped me came from life outside of the classroom and workplace. I want to take you back to April 8, 2022. On that day, I sat down and wrote an email to my MPP at the time, Doly Begum. It read, "Dear MPP Begum,

"I am writing to you in regards to my mother's urgent situation.

"My mother is in urgent need of access to immunotherapy, which is not covered by OHIP. She is battling stage 4 uterine carcinosarcoma, a very aggressive cancer. She has exhausted all conventional treatment options and now needs to start immunotherapy.

"The treatment is called pembrolizumab and costs approximately $12,000 every three weeks.

"This is a very large amount of money and is unsustainable for our family, since my mother is unable to work and I have just had a baby and am a stay-at-home mom."

Speaker, on my very first day in this Legislature, I heard my colleagues speak about the people who were dying while waiting to access treatment, and I want this House to know that I do not take this conversation lightly, because I was that daughter. I was the daughter desperately advocating for her mother, hoping that someone would listen. I know, in a deeply personal way, how the decisions made in this chamber affect people's lives.

Four months later, my mother passed away. Speaker, my mom was my best friend in the whole world. For many years, she was my entire family here in Canada. We came here together, faced years of uncertainty together and built our lives together. When she became seriously ill, I became her palliative caregiver. I cared for her in our home during the final moments of her life, and that experience changed me.

Speaker, we are fortunate to have a publicly funded health care system in this province, but when someone is facing a time-sensitive illness, access to care must also be timely. With cancer, every week matters. Families cannot always afford to wait for the system to respond.

The decisions we make in this House carry enormous weight. They have consequences that extend far beyond this chamber, and sometimes those consequences stay with families for the rest of their lives.

Speaker, while families gather around their Christmas tables with the people they love, for my family, there are footsteps in the snow leading to my mother's grave at Thornton cemetery in Oshawa. It looks like a grandmother that never got to meet her granddaughter.

For me, caring for my mother and advocating for her lit a fire in me that has never gone away. I know what it feels like to be on the other side of a government decision, waiting for help, knowing that time is running out.

I wish more than anything that my mother could be here to see me standing in this Legislature today. I think she would be proud. But I think she would also remind me that what matters most is not simply that I made it here, but what I choose to do now that I'm here.

Speaker, I'm proud to be a New Democrat, and I'm proud to serve alongside colleagues who share my commitment to building a better Ontario. I believe that a strong economy and public services are not competing priorities. A healthy, educated population is essential to a productive economy, just as a prosperous economy provides the resources needed to sustain the services people depend on.

We cannot build a prosperous province without investing in its people, and we cannot sustain those investments

without a strong, productive economy. Our responsibility is to do both and to be accountable for the results. And I believe good government requires us to look beyond intentions and examine results. Are our decisions improving people's lives? Are we using public resources effectively? And are we listening to the people affected by those decisions?

I came to the Legislature with my own experiences and conviction, but also with an open mind. I believe in the strength of an idea. I believe that the strength of an idea should matter more than which side of the chamber it comes from. Good ideas deserve serious consideration, wherever they originate. And I extend an invitation to all my colleagues in this House: Never hesitate to reach out to me. I am here to work constructively with members from all sides in this chamber to deliver meaningful results for the people of Scarborough Southwest.

I want to tell this House a little more about the community that sent me here. I often describe Scarborough Southwest as a snapshot of Canada within a single riding. We have newcomers and families who have lived here for generations. We have people from different cultures, faiths and walks of life. And I would argue that we have some of the best food in the entire province.

During my campaign, I remember asking volunteers who had worked in other ridings what they thought made Scarborough Southwest different, and one of them said something that stayed with me. They said, "Huh, this is a suburban community, but somehow it feels like a small town." I thought that was a remarkably accurate description. People know their neighbours. Children grow up together. Families build friendships through their schools, local businesses and community organizations. And people put down roots. I know that because I am one of them. I arrived here at 14 years old, grew up here, built my friendships here, and today, I'm raising my own children in the very same apartment where I spent my teenage years.

Speaker, one of the things that inspires me most about Scarborough Southwest is how much people are willing to give of themselves for their community. I think about Regent Heights Public School and the mothers who spend countless hours organizing school fairs, weekly pizza lunches, events and fundraisers. These parents have responsibilities of their own, yet they dedicate their time to creating opportunities for all the children in school, not just their own.

I think about residents who have organized around concerns about proposed data centres, taking time to research planning decisions, attend meetings and advocate for their neighbourhoods.

And I think about the tenants in my own apartment building. When our corporate landlord pursued above-guideline rent increases, residents came together to challenge them. Some were seniors living on fixed incomes facing retroactive rent bills amounting to thousands of dollars. Rather than face those challenges alone, neighbours organized, shared information, attended meetings and supported one another. And across Scarborough, other tenants have done the same.

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Speaker, these experiences taught me something about the community I call home. When people see something that needs to change, they don't always wait for someone else to take care of it. They get involved, and that spirit of community involvement is part of what brought me into public life.

I want to leave this House with a picture of what life looks like in my little corner of Scarborough Southwest: Imagine a warm evening in August. The sun is beginning to set, and behind my apartment building, the little park is full of life. Children are running back and forth. Bicycles are scattered across the grass. Someone has hopefully brought a ball, and before long, half the children are playing together. Parents are sitting outside, catching up on their day. Someone has brought a Thermos of hot tea. Neighbours are sharing stories, laughing, watching the children, talking about politics, enjoying the last few hours of a summer evening. And the beautiful thing is that nobody really had to organize any of it. There was no invitation, no scheduled gathering, no elaborate plan. People simply came downstairs.

I live in an apartment building where our neighbours have become an extension of my family. My children do not need me to arrange play dates weeks in advance. They just come home from school and ask if they can go see their friends who live just a few doors away or a few floors above us. They grow up surrounded by other children, by families who know them and by adults who look out for one another. And yes, Speaker, sometimes we are all a little too involved in each other's business.

But I wouldn't have it any other way, because what we have is something that money alone cannot buy. We have belonging. We have friendships that develop naturally across generations and cultures, and we have neighbours who know that when life becomes difficult, they do not have to face it alone.

There is extraordinary value in the communities people build within these buildings. And I want this House to understand that when we talk about housing, neighbourhoods and public services, we are not simply talking about buildings or budgets. We are talking about people's lives, the places where children grow up, where friendships form and where families build memories that last a lifetime.

Speaker, I do not want this House to know Scarborough Southwest only through the challenges we face. I want you to know the people. The people who build businesses, raise families, welcome newcomers, volunteer at schools and stand up for their neighbours, because those are the people I have the privilege of representing.

I was born in a country where I experienced racism and struggled to find a sense of belonging. I came to Canada in search of a better future only to spend years fighting for the right to remain in the country I've come to call home. And today, I stand in this Legislature as the opposition critic for citizenship, multiculturalism, equity and anti-racism. There is something profoundly meaningful about that journey, and I carry those experiences with me not simply as memories of the past but as a reminder of the responsibility I have been entrusted with today.

My mother did not live to see this day, but everything she taught me and everything we experienced together comes with me into this chamber. And when I think about my own children growing up in the same apartment where I spent my teenage years, I hope that one day they will look back and know that their mother used this opportunity to make a meaningful difference.

Speaker, I may have been born thousands of kilometres away, but I am a Scarborough kid. This community raised me, its people shaped me, and to the people of Scarborough Southwest, I want you to know that I will give this responsibility everything I have. I cannot think of a greater honour.

Applause

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

M^me^ Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I'm honoured to ask the first question to the new member from Scarborough Southwest.

I listened intently to your inaugural speech. Thank you for telling us so much about yourself. First off, my condolences on your mom. It's always difficult to lose a mother, so my condolences.

My question to you: When you were talking about university life, it sounds like you had four majors. I think I heard some technology; I heard some literature in there. Tell us a bit about why four majors.

MPP Fatima Shaban: Thank you to the member for Newmarket–Aurora for listening so closely to what I was saying. I truly appreciate it.

I went to the University of Toronto here at St. George, and I studied interdisciplinary programs. I was in international relations. And as part of that international relations program, we had to of course study economics, political science and history. At U of T, you can do two majors as part of your degree, or you can do a specialist degree, or you can do a major and two minors.

So I started out in international relations, and then my second major was in criminology and socio-legal studies. I took a lot of different courses as well, and took perhaps not a very traditional path, because towards the end of my degree my mom was very sick and I was also pregnant. So I had to adjust my degree requirements and all of those things. But I took many different courses, and I think that just makes me a lot better at understanding the people that I'm serving.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I couldn't be prouder of our new member for Scarborough Southwest for that wonderful inaugural speech.

I wanted to ask the member—she spoke with such love and affection for her mother. Clearly, her mother was a strong woman who left Slovakia and moved to a new country, new language, with her daughter. So we know that the member's mother was a strong influence on her life. I wondered if she would want to share perhaps other people that she encountered to get her here who were also an influence on her journey.

MPP Fatima Shaban: Thank you for the question. Oh, my goodness. I got advice from my campaign manager, who was absolutely fabulous. On the night when I won, she said, "Fatima, don't start naming people because you will never end. And if you forget someone, then people might get upset."

But there are, of course, influential people on my journey, whether it was across high school—I had a really great guidance counsellor. Her name was Mrs. Noble, and she was truly instrumental in the way that I was able to succeed throughout my studies.

On my way through my political career, I wouldn't be here without a man called Bob Spencer, who is a proud New Democrat and has been serving our community for decades.

So there are, of course, people who have been very instrumental. But I would be here all day because, as I mentioned, I do not have a family in Canada, other than, now, my husband and my children. So the people that I meet I cling to very closely, and that is how I feel about my community, because they've become my family.

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

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I'd like to congratulate the member from Scarborough Southwest on her inaugural remarks. It's kind of heartening that we've got now another member of—an unofficial that maybe we'll make a little bit more official with a few meetings—our central and southeastern European caucus, with myself and the member from Humber River–Black Creek and yourself and the member from Pickering–Uxbridge, and I know a couple of other members in this House as well.

In the spirit of that, is there a favourite memory that you might like to share about your mom or about that side of your family?

MPP Fatima Shaban: Yes, of course. Now I just get a rush of memories, and it's hard to pick one. But there are a lot of amazing things and traditions that we had growing up in Slovakia.

We also get a lot of snow; we had snow everywhere. We didn't have the truck that would pull the snow away from the roads, so oftentimes you could get a snow sled and you would take your kids to school on a snow sled. I remember my mom pulling me when I was a toddler. It was just a very fond memory that I keep very close to my heart.

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My mom was also a woman of God, so we went to church very often. She was Catholic, and oftentimes we would go to Catholic church on Christmas for a midnight mass. It feels a bit lonely now because whenever Christmas comes, I don't have anyone else to go with me at night.

Yes, those are my very nice memories. Thank you.

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

Mr. Jeff Beattie: Congratulations to the new member from Scarborough Southwest—as one of the three that was recently welcomed into the chamber, a special congratula-

tions and perhaps a shared kinship for the remainder of this session.

In the last few minutes, Speaker, I'm wondering—the member, I think, mentioned the best food is in Scarborough Southwest but didn't really elaborate. It would be unfair to have the member single out one restaurant or eating establishment. Perhaps the member might give us a top three or a top five of some of the best food picks in Scarborough Southwest.

MPP Fatima Shaban: Oh, you really put me on the spot here. But thank you so much for the question, member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

I would say there is a restaurant close to my office now. It's called Sisaket. They have amazing Thai food. Oh, my goodness. We really have so many. We have amazing Bangladeshi food; Kalyani, which is South Indian food; Sedaghat, which is Afghani food. Oh, my gosh—so many. If I start naming them, I might be in trouble in my own riding, so maybe I stop now. Thank you.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I also want to congratulate the member. We are so, so proud of you.

You spoke about your young children, and I can sympathize because I'm a parent of young children as well. So first of all, I'd like to give you a warning: Tape the red button in your office—you know, the security one—when you bring your kids here.

That leads me to my question: How many times have your children had a chance to come to this great place, what do they think of it and have they had a chance to run in the main hallway? Because they may try to do that, so I'm preparing you for that, okay?

MPP Fatima Shaban: Thank you for that question. They were here only one time. It was for my swearing in. They almost brought the house down, so I might wait a few more years or months before I invite them back. It's a few elections into the future, not any time soon. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A very quick question from the Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity.

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: Congratulations. Welcome to Queen's Park. Being the minister for women, it is extremely important for me to recognize that being a woman in politics, you're charting new territories, and you are also inspiring a generation of leaders.

So what would you say very quickly to women who are thinking about politics and want to follow in your footsteps?

MPP Fatima Shaban: I would very quickly say, know that you belong here. Know that you belong in every room that you walk into. I would say, fight for the issues that you care about, and it might lead you to somewhere amazing.

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

Mr. Steve Pinsonneault: Hi everyone. I want to start by talking about what truly powers this province: our rural communities and our agricultural families.

Let's be clear about what agriculture means to Ontario. Farming is not just an essential tradition; it's an absolute powerhouse in Ontario. It contributes $52 billion directly to our provincial economy, and it sustains one in every nine jobs right across our province. When our farmers thrive, Ontario thrives. When our food supply faces global bottlenecks and unfair trade pressures, every single family in this province pays the price.

That is why our government refuses to let our agricultural sector fall behind. We believe that to protect our economy and keep our province competitive we must invest heavily in food security and protect our land. Prime agricultural soil is not just open acreage; it is the very foundation of our long-term economic independence.

That is exactly why we are debating the Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act, 2026. We are here today to protect Ontario's food security and make sure the land that feeds us stays in productive hands. Today our government is introducing decisive legislation to support our farmers and safeguard domestic food production.

For generations our agricultural land has been the base of Ontario, and the truth is simple: Farmland is under growing threat from speculative foreign capital. Once prime land is bought up and taken out of food production, it is lost for good. Hard-working farmers are being held back by outdated red tape and unfair regulatory burdens. To fix this, the province of Ontario is stepping up with a bold common-sense plan. We are proposing the Farmland Security Act to give Ontario the authority to restrict the foreign ownership of farmland. Five other Canadian provinces and nearly 30 US states have already put these protections in place. We are making sure that Ontario farmland is not treated as a line item on an overseas corporation balance sheet, but actively feeds our communities.

Let's look at the specific details, because the approach is practical and balanced. The legislation is forward-thinking and will apply strictly to future acquisitions once regulations are set. It will not impact current farmland owners and it will not restrict Canadian citizens or permanent residents. We will back this up with serious enforcement, including fines up to $500,000 for individuals and $1 million for corporations that violate the rules.

Food security is economic security, and we are putting farmers first. At the same time we protect our land, we are refreshing the Grow Ontario Strategy. Originally launched in 2022, this plan has delivered strong, tangible momentum across the sector. Last year alone, Ontario agri-food exports reached nearly $28 billion.

But trade environments shift, and we are updating strategy to meet today's realities head-on. We are focusing on supply chain stability, lowering input costs and expanding processing capacity right here in Ontario. We are setting clear performance targets so we can adapt and keep growers competitive globally.

When people see the Ontario brand, they know it represents a global standard for safety and quality. We are backing this strategy with substantial provincial investments. In our provincial budget we committed an additional $61.5 million into Agricultural Research and

Innovation Ontario. That brings our total research investment to over $100 million over the next decade. This supports 14 specialized research stations and more than 5,600 acres of field trials right across Ontario. It delivers practical, science-based tools to help farmers lower costs, combat crop disease and increase yields.

I also want to highlight a massive economic opportunity that has been overlooked for far too long: northern Ontario agriculture. In the Great Clay Belt there are roughly 11 million acres of productive, fertile land waiting to be developed. We are partnering across ministries to create a single-window contact to cut through government bureaucracy for northern applicants.

We are working with the Beef Farmers of Ontario to expand livestock grazing on crown land. Expanding northern beef production creates local jobs, builds up processing facilities and reduces reliance on out-of-province imports. We will do this work responsibly, fully respecting Aboriginal treaty rights and existing land uses. Northern Ontario already generates over $238 million in annual farm cash crop receipts, and room for growth is immense.

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In addition to large-scale growth, this legislation tackles day-to-day headaches for producers on the ground. We are updating the Beef Cattle Marketing Act to fix an outdated fee loophole. Right now, when beef is produced privately, mandatory research and promotional check-off fees are missed. We are levelling the playing field for all producers while protecting a clear personal-use exemption for up to two head of cattle per farmer. We are also removing unnecessary registry requirements for beef processing plants to eliminate redundant paperwork.

Finally, we are cutting red tape in agricultural disputes. Today, if a farmer, a neighbour or a rural municipality has an issue, they have to navigate two separate boards. We are merging the Normal Farm Practices Protection Board and the appeal tribunal into one single body, the Agriculture and Agri-food Protection Tribunal—a single tribunal, one clear set of rules, faster decisions, less bureaucracy and less money wasted on administrative hearings.

This bill is about the big picture, protecting Ontario's food independence and about securing our province's economic future. It's about protecting the land that feeds our families, cutting red tape and standing firmly behind agricultural workers. We have a vision for a strong, self-reliant, competitive agri-food sector in Ontario, and we're going to deliver it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Questions?

Ms. Jessica Bell: This bill is interesting to me, the Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act. I'm curious to know from the member opposite what the government's interest is in bringing in stronger Buy-Ontario food policies into this act or in related acts. The reason why I think this is so important is because we actually don't buy a lot of Ontario food in Ontario. A lot of governments, municipalities, hospitals and schools don't buy a lot of Ontario food, and if we set some real targets it could be a real benefit to farmers across Ontario.

My question to you is, is that something that the government is looking at considering?

Mr. Steve Pinsonneault: That is why we are updating the Ontario grow strategy. At a time of global unrest, it's more important than ever to work closely with the farmers and the food producers, as you're alluding to, to protect the agriculture sector. We're undertaking a mid-term review of the Grow Ontario Strategy to address these new pressures, build resiliency and ensure our sector remains sustainable for the long term. We're engaging directly with farmers, processors and business to shape our path moving forward from this point on. This work will help build a more competitive, self-reliant agriculture economy and set the direction for years to come.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Further questions?

Mr. Chris Glover: I appreciate the member's comments, particularly around protecting farmland in Ontario, but this government's got a terrible record around protecting farmland. We're losing now, according to Statistics Canda, 319 acres of farmland per day in Ontario, and this government is building the 413. The 413 is one thing; that's the highway—that's going to be 2,000 acres that will be razed to build the highway. But what's happened is all of the land around the highway has been bought by speculators who are friends of the Premier's. That's another thousands of acres of farmland that could be paved over—at least, those developer friends of the Premier's are hoping to pave over that farmland—so we will lose some of the most valuable farmland in Ontario to the speculative nature of this government and its support for its developer friends.

So would you support not allowing the farmland around the 413 to be paved over?

Mr. Steve Pinsonneault: Our government has a balanced approach when it comes to growing communities and protecting our agricultural land. Our provincial planning statement represents a balanced approach to ensure a thriving agri-food sector while supporting growing communities. It expands the use of agricultural impact assessments province-wide, allowing every municipality in the province to use them.

We are protecting specialty croplands—prime agricultural areas—by prohibiting ground-mounted solar projects. We are expanding farmland in the province by developing the Clay Belt.

I spent a lot of time touring Ontario for Bill 109, and there's a lot of enthusiasm about expanding that land. There's a lot of untapped acres up there, and moving forward, we're going to open that up. We're going to reduce a lot of the red tape and make it more accessible—

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

Quick question.

M^me^ Dawn Gallagher Murphy: A quick question: We want to support our soil health and productivity, and we know we need to do some consultation. So to the member, real quick, can the member please explain how a coordinated approach can help protect local crop production and

support long-term market access for Ontario-grown products?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A quick response from the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

Mr. Steve Pinsonneault: Coordinated co-operation is always the key. I think you need to get all the farmers involved, all the agri-food sector involved. It is very complex. You want to make sure that you get everybody on board, you move it forward and you get everybody's input. And I think at the end of the day, you'll have a product that is good and fits everything, and it helps protect Ontario's food moving forward.

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

MPP Billy Denault: First of all, I do want to congratulate the former Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness as well as the current minister for bringing this legislation forward.

I rise today in full support of the Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act, and I'm proud to do so as a representative of a riding where agriculture isn't just an industry; it's our identity. My constituents understand in a way that is sometimes hard to put into words that land is not just an asset. Rather, it is a legacy, and protecting that legacy is exactly what this bill is all about.

I do want to dedicate my remarks to a couple of people in my community who work in the agriculture sector and are strong advocates for agriculture in the Ottawa Valley, because I think it's important to recognize them and all they do in terms of educating me and showing me why agriculture is so important to the Ottawa Valley.

First of all, I want to talk about Angela Field, who was down here in Queen's Park in the spring for the OFA reception and lobby day not too long ago. I got a chance to sit down and talk to her about many things in our own community, and I had the chance during the summer to be able to see her and her husband Barend's dairy farm for a tour. It was amazing to be able to see the innovations but also listen to the challenges and opportunities that he outlined at their farm. I want to congratulate her for a successful re-election to Admaston/Bromley council, and I look forward to working with her further in her capacity as an advocate for her community and the agricultural community in Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Interjections.

MPP Billy Denault: Well, thank you. Thank you to the deputy House leader.

I also want to recognize Andrea McCoy, who serves as the OFA representative for zone 8. I have had the privilege of working with her and meeting her many times with farmers' breakfasts and events in her capacity as an advocate for Arnprior, Lanark, Ottawa and Renfrew farmers.

Then there's also Keanan Stone, who I actually saw not too long ago at the Roseburg Forest Products open house—a very progressive farmer who is focused on innovative farming methods and the new agriculture sector.

I want to give a shout-out to Jenn Doelman. She's a pretty impressive woman farmer and advocate in the county of Renfrew. I've had the chance to see their operations and join her on a couple of events, including during the summer at Travis Smith's farm when we toured his new grain elevator and tofu and soybean plot in Admaston/Bromley—very impressive operation. I have got to say that Jenn Doelman is definitely a strong asset for farmers and the ag community in Renfrew county. I take this time to mention all these folks because they are amazing people that I have gotten to know in my capacity as their MPP.

1550

We've heard from farmers across my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke who are deeply concerned, not just about today's markets, but on who will own and work Ontario's farmland a generation from now. The proposed Farmland Security Act addresses something urgent and real. Five Canadian provinces and 29 American states have already moved to restrict foreign ownership of agricultural land. Ontario is not ahead of the curve here; we are catching up to the recognition that has been plain to farmers for years: Food security is national security.

When farmland leaves local hands, it doesn't just represent a financial transaction; it represents a shift in who controls what feeds our families. This legislation protects. It protects possibility. It protects that possibility by preventing foreign investors from driving up the price of Ontario farmland. You don't have to be born into Ontario farming to become a farmer, and you don't have to buy farmland at an astronomical price from a foreign company.

We, as a government, were elected with a mandate. It's a mandate to protect Ontario at a time of great uncertainty—to protect Ontario's workers, businesses, families and the communities that they call home. And I can think of nothing more fitting in that mandate than when a government is protecting and securing Ontario's food resiliency, ensuring that what is our most precious asset—the land—is not seen as a transaction or an asset on a balance sheet, but it is protected, but it is actively producing food for our communities and supporting farm families. The most important thing in this bill is the protection of food production in Ontario, because once that land is gone, it's gone.

The framework that the minister has described is thoughtful and measured. It is enabling legislation. It sets the framework and invites the people of Ontario into that regulatory process. I look forward to ensuring the voices of my constituents are heard in that consultation and going forward from here.

I want to talk briefly about the new, renewed Grow Ontario Strategy. Our government launched this strategy in 2022 with a clear vision to make Ontario a global leader in agri-food production. Now, with trade disruptions and global uncertainty attacking us from every direction, refreshing that strategy is not just cautionary; it is essential.

Ontario's agri-food exports totalled approximately $28 billion last year. Let me say that again: $28 billion. This sector contributes $52 billion to our economy and employs

one in nine Ontarians. This industry is the backbone of our province, and that backbone is thanks to hard-working farmers in our province.

When we talk about strengthening Ontario's agri-food sector, we are talking about protecting real jobs in real communities. We are talking about a web of economic activity that radiates outward from every working farm in this province.

I want to spend a few moments touching on something I believe needs a lot of recognition in this legislation, and that's respect for farmers' time. Farmers spend hours upon hours, days upon days, months upon months and years upon years taking care of the food we consume. Farmers are problem-solvers. They are looking for a government that gets out of the way of their success while standing firmly behind them when we need to support them.

There are proposed changes in terms of consolidation of the appeal tribunal and the Normal Farm Practices Protection Board into a single Agricultural and Agri-Food Protection Tribunal. It's exactly that kind of red tape reduction our farmers have been asking for. One process, one set of rules that's clear, faster, fair—that is good governance. That is an example of a government that listens to the people.

Similarly, there are proposed updates to the Beef Cattle Marketing Act to close gaps in licence fee collection. It's a matter of basic fairness: Farmers who are doing the right thing should not be disadvantaged by a loophole. Closing that loophole while protecting personal-use exemptions is a sensible and balanced fix.

I have the privilege of representing the beautiful, tough, hard-working riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. I'm a little bit biased; I think it's the best riding in the province of Ontario but that's maybe just my personal opinion. When my constituents voice their concerns, they really do make sure that they are heard, and I am honoured to have been entrusted with that responsibility.

I represent a riding where agriculture shapes everyday life. I see the hard work, the risk, the dedication and the pride that goes into every harvest. I see the anxiety that comes with trade uncertainty, with pest pressures, with rising input costs and unpredictable weather.

This legislation says to those farmers, "We see you, we hear you, and we are taking action." We are taking bold action to protect Ontario's future—to protect Ontario workers, Ontario businesses, Ontario families and the communities that they call home.

Speaker, we must build an Ontario that is protected from the tariffs and global economic uncertainty present in today's world. Amid that uncertainty, actions like this bill are part of our plan to protect Ontario by building the most competitive, resilient and self-reliant economy in the G7.

Bill 109, the Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act, is forward-looking, farmer-informed and focused, and firmly grounded in the principle that the people of Ontario deserve local and high-quality food now and for generations to come. If passed, this bill will increase resiliency and competitiveness and protect Ontario's agriculture sector.

I want to make very clear in this House, and for the people in my riding and for the people of Ontario, that we will always stand up for Ontario's farmers and will continue to protect our farmers during this time of great uncertainty.

I urge all members of this House to support this bill, and I look forward to seeing the positive impact that it will have for the farming communities.

I appreciate the time to speak on this piece of legislation.

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

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to the great member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for your comments on the bill.

I want to dig a little deeper into the red tape reduction that you talked about. I think it's so important that we get government out of the way, that we save farmers time and make sure that they're actually doing the things they need to do out in the fields, taking care of the animals.

Could you speak about why it's so important to make sure that we're reducing red tape for farmers, and the impact that has on our agricultural industry?

MPP Billy Denault: I appreciate the question from the member from Wellington–Halton Hills. Of course, he would be focused on red tape in his former position as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

As a government, we are focused on building the most resilient economy in the G7. We are cutting red tape to make it easier for people to resolve disputes, in the form of tribunal reform. And to do this, we are merging the Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Appeal Tribunal and the Normal Farm Practices Protection Board into one board. This merger will create one efficient board with one clear process, meaning faster decisions, less overlap, and a system that works better for farmers and rural communities across the province of Ontario.

We'll continue to take action to make life easier for farmers so that they can be focused on what matters most in this province, and that's feeding Ontario.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member for his comments today.

Obviously, everybody in this House recognizes the importance of protecting Ontario farmland. We need to be able to feed ourselves, especially with the tensions in the States—there may be a bit of relief in that area, but we cannot be depending on the United States for importing food.

Are you aware that Ontario imports $10 billion more food per year than we export? And are you also aware that along the 413, a number of the Premier's friends and developers own thousands of acres of farmland that they are hoping to develop? Would you support protecting that farmland along the route of the 413?

MPP Billy Denault: First of all, I thank and appreciate the member from Spadina–Fort York for that question.

I think we can all recognize and agree that agriculture and agri-food is one of the biggest sectors in our province. It contributes $52 billion in annual GDP and employs one in nine people in our province of Ontario.

That's why this legislation is so important. We're talking about banning the foreign ownership of farmland, to ensure that it's not just a number on a foreign company's balance sheet, but that farmland is actively producing food for communities and supporting farm families across the province of Ontario. We are preventing foreign investors from driving up the price of Ontario—you don't have to be born into farming, and you don't have to buy farmland at an astronomical price from a foreign company. It's the most important thing in this legislation. It's about protecting food production in Ontario because once the land is gone, it's gone for good.

1600

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

Hon. Matthew Rae: My question to my great colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke is—I know my colleague from the NDP was talking about some of the imports we're doing. I was wondering if he can explain how this bill and other government actions we've taken over the past almost eight years to increase and onshore some of that food processing capacity—which I'm sure he's hearing from his own constituents in the beautiful Ottawa Valley on—how we bring some of that production home.

MPP Billy Denault: The member from Perth–Wellington is certainly right. It is the beautiful Ottawa Valley. I really appreciate the opportunity to answer his question.

We're looking at this piece of legislation. If passed, the Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act builds on our existing plan by increasing resilience and competitiveness and protecting Ontario's agriculture and growing business opportunities across the province of Ontario.

If we look at some of the red tape reduction bills that we have brought about, bringing manufacturing, onshoring production here into the province of Ontario, like the Buy Ontario Act, which is a major piece of legislation that was brought forward in the last session—which I was proud to speak on as well, because Ontario's public procurement process is one of the opportunities to be able to ensure that the province is supporting businesses in our own province. So I appreciate the question; I appreciate the opportunity to answer.

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

Interjections.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Ha ha, look at that. Well, I'm sure government members will be pleased to hear that I'm pleased to rise today to speak in support of Bill 109, Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act.

In Ajax, we don't have that much of a farming community. We do have some land that's in the greenbelt that is used for farming, but we have a number of acres of farmland all throughout Durham region, and I'd just like to thank our farmers in Durham region for helping to feed us.

Ontario's agricultural sector and the thousands of farmers, agricultural workers, processors and businesses: You help feed our province. Agriculture simply isn't another economic sector. It's fundamental to our economy, our communities, our food security and our long-term prosperity.

Sometimes when we hear the government talking about the economy, we don't hear about agriculture as much, as some advocates in the sector like to remind me. The food sector provides over $51 billion to the province's GDP. It supports more than 867,000 jobs in the province. That's like one out of every nine jobs in the province that's directly connected to our agri-food sector. We've got incredible farmers around the province who work tirelessly, making the most of some of the most fertile land in the province.

When I think of farming in Ontario, I think back to my grandfather who came here in the 1950s. He has passed away now, but he immigrated here as a farm labourer, working in the fields in the Holland Marsh, picking carrots, and then at night working in the packing plant, and doing that over and over, six days a week. He was able to build a life here based on working in farming.

As we look at what's happening around the world—disruptions to global supply chains, the trade uncertainty that we continue to see and even changes to climate and rising food costs as well—if we don't have access to food that's made here, if we don't have that production taking place here, I would argue that we're weaker on the world stage. When we look at the war in Ukraine right now and Russia targeting grain exports, targeting food exports out of there, it's a reminder of how important it is for us here to have that food sovereignty and to continue to strengthen that sector.

When I talk to folks, what I hear is we're really good at growing some things, we're good at processing some things, but there are some things that we grow here that get sent to the United States and then come back to us. So continued investment and more investment into that area, partnering with the dairy farmers, partnering with the grain sector, partnering with the agri-food businesses across the province, I think, is extremely important. I think all of us in this House agree that that needs to continue and move forward.

Speaker, there are many elements of this legislation we support. The idea of protecting farmland—Ontario Liberals have been loud advocates for protecting our farmland in the province—improving protections for farmers and modernizing agriculture regulations are all worthwhile objectives.

I have to say I am pleased that the government did bring forward this bill, because it is a bill that I think we're seeing that all of us in this House can agree on.

A Team Ontario approach, I think, always is the right approach, especially when we're dealing with this economic uncertainty still from the US. We might have had potentially some good news through the mid-term elec-

tions, but ultimately President Trump is still in the White House, and it's, I think, our sincere hope—all of our sincere hope—that we'll be able to get through this together and be able to help grow our exports. Focusing on agreements like Prime Minister Carney is right now with the European Union is important. How do we have more markets for our products here in Ontario?

But I will say very clearly that protecting supply management is important to myself, and I know it's important to the farmers in our province. Back in August, I had the privilege to participate in one of the consultations on this bill in Shelburne, Ontario. We heard from industry partners, farmers, conservationists as well. Those hearings demonstrated that there are still some significant challenges facing Ontario agriculture beyond this legislation.

Speaker, I want to begin with farmland protection, because without the land to grow our food, well, you can't really do much of that. There are other processes now with people using hydroponics and using some other interesting ways to grow produce in the province. I think that is part of the innovation piece that we're seeing, and that's a good thing. We can't ever lose the Holland Marsh, for example, in the riding of Simcoe North.

So the creation of the Farmland Security Act, I agree with—restrictions on designated persons acquiring farmland in Ontario. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture dutifully reminds us of the estimated loss of about 319 acres of farmland every day. There's a legitimate public interest, I think, in knowing and understanding who owns farmland in the province and ensuring that productive land, as much as possible, is available for agriculture.

We also heard, as I understand, foreign ownership represents a pretty small portion of that picture, with one witness citing an estimate of approximately 3%. Talking about and looking into the next step, I think government would be well advised—and how do we make it easier for folks to pass down that family farm to the next generation and make it easier for new farmers to get into farming?

To people watching at home: I know there's some of you, right now, of great interest to me. Farming is highly technologically advanced, and I've learned so much more about that in my time being here in the Legislature.

Young farmers are facing barriers when trying to purchase agricultural land. During the committee, we raised the possibility of crown land—can that be made available for agricultural use through long-term leases or sales with permanent farmland protections just to avoid some of the speculation that comes out of it? I think that's an idea that's worth exploring, Speaker.

I'm scrolling through which sections I might want to talk about in the House today.

1610

As the Ontario Liberal critic for economic development and innovation, something that I think is extremely important is greater innovation in all sectors across the province, quite frankly, but greater provincial investment in agricultural research and development—witnesses were identifying opportunities in dairy processing, for example, new product development, animal health and agricultural technology.

I know the member from Guelph is very proud of the work that the University of Guelph and its research institutions are doing there, so—

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Hear, hear!

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Absolutely. And there's so much more I know that we can be doing, because as I visit university campuses in the province, the first question I ask them is, "Can we be doing more? What do you need from the province to be able to do more?" And every single time, the answer is, "Yes, there are more businesses that we could partner with. There are more research spots that we can create that will fuel the next idea, the next business." Then, as a province, it's so important for us to be able to do what we can to keep that business here in Ontario, so that we benefit as Ontarians.

Our beef sector and our beef producers: We were talking at committee with the Beef Farmers of Ontario around the breeder loan program and the need for implementing that. The government acknowledged that things are going to be close there, but they're not there yet, so that would be something I think folks—all of us, I think—could probably agree that does need to happen, and I know it's their hope and our hope as well that it will be.

I want to recognize the importance of the Ontario Food Terminal. I know it's important to my colleague in Etobicoke–Lakeshore, and the member from Kingston and the Islands was talking about that market and understanding the different prices of a zucchini, big and small, and what that looks like. That food independence doesn't end at the farm gate; it's the market. It's the infrastructure to move food from producers to wholesalers to retailers and consumers, and the food terminal plays such an important role as part of that distribution network. So ensuring that the food terminal can succeed—and, frankly, stay where it is, because there are some threats to that—I think is something that should concern us in the greater Toronto area.

I think a good idea would be looking at opportunities—this is some of the buy-Ontario stuff as well—on Ontario-grown food procurement in hospitals, schools and long-term-care homes. Our public institutions represent an important opportunity to support local producers and keep more economic activity here within the province. A strong agricultural sector requires that strong supply chain, fair markets and the infrastructure that works for producers of all sizes.

We spoke a bit about veterinary services and how important and essential they are to livestock production and animal health, and we heard from witnesses at committee with significant concerns about shortages of large-animal veterinarians, particularly in rural and northern communities. We heard about impending retirements, recruitment challenges and barriers facing students who want to pursue veterinary medicine.

During the hearing, we raised the possibility of a separate admissions pathway for students interested in large-animal veterinary practice. It's a good idea worth

examining, and I think that speaks, though, to the importance of committee; I think that speaks to the importance of the bills that come to this Legislature.

I'll give the government credit on it for touring that bill throughout the province, so that we had an open opportunity for folks—different stakeholders with different opinions, as well—to be able to come forward, because sometimes we sit in our lobby meetings with stakeholder associations or other folks, but being able to hear directly from the public and directly from other folks who may have a little bit of a different opinion I think is a good thing.

So that speaks to the importance of the committee process here, and it's my hope that, moving forward, we'll be able to see more bills go to committee so that the public has an opportunity to really understand and contribute to the debate around legislation that comes forward.

Speaker, I just want to conclude by saying that I'm proud to support the objective of protecting Ontario's food independence. I know that more needs to be done. I think everybody here knows that more needs to be done. We've got a great foundation here in Ontario. I joke sometimes because the Foodland Ontario little jingle, "Good things grow in Ontario"—I won't sing it in the House here right now—

Hon. Mike Harris: Sing it. I dare you.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Perhaps the Minister of Natural Resources can use that as a question opportunity during debate on the bill. But good things truly do grow in Ontario, and it's great to support this bill, and it's great to be part of a Legislature that believes in the importance of food sovereignty so that we can build healthier lives. And that's the other piece to it, healthier lives.

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

Hon. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague—

Interjections.

Hon. Matthew Rae: Thank you, everyone. Thank you. Maybe I'll get to speak later.

Speaker, my question to the member from Ajax for his remarks—and I know he participated in some of the committee process that we had, the extensive committee process that came to Listowel in my beautiful riding. The member from Ajax wasn't able to attend. That's okay; he's welcome any time. But I was really wondering, what are his thoughts? I know he mentioned the banning of foreign buyers of farmland and the proposals in the bill on that. I'm wondering if you could share what you heard from the committee, because I know when I was in my riding, there was a lot of support for that from local farmers, in Perth–Wellington at least.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: The member from Perth–Wellington is right. I regret I wasn't able to be in Listowel. I do believe one member of the third party caucus was there. I heard that there was definitely agreement around preventing foreign buyers of our farmland. In fact, when this bill first was launched, that was the first thing that I noticed in the bill and the discussion, and I thought that was a good idea.

But it's, how do we go a bit further, as well? How do we ensure that the next generation can buy that family farm, or for new people that want to get into farming, that we are able to help support that? Because God knows we need more farmers.

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

MPP Alexa Gilmour: The bill is called Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act, and that's a very, very good thing. It speaks about protecting it from foreign interests, and yet Ontario loses 319 acres of farmland every single day, not to foreign corporations, not to overseas investors—319 acres to urban sprawl, to highways through prime agricultural land, through zoning decisions. In fact, the Auditor General has said so repeatedly, that this government's land use policies have been systematically destroying the farmland it now claims to protect.

I wondered if my colleague could speak a little bit more about what we could do differently in terms of policies that would actually protect from the internal loss that's happening due to this government.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: It was Ontario Liberals that put forward the greenbelt in the first place that protected quite a large amount of agricultural land within the province itself. We need to be looking at our growth plans. There is a need for all different types of housing. There is a need in this province, Speaker, for low-rise housing because that is a part of housing that is in demand. Do we need to change some opinions and ideas and feelings around that? Absolutely, but I think that's a gradual thing.

1620

You know, Speaker, I grew up in an apartment building, so I grew up in a high-rise. Looking at our growth plans and how do we ensure that we get the kind of housing that we need, which includes higher-density housing, but in a way that is more livable for folks, in a way that the market wants to buy, because shoeboxes in the sky—there's a bit of a market for that, but we see that that market now is saturated.

I know Ontario Liberals are proud of protecting farmland in the province.

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

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to the member for Ajax for his comments this afternoon, as well as for his support of Bill 109, a very important piece of legislation.

I agree with his comments. It's difficult for young people to get into farming, and that's why our government is exploring the Clay Belt, a very valuable region—a lot of potential there in northern Ontario to expand farming, maybe, for younger people that want to get into the business.

The member also knows that the previous Liberal government called northern Ontario "no man's land," so I wanted to just get his take on the Clay Belt and the importance of that region for the future of agriculture.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I definitely wouldn't call northern Ontario "no man's land." I've had the opportunity to travel throughout northern Ontario—not to every place yet, not

to the Clay Belt area yet, so I do look forward to be able to visit that part of the province.

I know the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane has referenced the Clay Belt and spoken about the Clay Belt, and that it's a little bit different to farm up there. But I agree that it is an area that is worth exploring in the province—absolutely—but just understanding that farming there is going to be a little bit different than it is, let's say, in southwestern Ontario or in your riding of Wellington–Halton Hills as well.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: To the member from Ajax, thank you for your presentation. I think we've heard this number bantered in this chamber before, that Ontario is currently losing 319 acres of farmland every single day—not week, not month, not year, but every single day.

We learned from the OFA that their biggest concern is around government land use policies and how it's actually eroding the protections for the environment as well as good agricultural lands. Yet we have a government that's putting forward a bill that is pointing the finger elsewhere, saying that it's foreign buyers and how they're letting the land sit fallow and unproductive.

And if the government is so concerned about protecting farmland, can the member from Ajax explain why the government continues to vote against measures that will actually protect farmland?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I'm not quite sure why the government is voting against measures that might protect farmland. I think as we plan for the future and the housing needs, we've got to consider where people want to live, but also where we need to grow and where we need to build in the province. There are so many more untapped resources within our urban areas, whether it's in Toronto or other parts of the province as well. So I think it's really important that we're looking at that, and that that balance is there.

The other thing I would just say is that gridlock—being a member from a 905 riding in Ajax, gridlock is something that's huge. It takes an hour and a half plus to get from downtown Toronto to Ajax or other parts in Durham region, whether you're driving or whether you're taking the GO train. So that investment into rapid transit, so that we can take more cars off the road—and also frankly speaking, make it a bit easier to move some of the goods, the produce for example, around the province.

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

Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's always an honour to get up in this House and debate, especially a bill about Ontario food and farming, Bill 109, the Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act.

As somebody who grew up on a grain and cattle farm and has literally spent my entire adult life running local food businesses or non-profits to promote Ontario food and farmers, we absolutely need to act on food independence and food sovereignty, especially given the attacks we're seeing south of the border when it comes to our economy.

I'm somebody who believes that we should be expanding agriculture into the Clay Belt. I think it's a good idea. But I also want to caution the government that, if we are going to expand agriculture into the Clay Belt, we're going to have to have opportunities in place for the infrastructure to support agriculture in the Clay Belt to be developed, because it's lacking, especially when we come to tile drainage. There are going to be significant drainage issues in the Clay Belt that will need to be dealt with. It will add costs to farmers, and they're going to need support.

We're going to need electrical infrastructure, especially given the increasing technology and sophistication in farming. We need to make sure we have adequate electricity supply in the north, and we're going to have to make sure we have processing facilities. We've lost a lot of processing in southern Ontario, and we sure as heck need to rebuild that, but we're also going to need to make sure we have processing in the north so we have strong-value supply chains to support the farmers working in the north.

Finally, I just want to say that expansion will need to be done in a way that is responsible and thoughtful, respecting Indigenous rights, protecting the unique biological and ecological diversity of the wetlands and the forests and the waterways and the wildlife habitat in the region, and that respects the existing businesses operating in the region. And because a lot of that land is crown land, we're going to have to make sure the farmers that do farm in the north have some security of tenure, because anybody who grew up on a farm or works on a farm knows we think in decades about how we manage our farm and the investments we make in the long-term success of that farm. When it comes to land tenure, we're not doing a very good job in the south because we're losing 319 acres of farmland each and every day, which is going to bring me to the next point of this bill.

I've been calling for restrictions around foreign ownership of farmland in Ontario for over a decade now, so I want to compliment this government for acting on it. It's about time we took action on this. But we also—especially as somebody who's been a business guy; I'm also a numbers guy—have to recognize that a very small percentage of the threat to farmland in Ontario actually comes from foreign ownership. The biggest threat to farmland comes from the fact that we're losing 319 acres a day; the fact that over the last 35 years, we've lost 2.8 million acres of farmland in this province—35% of our farmland has been lost. This is something that has spanned—I'm not just saying this government; it has spanned across multiple governments. It certainly has accelerated in the last decade, but a number of governments have been responsible for this loss.

It's particularly important because only 5% of our land is suitable for growing food and 0.4% is prime farmland—the very best land—and over half of that prime farmland, especially for the entire country of Canada, is in southern Ontario. We have to protect that land, Speaker. Our $52-billion food and farming economy depends on it; the

875,000 people who work in the agri-food sector depend on it; one in nine jobs depends on the production of our farmland in this province. So for economic reasons alone, we can't lose it. It is far too valuable. It's also valuable providing many other benefits like draining water, cleaning water, protecting us from flooding and other things.

So the government is going to have an opportunity on December 1 to debate Bill 21, the Protect Our Food Act, which will give them an opportunity to create a food belt, to actually protect that farmland and protect the farm families that make their living on that land and the 875,000 people whose jobs depend on that land.

Speaker, I want to close in my final moments here to talk a little bit about a few of the other schedules in this bill. First of all, I want to say, some of the changes to the dairy act are good changes. We need some updating and modernization to the dairy act. I also want to say, though—and this is probably more directed at the federal government—but I hope and believe and I think I've heard every party in this Legislature support supply management. We know that's why we have profitable family dairy farms in the province of Ontario and across Canada. We cannot allow that to be sacrificed in negotiations with the US. I represent a riding where the largest employer is the auto sector. I want to protect and defend the auto sector. But we can't sacrifice family farms in negotiations.

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The final thing I want to say is that we have to make sure those farmers are profitable. The government raised the business risk management—they're phasing it in over three years. Let's bring it in immediately, because farmers need help right now.

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

Hon. Mike Harris: I think when we hear the member opposite talk about that long-term planning and the fact that farmers and folks in the agricultural industry are planning decades ahead—that's exactly what we are trying to do when we are limiting foreign ownership. This may not be a giant problem here in Ontario right now, but we are seeing it play out across the world, where bad actors are buying agricultural land or participating in large-scale infrastructure projects and are then leveraging themselves into those nations. We don't want to see that here in Ontario. We don't want to see that in Canada.

So I would submit to the member: Does he support limiting bad actors in purchasing farmland here in Ontario and making sure that we are protecting our food sovereignty?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I really appreciate my neighbour's question over here.

I don't know if maybe you got distracted, but I did say in my debate remarks that for over 10 years now, I've been fighting for governments to restrict foreign ownership of farmland in Ontario. So I'm glad this government has finally acted on it, because too many governments in the past have failed to act on it.

I will also say that one of the things that's limiting access to farmland, especially for young farmers, is speculation that's happening on that farmland, whether it's from people who live in Ontario or people who live outside of Ontario. As a result, the per-acre cost of farmland in southern Ontario has gone from $8,400 an acre in 2015 to, just 11 years later, $23,400 per acre.

So when we think about long-term planning in farming, we have to protect farmland, and part of protecting farmland is driving speculation—all speculation—out of farms.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: To the member for Guelph: I've been very concerned about the government's changes to how municipal boundaries are approved. After the greenbelt scandal, what we have seen now is that the government has made it much harder for municipalities to retain or protect their municipal boundaries and much easier for developers to force municipalities to change their municipal boundaries. It has created a lot of problems, even though we're hearing very clearly that there's more than enough land to build the housing that we need.

What would you like to see the government do when it comes to the issue of municipal boundaries?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question.

First of all, I'd like to see the government pass Bill 21, the Protect Our Food Act, which would create a food belt to permanently protect farmland in this province. Most of those enforced urban boundary expansions are actually going onto farmland, and it is a significant contributor to why we're losing 319 acres of farmland each and every day.

Secondly, I would like to see the government respect decisions like Waterloo region has made, with their countryside line that's now threatened, or like Hamilton has made, where they've had urban boundary expansions enforced on them, for a couple of reasons—not only because we know we have enough land already approved to build well over two million homes, but also because these enforced urban boundary expansions are fiscally irresponsible; they impose very expensive growth onto municipalities. It costs 2.5 times more money to service low-density sprawl than it does to service missing-middle and gentle-density housing.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We have time for a very quick question.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: My colleague from Guelph spoke about supply management and how important it is to stay strong on that. I'm wondering if the member from Guelph can explain what the consequences would be of ending supply management here in Ontario and Canada.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Again, I thank the member for the question.

I think it would have significant negative consequences on the viability of family farming in the dairy sector in Ontario. One of the great things about living in Ontario is you can make a good living with a herd of 70 cows. The average herd is slightly over 100 in Ontario.

If you go down to the US, especially in places like California, you sometimes see dairy operations with

30,000 cows. That is simply not sustainable at all. That's not family farming. That's not what's made rural communities so profitable in Ontario. One of the things that's made rural communities prosperous in this province is dairy farmers, as a family farm, can make a good living, and supply management makes that happen.

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

MPP Susan Lahey: Speaker, please note I'm sharing my time with the member from Wellington–Halton Hills.

I am pleased to rise today to speak to the Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act, 2026, which I am in full support of. As the member for York–Simcoe, I proudly represent the communities of East Gwillimbury, Georgina, Bradford West Gwillimbury and King township, where agriculture is deeply rooted in our economy, our history and our way of life.

Our riding is home to the Holland Marsh, a vital vegetable-growing region that reflects the value of our farmland and the dedication of our farmers. In fact, we are fondly referred to as "the soup and salad bowl of Canada," and carrots are possibly what we are most famous for, which we celebrate annually at the street festival Carrot Fest, in Bradford, which attracts tens of thousands of participants and brings in tremendous economic benefit.

Across York–Simcoe, dairy and livestock producers, family farms and agricultural businesses also contribute to the strength of our local communities and Ontario's food supply.

Through my interactions with our agricultural community, I have gained an appreciation for the dedication, investment and hard work that goes into farming. In particular, I'd like to thank Jody Mott and the Holland Marsh Growers' Association for their time and efforts contributing to the agriculture in York–Simcoe. And I recognize that farmers across Ontario face many of the same challenges: rising costs, changing markets and uncertainty about the future.

Speaker, Ontario's agriculture and agri-food sector contributes approximately $52 billion annually to our provincial economy and supports one in nine jobs. Behind those numbers are the farmers, families and businesses whose work keeps our province growing. At a time of tariffs, fluctuating market conditions and global economic uncertainty, supporting our farmers and protecting our ability to produce food here at home is more important than ever.

The Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act builds on that commitment by proposing measures to protect farmland, modernize regulations and strengthen our agricultural economy.

Farmland is one of our most valuable resources. Protecting it is essential to securing our food supply, both today and for future generations. Our government is proposing restrictions on foreign ownership of Ontario farmland to help ensure agricultural land continues to support food production and farming families.

In York–Simcoe, particularly in the Holland Marsh, we understand the value of productive farmland and the pressures it faces. Farmers need access to affordable land, and young people entering agriculture need opportunities to build their futures. These proposed restrictions are intended to limit foreign investment pressures on farmland prices and preserve those opportunities. Five other provinces—Prince Edward Island, Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Quebec—have similar restrictions in place.

While we protect existing farmland, we must also look at opportunities to strengthen agricultural production. As other members have spoken to today, the northern Ontario Clay Belt represents significant potential to expand agriculture, support economic development and create opportunities for northern communities. Whether in York–Simcoe or northern Ontario, our objective is to strengthen our ability to produce food here at home.

But protecting farmland is only one part of the equation. Farmers also need regulations that reflect how agriculture operates today. Our government is proposing to consolidate the Normal Farm Practices Protection Board and the Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Appeal Tribunal into a single board. This would reduce duplication, provide a clearer process and support more efficient dispute resolution.

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We are also proposing consultations to modernize legacy livestock and poultry legislation to better reflect current agricultural practices. For farmers across Ontario, clear and consistent regulations mean more time and resources can be directed towards their operations.

Just as farmers need certainty in the rules governing their businesses, they also need confidence that they will be paid for what they produce. Farming requires substantial financial investment, often long before a crop is harvested or livestock reaches market. Building on the Protecting Farmers from Non-Payment Act, our government is proposing changes to the financial protection programs to provide greater clarity and consistency. These measures are intended to strengthen confidence in agricultural transactions and support the stability of Ontario farming businesses.

Speaker, another issue particularly important to York–Simcoe is agricultural drainage. Anyone familiar with the Holland Marsh understands how essential proper water management is to successful farming. Reliable drainage infrastructure helps farmers manage water, protect their crops and maintain productive farmland. With increasingly unpredictable weather, this infrastructure is more important than ever. That is why our government intends to consult on improvements to the Agricultural Drainage Infrastructure Program. For farmers in the Holland Marsh and across Ontario, effective drainage supports agricultural productivity, rural municipalities and long-term competitiveness.

Our government also recognizes the importance of fairness and consistency for Ontario's dairy and livestock producers. Proposed changes to dairy legislation would modernize regulations while maintaining Ontario's high food safety standards. We are also proposing updates to

dairy end-use pricing to close a loophole that has allowed some companies to bypass the supply management system. These changes would help ensure dairy ingredients are treated consistently, supporting fairness for producers and protecting Ontario's supply management system.

Similarly, proposed changes to the Beef Cattle Marketing Act would modernize the beef cattle check-off system. The objective is to ensure all producers, including those who process their own cattle for sale, contribute fairly and consistently. For livestock and dairy producers in York–Simcoe and throughout Ontario, predictable and equitable systems are important to the success of their businesses.

Speaker, supporting farmers also means ensuring they can get their products to market efficiently. The Ontario Food Terminal plays an important role in connecting Ontario growers with retailers and consumers. For vegetable growers in the Holland Marsh, reliable distribution networks are essential to reaching markets. Our government is proposing changes to modernize the food terminal's operations and strengthen its governance. These measures are intended to support long-term infrastructure investments and keep fresh, locally grown food moving efficiently across Ontario. Strengthening our food distribution system helps farmers remain competitive and supports a more self-reliant food supply.

Protecting agricultural productivity also means protecting the health of our crops. For vegetable growers in York–Simcoe, pests and plant diseases can have serious consequences for an entire growing season. With changing weather patterns and increased global trade, Ontario must remain prepared to respond to emerging risks. Our government is proposing to explore updates to strengthen how plant health risks are prevented, monitored and addressed. These efforts are intended to safeguard Ontario crops and protect the productivity of our agricultural sector.

And just as plant health is essential to crop production, animal health and welfare are important to our livestock producers and rural communities. Veterinary professionals play a vital role in supporting farmers and animal owners throughout Ontario. Our government is proposing updates to the Veterinary Professionals Act to strengthen oversight and provide greater clarity for veterinary services delivered outside traditional clinics. For rural communities, where veterinary care is often provided directly on farms, regulations must reflect the realities of how those services are delivered. These measures are part of a broader commitment to Ontario's agricultural future.

Through the Grow Ontario Strategy, our government is focused on building a more competitive, resilient and self-reliant agri-food economy. Our government is undertaking a mid-term review of the Grow Ontario Strategy to address emerging pressures and support the long-term sustainability of the sector. An important part of that work is listening to farmers, processors and agricultural businesses, whose knowledge and experience help build a stronger, more competitive and self-reliant agricultural sector.

Farmers understand their land, their operations and the challenges they face every day. They know first-hand how changing market conditions, rising costs and regulatory requirements can affect their ability to operate and plan for the future. Their experience must continue to inform the decisions we make. Through ongoing engagement with farmers, processors and agricultural businesses, we can help ensure the Grow Ontario Strategy reflects the needs of those working across our agri-food sector.

This is important in communities like York–Simcoe, where agriculture is deeply connected to our local economy and where many farms have been operated by families for generations. Whether we are discussing farmland protection, agricultural infrastructure, regulations, or access to markets, our objective is to create the conditions that will allow Ontario farmers to succeed.

I want to conclude by returning to the farmers and the food producers of York–Simcoe. From the vegetable growers of the Holland Marsh to the livestock and dairy producers and agricultural businesses throughout York–Simcoe, these are people who contribute every day to Ontario's food supply and economy. Many farming families have spent generations building their operations, investing in their land and adapting to changing conditions. Their dedication reflects the strength of agricultural communities across our province. As legislators, we have a responsibility to ensure our policies support the people who grow and produce our food.

The Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act proposes measures to protect farmland, modernize regulations, strengthen financial protections and support the long-term competitiveness of our agri-food sector.

As the member for York–Simcoe, I am proud to represent a riding with such a strong agricultural history and an important role in Ontario's food production. Protecting our ability to grow and produce food here at home means supporting our farmers, strengthening our rural communities and investing in Ontario's future. Our government will continue standing up for Ontario farmers, supporting our food producers and taking steps to strengthen Ontario's agricultural economy.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member for Wellington–Halton Hills.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: I know it's late in the afternoon, so I thank my colleagues for their attention to this important matter. I'm very happy to rise in support of the third reading of Bill 109, the Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act.

As some of my colleagues know, earlier this afternoon, I tabled a petition signed by over 150 of my constituents. This is a very important topic to the people of Wellington–Halton Hills. In Wellington–Halton Hills, agriculture contributes to our economy through the food our farmers produce, the people they employ and the businesses they support. An investment in a farm also means business for equipment dealers, processors, suppliers and transportation companies.

An example in my riding would be Walinga, just north of Guelph. That is a manufacturer creating specialized trailers for agriculture, dealing with transportation of seed, livestock and other things used around the farm.

I recently attended the annual general meetings of both the Halton Region Federation of Agriculture as well as the Wellington Federation of Agriculture. At both meetings, I heard directly from local farmers about the future of agriculture in our communities. Those conversations reinforced the importance of our government's work to help farmers invest in their operations and create opportunities for the next generation. I thank both the federations for their continued advocacy and for bringing local producers together.

Some of the feedback that I heard—two of the topics very important to the farmers gathered there—was the need for reliable energy and the importance of reducing red tape. They want an agricultural industry that is sovereign, secure and self-reliant. Bill 109 advances that work through measures addressing farmland ownership, dairy regulation and financial protection for producers.

One of its central proposals is the Farmland Security Act. This would establish a framework to restrict the purchase or acquisition of farmland, or any interest in farmland, by designated persons, including foreign nationals and entities meeting criteria established through regulation. The framework would include reporting requirements and enforcement powers, with regulations setting out detailed requirements and exemptions. Through this proposal, our government is addressing foreign acquisition of farmland as part of our plan to strengthen Ontario's food independence. For farm families planning years ahead, and young people looking to enter the industry, the future of agricultural ownership matters.

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Speaker, I find that in my area, often, we get folks who are maybe from the city and they like the idea of agriculture, they want to support agriculture, but they don't understand how it works. Myself, I did not grow up on a farm. I grew up in a rural area. My grandfather left the farm out in Manitoba, came to Ontario to seek his fortune in 1953, and ended up at Stelco where he worked for many years.

But as a municipal councillor representing rural Halton Hills, I tried to really engage with the agricultural community, to hear what they need. And they don't want fancy government programs, in Halton Hills' case; all they wanted was the ditches cleaned out, common-sense things like that, to make it easier for them to do their job. It's great working with local farmers like Bill Allison and others to do that work, and I enjoy continuing to work with them.

And I think this bill also demonstrates that we're—I'm happy to see so many of our agricultural stakeholders supporting the work in this bill: the dairy farmers, the beef farmers. This bill was drafted in partnership with those organizations, listening to their feedback, and delivering.

I want to talk a little bit about the Milk Act. Proposed amendments to the Milk Act in this bill would address gaps in the treatment of dairy ingredients, supporting more consistent pricing rules and fair competition among processors. Dairy Farmers of Ontario have welcomed these changes, as I mentioned, and their alignment with national milk pricing policies. That support reflects the importance of a predictable framework for farmers producing milk and businesses investing in processing capacity.

Speaker, another important part of this legislation concerns payment protections. Farmers invest in seed, feed, equipment and labour long before they receive payment for their products. A buyer's failure to pay can affect an entire operation, including its ability to cover expenses and prepare for the next production cycle.

Our government has already acted through the Protecting Farmers from Non-Payment Act passed in 2023. Bill 109 would build on that foundation by clarifying rules governing agricultural transactions, updating storage documentation requirements and strengthening enforcement measures. These changes would help producers and businesses understand their responsibilities and reinforce confidence in the marketplace.

For the agricultural businesses across Wellington–Halton Hills, reliable payment arrangements and clear rules are an important part of being able to invest and grow for our farmers.

I think it's important to remember that farmers and farms are businesses. I was touring Woodrill Farms with the Hannam family, with the Wellington Federation of Agriculture, back in the summer, and they are always—major capital costs, new equipment, new tractors and combines, getting new ones every couple of years because the technology is always changing. Those are big business costs, just like any other business. I think that's important for us to remember.

Speaker, this legislation also simplifies the administration of agricultural appeals and disputes. I'm a big fan of red tape reduction. I strived to do that when I was on town council: to get government out of the way; have farmers spend more time in the fields, less time in their offices doing paperwork.

The responsibilities of the Normal Farm Practices Protection Board and the Agricultural, Food and Rural Affairs Appeal Tribunal would be brought together through this legislation under the Agriculture and Agri-Food Protection Tribunal. This would retain a specialized forum for agricultural matters while bringing those responsibilities into one body. That expertise matters in communities like Wellington–Halton Hills, where farms operate alongside growing residential areas.

Questions involving normal farm practices require an understanding of agriculture, seasonal demands and the circumstances of individual operations. Our government's approach recognizes that need while working to make the system easier for farmers, municipalities and other parties to navigate.

Speaker, in conclusion, Bill 109 reflects our government's support for the people who produce our food and contribute so much to Ontario's economy. By addressing foreign acquisition of farmland, modernizing dairy regulations and strengthening producer protections, we are helping Ontario agriculture prepare for the future.

I support this legislation, and I encourage all members to support its passage.

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

Mr. Steve Pinsonneault: Speaker, through you to the new member from York–Simcoe: The Grow Ontario Strategy has helped guide our agri-food sector since 2022. With global trade challenges and economic uncertainty, it is important the plan keeps up with today's realities.

Our government is now reviewing the updated strategy to make sure it reflects on what farmers, producers and businesses need right now. We also heard directly from over 200 agri-food leaders at the recent Ontario Food Summit.

Through you, Speaker, can the member please explain how that feedback will be used to update the strategy and how it will work to support the goals of building a stronger, more self-reliant food system here in Ontario?

MPP Susan Lahey: Thank you to the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex for the question.

Our government believes the best ideas come from the people working in the sector every day. That is why we listened closely to over 200 agri-food leaders at the Ontario Food Summit.

Their feedback will help shape an updated Grow Ontario Strategy that reflects current challenges and new opportunities. This refreshed strategy will focus on cutting red tape, strengthening supply chains and supporting a more self-reliant agri-food sector. It will also align with our broader plan to protect Ontario's food system and support long-term growth. By updating the strategy now, we are making sure it stays practical, responsive and focused on helping farmers succeed.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My thanks to the members who have spoken to this bill this afternoon.

Question: The minister, in introducing the bill, talked about foreign companies buying up Ontario farmland as one of the justifications for the bill. Can one of the members tell us what percentage of Ontario farmland has been purchased by foreign interests and whether the percentage of foreign ownership of Ontario farmland has been increasing?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: As the minister mentioned this morning, five provinces, including the western provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, have already passed legislation restricting foreign ownership. So it's important for Ontario to keep up with that because we are concerned. Perhaps it's not a large issue now, but it could be in the future.

We're going to definitely also be including measures through the regulations to begin tracking that and when it comes to restricting it so that it does not become a problem. We don't want this to become a problem, and that's why we're introducing this legislation.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I want to appreciate the member from York–Simcoe's remarks. I did a lot of work with the Holland Marsh Growers' Association over the years. I also want to thank the member for Wellington–Halton Hills, whose riding is adjacent to mine in Guelph.

All three major farm organizations in Ontario—the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario and the National Farmers Union—have all raised serious concerns about the fact that Ontario is losing 319 acres of farmland each and every day. That's why they're endorsing efforts to protect farmland in Ontario, because of the unsustainable way in which we're losing farmland.

Are the members concerned about that, and do you have suggestions on how the government can permanently protect farmland so we don't lose 319 acres of that land anymore?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: I'm certainly concerned, always, about the loss of farmland. It's a finite resource. I think it's often a tough decision when you're dealing with essential services. I think the two most important things that people need in their daily lives are food on their table and a roof over their head. Both are very important for people.

I think our government has introduced new agricultural impact assessments when approving official plans put forward by municipalities. We've gotten rid of the parking requirement for condos built within major transit hubs to promote intensification. These are some of the measures that our government is taking. Then, of course, in this bill, Bill 109, we're restricting foreign ownership so that, again, that farmland is being used for farming purposes and not as simply an investment line on some foreign company's asset books.

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

Hon. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleagues from Wellington–Halton Hills and York–Simcoe for their remarks this afternoon on a very important piece of legislation.

My question is to my colleague from York–Simcoe. Obviously, she represents another beautiful part of our province in this place and the importance she alluded to of some of that, obviously, agricultural land in her riding. I know she's new to this place, but in the campaign, and then also coming to this place—is she able to elaborate on what she's hearing from some of her local farmers on why it's important for us to pass this piece of legislation and ensure we're protecting and supporting our farmers in Ontario?

1700

MPP Susan Lahey: Thank you very much to the member for that question.

It was a great privilege to not only knock on thousands of doors during the summer, but also to speak to dozens of farmers in many different crop-growing lines of work, whether it was from carrots—or other individuals who raise livestock. It is a great privilege to have those members in this riding. We continue to hear feedback about reducing red tape in order to make farmers' lives easier and in order to continue to support them in making

a living in the farming business. So I would say that their main concerns with me, from the feedback that I heard, were about reducing red tape and supporting changes in regulations that make farming more efficient and easier for them.

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

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I want to thank my colleagues for speaking to this bill today. I have a few questions around foreign ownership. The bill specifically says that it's protecting Ontario's farmland from foreign ownership, but one of my questions was exactly that—and my colleague couldn't answer the question around how many acres we are talking about that are actually being purchased by foreign ownership, and how many of those 319 are being eroded through development through highways.

The other question that I had is around who qualifies as a "designated person" and why we should entrust the government of the day—that they're serious about protecting farmland, when this important part of the scheme is not actually contained in the legislation. We don't know who a "designated person" is, and yet we know that, repeatedly, this government has been under investigation for making deals, so it feels very strongly to me that we need to know more about exactly who we will be entrusting as a "designated person" to protect our food sovereignty.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to the member from Parkdale–High Park. I think she's missing the point a little bit when it comes to the restriction of foreign ownership. It's about ensuring that when a young farmer or a family wants to expand a farm, they are not competing against a company from a foreign entity. We're trying to limit competition and ensure that Ontario farmland is used for Ontario farms.

Again, like the minister said, if somebody wants to come here—my father was a farmer in Northern Ireland and came as a refugee, worked on a farm in Halton Hills in the 1980s. We want that to continue to happen.

That's why there was going to be a request for input on the Environmental Registry with the province, with proposed regulations—and yourself and any member of the public are happy to make suggestions on what exactly those regulations look like.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I would say there isn't quite enough time for another round of questions.

Further debate? Further debate?

Mr. Oosterhoff has moved third reading of Bill 109, An Act to enact the Farmland Security Act, 2026 and to amend various Acts.

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

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

Third reading agreed to.

PROTECTING ONTARIO'S STREETS AND COMMUNITIES ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 VISANT À PROTÉGER LES RUES ET LES COLLECTIVITÉS DE L'ONTARIO

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

Bill 119, An Act to enact two new Acts and to amend various other Acts / Projet de loi 119, Loi édictant deux nouvelles lois et modifiant diverses autres lois.

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

MPP Mohamed Firin: As the new parliamentary assistant to the Solicitor General, I'm pleased to rise today in support of Bill 119, the Protecting Ontario's Streets and Communities Act. At its heart, this legislation reflects a simple but powerful principle: The first duty of any government is to keep its people safe.

As governments are building highways, expanding transit, attracting investment, improving health care and creating opportunities, they must ensure that people can live their lives in safety and security. Public safety is the foundation upon which everything else is built. Without it, confidence erodes, communities weaken and the quality of life that Ontarians work so hard to achieve begins to deteriorate.

Speaker, most Ontarians are asking their government to prioritize safety. They work hard, raise families, support local businesses, volunteer in their communities and contribute to the province's success. They play by the rules and, in return, they expect something profoundly reasonable: that their government will stand firmly on the side of law-abiding citizens and take meaningful action against those who threaten the safety and well-being of others.

That expectation is neither ideological nor partisan. It's common sense. Parents expect their children to be safe on public transit. Seniors expect to feel secure in their neighbourhoods. Small business owners expect protection from organized criminal activity. Front-line workers expect safe workplaces. Communities expect governments to respond when public safety challenges emerge.

Speaker, when those expectations are not met, confidence in public institutions begins to suffer. That is why Bill 119 is important. This legislation recognizes that the challenges facing Ontario today require a government willing to act with clarity and purpose. It recognizes that crime is evolving, that organized criminal networks are becoming increasingly sophisticated and our public safety systems must evolve alongside them. Most importantly, it recognizes governments cannot simply react to threats after harm has already occurred. We must be proactive. We must strengthen institutions, modernize enforcement tools, support front-line personnel and ensure that criminals face meaningful consequences for their actions.

That is exactly what Bill 119 seeks to accomplish. This bill is comprehensive because the public safety challenges facing our province are multi-faceted. The bill increases

transparency around high-risk offenders, it makes public transit safer, and it targets illegal drug production and organized criminal enterprises. We aim to further strengthen correctional institutions, modernize security standards, support anti-money laundering efforts and advance new measures to combat organized retail theft. Each provision serves a distinct purpose. Together, they form a coherent public safety strategy built around the straightforward belief that Ontario should be a place where law-abiding people feel protected, where public institutions are strong and where criminal behaviour is met with a firm and effective response.

Speaker, one of the strengths of this legislation is that it understands an important truth about public safety: Effective policing begins long before an officer responds to a call. Strong policing requires strong governance. It requires systems that establish clear expectations, promote accountability and ensure that resources are focused where they're needed most. That is why Bill 119 includes important amendments to the Community Safety and Policing Act that strengthen oversight, standards and governance rules for the police services boards while further enhancing the role of the Inspector General of Policing.

Police service boards play a critical role in Ontario's policing framework. Effective boards help establish priorities, provide oversight and ensure that police services are operating in the best interests of the communities they serve. When governance is clear and effective, police services are better positioned to deliver high-quality policing and maintain public confidence.

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Similarly, a strong inspector general helps ensure consistency, accountability and professionalism across the province's policing system. These measures reflect a philosophy that good governance and effective policing are not competing objectives; they reinforce one another.

The residents of Ontario deserve police services that are accountable, professional, transparent and focused on results. Bill 119 helps ensure exactly that.

Another key principle of this legislation is that communities deserve access to information that affects their safety. Knowledge is not a substitute for enforcement, but it is an important component of prevention and public awareness. When police determine that a high-risk offender poses a significant concern to community safety and issue a public notification, residents should have reliable access to that information.

For that reason, Bill 119 authorizes the Commissioner of the Ontario Provincial Police to publish information relating to high-risk offenders, including high-risk sex offenders, when a police service has determined that community notification is necessary. This measure strengthens transparency and supports informed decision-making at the local level. Parents have a right to be aware of significant public safety concerns in their communities. Residents have a right to information that may affect their safety. Police services already make difficult decisions regarding community notifications, and this legislation helps ensure that those efforts are more accessible and effective. The goal is spreading awareness; an informed community is a safer community.

If there is one area where Ontarians increasingly expect decisive action, it is the fight against illegal drugs and organized criminal networks that profit from them. The human consequences of the illegal drug trade are visible across the province. Behind every illegal drug lab is a criminal enterprise seeking profit. Behind every trafficking network is an organization willing to exploit addiction and vulnerability. Behind every shipment, every distribution operation, every production facility is a group of individuals who view communities not as a place to live and raise families but as a market to exploit.

We must not be forced to only deal with the consequences of drug activity after the damage has already occurred. After the dangerous substances have already reached our streets, the neighbourhoods have already been affected and the criminals have already profited. Bill 119 takes a different approach. We're focusing on disruption and prevention. We focus on stopping criminal activity before its harmful effects spread further into our communities. The legislation creates new offences targeting equipment and precursor chemicals associated with illegal drug production. This is an important shift because it targets a critical stage in the criminal supply chain. If government is serious about combatting illegal drugs, it cannot focus exclusively on distribution; it must disrupt the production itself. By creating additional tools to address pill presses, precursor chemicals and related activities, Bill 119 strengthens the ability of law enforcement to intervene earlier and more effectively.

Speaker, this legislation also addresses another important issue: accountability. Landlords who knowingly permit their properties to be used for illegal drug production should not be allowed to turn a blind eye while criminal activity flourishes. Most landlords are responsible members of their communities who take their obligations seriously. They should not be confused with those who knowingly facilitate criminal operations. Bill 119 draws that distinction clearly. It ensures that those who knowingly enable illegal drug production can be held accountable for their role in that activity.

Taken together, these measures send an unmistakable message: Ontario is not interested in waiting for criminal enterprises to grow stronger before taking action. We are disrupting them as early as possible and using every available tool to protect our communities.

The bill also addresses one of the most visible concerns raised by Ontarians in recent years: safety on public transit. I remember, Speaker, it was actually my first week when I was elected as a member of provincial Parliament, and I took the UP Express and then I ended up taking the subway. My first day coming to Queen's Park, I witnessed an individual carrying a knife chasing another individual who was also carrying a knife. This was my first time taking the subway in years and it was the last time I took the subway to Queen's Park. It's something that is

resonating in a lot of communities and people are very concerned about.

As I was saying, we're disrupting them as early as possible and using every available tool to protect our communities. The bill also addresses one of the most visible concerns raised by Ontarians in recent years: safety on public transit. Public transit is an essential part of daily life for millions of people. Students rely on it. Workers wouldn't be able to get to work or home without it. And the same goes for seniors and families. When people board a train, a bus or a streetcar, they should be focused on getting to their destination, not navigating illegal activity that compromises the safety of the passengers and employees.

Bill 119 responds to this concern by expanding powers under the Restricting Public Consumption of Illegal Substances Act to designated transit special constables. This is a practical measure designed to support safer and more welcoming transit systems. Transit operators, transit employees and passengers should not have to accept illegal drug users as an unavoidable feature of public transportation. By providing designated transit constables with additional enforcement tools, Ontario is helping to ensure that public transit remains focused on its intended purpose: moving people safely and efficiently throughout their communities.

Speaker, another important element of this legislation recognizes that organized crime does not exist without money. Criminal organizations may engage in drug trafficking, fraud, extortion and countless other illegal activities, but their ultimate objective is almost always the same: profit. That is why fighting organized crime requires more than arrests. It requires targeting criminal proceeds. It requires disrupting financial networks and, importantly, following the money.

As a part of the broader package that goes alongside Bill 119, the government is supporting the development of a provincial anti-money laundering strategy and the exploration of additional tools, including unexplained wealth orders. These measures reflect a growing recognition that organized crime cannot be effectively addressed through law enforcement alone. Governments and agencies must also work collaboratively to prevent criminals from hiding, protecting and reinvesting the proceeds of unlawful activity. Every dollar laundered through legitimate economic systems undermines public confidence and strengthens criminal organizations. Every effort that deprives organized crime of its illicit profits makes communities safer. These objectives are straightforward: Crime should not pay.

Speaker, I would also like to address the provisions of Bill 119 that modernize Ontario's framework for private security and investigative services. Private security personnel are often amongst the first individuals to encounter a safety risk in a wide variety of settings. They help protect businesses, hospitals, residential buildings, event venues, transit systems and critical infrastructure. The responsibilities associated with these roles have evolved considerably over time. Today, security professionals operate in an increasingly complex environment and face challenges that would have been difficult to imagine generations ago.

As the industry evolves, regulatory frameworks must evolve as well. Bill 119 modernizes oversight, training and licensing requirements to ensure that standards remain aligned with contemporary realities. These measures improve professionalism, strengthen accountability and help ensure that individuals performing important safety-related functions possess the knowledge and qualifications required to do so effectively.

Correctional institutions are another area where vigilance and effective tools remain essential. Correctional officers perform demanding work in challenging environments. The security of institutions matters. Contraband poses a serious threat to both staff and inmates. That is why Bill 119 supports the expansion of canine teams used to conduct searches within correctional facilities. These highly effective teams play an important role in detecting prohibited items and preventing dangerous substances from entering institutions. While this may appear to be a relatively targeted measure, its benefits are substantial. Safer institutions contribute to safe working conditions for staff, safer living conditions within facilities and improved operational effectiveness overall. Sometimes meaningful improvements in public safety come not from dramatic changes, but from measures that strengthen front-line operations. This is one such measure.

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No discussions of public safety can ignore the growing impact of organized retail theft. Across North America, retail businesses have increasingly found themselves targeted by organized criminal groups who treat theft as a business model. These are not isolated incidents involving momentary lapses of judgment. In many cases, these are coordinated operations conducted by repeat offenders seeking profit. These consequences extend far beyond stolen goods. Employees are placed at risk, security personnel face threats and assaults, small businesses absorb losses they can scarcely afford, consumers ultimately bear costs and communities experience a growing sense that disorder is being allowed to flourish.

Ontario's response must be equal to the challenge. That is why our government is building upon previous successes by establishing dedicated prosecution teams focused on organized retail theft. These specialized efforts will help prioritize serious cases while supporting stronger coordination between prosecutors and police.

The government is also continuing to advocate for stronger federal measures, including recognizing assaults against security guards as an aggravating factor during sentencing. This reflects an important principle: Individuals who protect businesses, employees and customers deserve protection themselves.

Speaker, the exploration of additional enforcement technologies and other innovative approaches also demonstrate a willingness to adapt as criminal methods evolve. The status quo is not acceptable. Communities deserve action, and Bill 119 helps move that work forward.

When one steps back and examines the legislation, a clear theme emerges. Bill 119 is fundamentally about bringing confidence to the people of Ontario: confidence that laws will be enforced; peace of mind that institutions will remain strong; the fact that front-line personnel will have the tools they need; and a commitment that organized criminal activity will be confronted rather than ignored.

These measures contained in this legislation are varied because the challenges they address are varied. Yet, they are united by a common purpose: ensuring that Ontario remains a province where safety, order and accountability are valued and protected.

Government acts not merely as an administrator but as a guardian of the conditions that allow communities to thrive. Families flourish when neighbourhoods are safe, and businesses invest when laws are respected. Communities grow stronger when citizens trust their public institutions. Public safety is not separate from prosperity, but rather one of the preconditions of prosperity.

That is why this legislation must be passed. It reflects the belief that government should stand unapologetically with law-abiding citizens, that victims deserve support and protection, and that criminals should face meaningful consequences for their actions. Ontarians should never be asked to accept disorder, criminal activity or declining public safety as inevitable facts of life because they're not inevitable. With the right policies, the right partnerships and the right determination, they can be addressed. Bill 119 is an important step in that direction.

For those reasons, Speaker, I'm proud to support the Protecting Ontario's Streets and Communities Act, and I encourage all members of this House to join me in supporting this legislation. I would like to thank all the members for listening to my speech tonight.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you to the member from York South–Weston for his presentation.

I want to offer some reflections today. Our communities are less safe than they were when the Premier took office eight years ago. Our courts are horribly backlogged, the opioid crisis has reached every single corner of the province, and prisoners are literally walking out of jail. So one can argue that Bill 119 is simply damage control.

The government has promised action on transit safety, retail theft, animal theft and animal welfare, yet none of that is actually in the bill. You've made some announcements to grab some good headlines, but we haven't seen the proof of concept in the bill.

When will we see the actual powers and the new laws that will give the transit authority powers to make arrests based on drug-related charges? When will we see an actual retail theft task force? And when will we see a ban on animal tail cropping and ear cropping?

MPP Mohamed Firin: I thank the member opposite for the question. I hope that the member will be able to vote for this bill, because what we've done is we've listened to the stakeholders, we've listened to the communities, and this is exactly what we're addressing.

When you talk about looking at pill presses, for example, we all know the damage that this has done. Organized criminals are using these to elicit illegal drugs and sell it to our communities—things like fentanyl.

When we talk about safety on transit, I agree with the member. I just told you a story where, on my first week to Queen's Park, I actually saw two individuals carrying a knife. That's why we're enhancing our community safety, and this is exactly what Bill 119 is doing.

I hope that the member is able to support this bill.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I appreciate the opportunity to ask my colleague a question on this bill.

I see that schedule 6 deals with pill presses and precursors. My understanding of the act is that it will introduce a prohibition against the possession or sale of pill presses or precursors in certain circumstances. It will not introduce a prohibition in all circumstances because, of course, there are some legal uses of pill presses. But it will introduce a prohibition of pill presses in certain circumstances, thus allowing the province to seize these as contraband if those pill presses are being used for illegal purposes.

I think that is a good schedule, schedule 6. I think it is right for the province to prohibit the possession of pill presses in certain circumstances, and I invite my colleague the member to comment on schedule 6 as he would like to do.

MPP Mohamed Firin: I'd like to thank the member from Essex for the wonderful question.

If we want safer streets, we need to make sure that we make it harder for criminals to manufacture and sell dangerous drugs in the first place. Organized crime profits from addiction, preys on vulnerable people and brings violence into our communities. That is why Bill 119 takes a direct action against the tools criminals use to produce these deadly substances. By restricting access to the pill presses and other drug production equipment, we're helping police stop illegal operations before more drugs are on our streets.

Our government believes that public safety comes first, and that's why we're sending a clear message that Ontario will not be a place where criminals can easily manufacture poison and put it at risk and give it to our families and our communities.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: I thank the member for his comments.

You're talking about community safety in this bill, but your actions are always after. This government's actions are always after the fact. There's violent crime that happens and then they're going to punish the people. They're going to allow the police to have helicopters or fund helicopters. But really, I think most people in Ontario would prefer not to be victims of crime. So if the police arrest somebody with a gun, they want to make sure

there's not a young person with a gun waiting to pick that up, to join a gang.

Yet we have a 17% youth unemployment rate. This government just downloaded a massive amount of debt, through OSAP changes, onto young people, forcing some people to actually give up their dream of a post-secondary education. Our elementary and secondary schools are so badly funded that they're cutting special education programs and they're increasing class sizes. So opportunities for young people keep getting diminished, and this provides a breeding ground for gangs to recruit young people.

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What is your government doing on the prevention side? Will they reverse the OSAP cuts? Will they provide adequate funding to schools? And will they address the 17% youth unemployment rate?

MPP Mohamed Firin: I'd like to thank the member opposite for the question.

Speaker, prior to running, I was the province's advocate for community opportunities, and I can tell you without a doubt that this government has invested more into young people than any other government in Ontario's history. Whether it's through the Black youth action plan, whether it's through the SDF, which—we have seen tremendous work being done.

If you go to my riding of York South–Weston and you go to Hammer Heads—and I would encourage the member to come join me for a visit one of these days—what you'll see is that young people are being given the opportunity, where they're training and where they're finding meaningful work.

We've done a lot of good work.

In the member for Humber River–Black Creek's riding, there's an organization called YES that's doing wonderful work for youth.

So when it comes to youth, we've invested a lot, but also when it comes to community safety.

You can ask any law enforcement agency—this government has supported our police. This government has invested more into law enforcement, into targeting criminals and gang activity, than any other government in this province's history, and I can say that I'm proud to stand behind this government in accomplishing that.

Of course, there are challenges that lie ahead, and that's what this bill hopes to address—addressing some of those challenges.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: It looks like we're going for a double play here.

I have a great police force in my riding: the LaSalle police force. The LaSalle police force recently benefited from a great grant from the provincial government, in the approximate amount of $2.4 million, under the repeat offenders and parole enforcement program. That was a program that was designed to get repeat offenders and parole breakers back in jail.

I noticed that the member talked about the efforts being made by our government to enforce the laws and to give police officers and police forces the tools they need to enforce the law—and in particular, as I just spoke about, the repeat offenders and parole enforcement grant, or ROPE grant, which allows police forces to take these resources and put them towards going after repeat offenders and the people who are constantly going through the revolving door in our court system, getting arrested and released and arrested and released. I invite the member to make any commentary he would like about that topic.

MPP Mohamed Firin: I thank the member opposite for the question.

Premier Ford led the way in regard to bail. Our government called on the federal government to enhance bail, and one of the reasons we did that was because we have violent criminals who are harming human beings, harming families. In the story of one of the members—Minister Lecce's riding, where a man was actually killed in front of his kids, and within a matter of days, that criminal would have been put out on bail. So I would like to thank Premier Ford for leading, and all the Premiers in this country for coming together—because that's something that we saw being a huge issue.

Speaker, we want to support young people who might get caught up in crime but are not doing big crime, who want to move on from crime and they want to educate themselves; they want to get better. Oaks Revitalization Association is one organization that does that work, and they're rehabilitating some of these young people back into communities. But for the violent repeat offenders, we must do everything to throw the book at them. That's what our bill focuses on, and that's what our government is focused on.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Just a reminder to all members that we refer to each other by our ridings or ministerial portfolios.

Further debate?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: As I enter into debate on Bill 119, I think about certain key beliefs or key principles, the pillars that this Conservative government would consider necessary to their identity. Those things would include fiscal prudence, conserving for a rainy day, safety, crime and punishment, and law and order. And yet, on many of these things, this government has completely failed.

When we see Bill 119, Protecting Ontario's Streets and Communities Act, they have really done a really terrible job of ensuring that Ontario has safe streets in so many different ways. There are many opportunities—and many missed opportunities—that this government has unfortunately neglected.

When I think about harm reduction, this government ideologically closed supervised consumption sites across Ontario after first arbitrarily limiting the number to 19, I believe it was. And then they would have the audacity to ask the question, "Why are we seeing so much open drug use on our streets?"

When we look back roughly 20 years ago in cancer care, before the cancer care continuum, there used to be an unfortunate belief in society that people were responsible for cancer. It was a really unfortunate belief, but that was why certain information and certain policies and continuums needed to be made in order to help educate the public.

On that cancer care continuum, the first stage is prevention and screening. Well, Speaker, in terms of the opioid crisis and the addiction crisis we see in our province, that first necessary stage of screening and prevention is harm reduction. It's about welcoming people who are addicted into a space where you can build relationships and help get them in touch with necessary supports.

I've also learned, unfortunately, that this government will soon close a withdrawal management support program in St. Thomas. This program has provided 24/7 access to a safe, supportive, community-based environment. It has helped over 1,500 people. Now, Speaker, these are not people who you would typically imagine or who would be the typical idea of who would use these services; these are working people. Over 1,500 people have used these bed-based supports in order to combat addiction. In fact, that 1,500 includes 650 from London.

But unfortunately, Ontario Health is going to be winding down that program. At a time when we see addiction at a tremendous high, this government is taking away supports from people. In fact, it is necessary to go to this withdrawal management program before anyone is even admitted into the HART hub model. Middlesex-London paramedics have noted that opioid overdose calls have tripled since the closure of Carepoint in London.

I want to also point out that there was a letter sent by ward 13 councillor David Ferreira from the city of London. This was sent to Minister Sylvia Jones, as well as the Ontario College of Pharmacists and the CPSO, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario. It pointed out that there's a model from New Dawn Medical clinic; it is a prescribing pharmacy that prescribes opioids to people. It does not provide the same continuity of care, there is no monitoring, and there is no wrap-around care whatsoever. This is the kind of model that this government loves, because it is a privatized, quick buck that can be made on the suffering of people within our community.

People in the surrounding neighbourhood have pointed out how this has created very difficult situations for them. People in London care. However, when you see people who are struggling, people who are hanging around in doorways, people who are very clearly having struggles, it becomes very difficult for everyone involved.

It's important to note that municipalities also do not license or regulate these medical prescribing practices. The government has responsibility for them. It's interesting to hear government members talk about criminals and drugs on streets when, in actual point of fact, they are rubber-stamping what is happening here.

It's important to point out that this is not an argument against harm reduction. This is not an argument against opioid agonist treatment or prescribed alternatives. It is, however, a call to action to ensure that there are supports for those people outside of them simply being prescribed the drugs and turned around and turned away.

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When this government promised London a HART hub, they delivered on their promise 209 days late. Whenever any inquiry was made as to why that funding was not flowing, they would point to some meaningless statement about all of the other things they were doing across the province, but would never address the actual question itself, which was, why would they simply not get off their wallets? When I went to the media and called them out on it, finally the money finally flowed.

Those 59 beds—people had been hired. People were ready to work. They had to sit and wait for the government to finally get off of its wallet. But those 59 beds, Speaker—think about the impact that they could have had on our community. Those 59 beds for that length of time, for those 209 days: Those are 12,331 opportunities for people to get into recovery.

Also, this government has closed—or refused to fund properly—the House of Hope in London, an opportunity for people who are most heavily street-involved to be welcomed back into the community. It was administered through London Cares, and it has shown that it is actually not only the moral and ethical thing to do, but it's the most fiscally responsible thing to do because it cuts down on criminal justice interactions; it cuts down on interactions with the emergency rooms. In fact, it's very similar to a model that is funded by the University Health Network and Ontario Health—Dunn House in Toronto—yet this government could not see fit to provide funding for that model.

I also wanted to note that in Bill 119, there are many missed opportunities that we, as the official opposition, have provided to this government. Number one: This government had the opportunity to pass Lydia's Law, which was a piece of legislation that was drafted and I was honoured to co-sponsor. It was drafted by the member from Waterloo, and it would have improved tracking and acted to reduce criminal case delays for more than 1,600 people who had the courage and the determination and the willingness to go through all of the difficulties that are faced within the court system to face someone and seek justice for sexual assault. Some 1,600 people were turned away due to procedural delays.

This legislation would ensure that those people were finally able to seek justice, and yet this government voted that down. For them to now try to pretend as though they're the party of law and order, and crime and punishment, it is beyond belief that they could not find it within themselves to support this important piece of legislation. It's a missed opportunity. It is dressed up as tough-on-crime legislation, but I would say these words from this government are clearly empty when they have opportunities such as passing Lydia's Law and yet stand in their place and vote against it, stand in their place and say to those 1,600 individuals that their case isn't worthy of justice: "Too bad."

Can you imagine? I cannot imagine, Speaker, how this government could ever face—how any of the men in this

Legislature could face the women in their lives and say, "I voted against women finally having their day of justice and facing a person accused of sexual assault." How on earth is that even possible? This government talks a tough game, but, unfortunately, when it comes down to what their actions actually are, they simply are failing when it comes to housing, protecting our streets and ensuring people get the supports that they deserve.

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

Hon. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague from London North Centre for his remarks this afternoon on a very important piece of legislation.

I know he was talking about the government voting against NDP opposition motions on opposition motion days, Speaker, and the motions they bring forward in this place. My question to the member from London North Centre, colleagues, would be, why did he choose to vote against the expansion of the Homelessness Prevention Program that we made a couple years ago in a provincial budget that increased to London, in particular—a 40% increase to London's homeless prevention fund, which helps individuals directly on the ground?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: If a government had a moral and ethical sense, then it wouldn't need to put poison pills inside of legislation. It wouldn't need to hide odious things that, clearly, we could simply not vote for and then claim we voted against the good things they placed in legislation. It really is a rather unfortunate and devious tactic that the government needs to always simply try to hide something within legislation and then accuse us for not voting for the good things.

If we were to separate out all of these schedules, like the things that the member just mentioned, we would gladly vote for them. They shouldn't need to hide things that we simply cannot support because they are not only morally and ethically wrong but, quite frankly, financially irresponsible as well.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: To the member from London North Centre, thank you for your presentation.

Through press releases and media announcements, the government has promised action on transit safety, on retail theft, on animal welfare, and yet we see none of this in the legislation that's before us in Bill 119. There's nothing in this bill that permits transit police to make drug-related arrests; nothing in this so-called law-and-order bill that toughens penalties or focuses resources against an increase of targeted extortions, especially those that are specific to ethnocultural communities. There's nothing in this bill that actually creates a retail task force or even provides grants to develop specialized powers for security guards.

So why would the government make these announcements to the media and then, when actually given the opportunity to put forward legislation to do something about it, they choose not to?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I would like to thank my friend from Toronto Centre for an excellent question. It really does makes one wonder what this government's intention is. They seem to stand for one principle. They name their legislation in rather effective ways, but when we actually see their actions, they speak entirely otherwise.

One of those examples would be that this bill does finally act upon coerced debt for human trafficking survivors. But we have to ask the question: Why did it take three years to get here? Bill 41 achieved the same goal and it received royal assent, but it was never brought into force.

If you do what you're supposed to do as legislators, you should not need to bring this back up because you realized you simply had not done your job.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: As they say, Speaker, timing is everything. I would like to—

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Three years later.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Actually, I was referring to the fact that I just walked in.

If the member would take a moment to turn his attention to schedule 7: It would allow municipalities to impose an administrative penalty if there's failure to comply with a certain bylaw. I think that's a good thing for municipalities to have that power to do. Particularly, this one deals with the Planning Act.

I would simply put it to the member and invite him to make whatever observations he feels he would like to make.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Oh, my goodness. I have got say, I have got to thank the member for Essex saying time is of the essence, because considering what we were just saying about this government having Bill 41 three years ago and not proclaiming it into force, your comments were absolutely perfect.

Unfortunately, I do not have enough time to address schedule 7. I look forward to further debate.

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

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MPP Silvia Gualtieri: It is an honour and a privilege to speak on this very important bill, Protecting Ontario's Streets and Communities Act. I speak today from my experience touring the province and hearing from law enforcement officers in my previous role as parliamentary assistant to the Solicitor General Michael Kerzner, and from my role as MPP for the wonderful riding of Mississauga East–Cooksville.

As an MPP, my office conducted two community town halls in less than a year, and I can tell you that this bill speaks to the concerns I heard residents voice at those town halls. Speaker, community safety is not achieved by a single piece of legislation. It is the result of choices. It is the result of investments. It is the result of actions taken by a government that understands that community safety is not something you just talk about; it is something you build year by year, decision by decision, legislation by legislation. That is exactly why, once again, under the

leadership of Premier Ford, our government is taking decisive action to protect Ontario, to keep communities safe and to hold the bad guys accountable.

So what does this bill do? If you haven't been following, then let me tell you one more time that this package strengthens public safety by equipping law enforcement, prosecutors and regulators with strong tools to crack down on illegal activity. It strengthens protections for victims of crime, human trafficking and harassment while improving enforcement against illegal drugs, organized retail crime and other threats to community safety. It also reinforces oversight and accountability across policing, private security and other regulated sectors, strengthening public confidence. Speaker, throughout, we are going after Ontario's most wanted while protecting Ontario's most vulnerable by making sure supports remain available for victims and their families.

We all know that retail theft is a growing menace. We've all seen the videos of commercial break-ins, of suspects crashing stolen vehicles through the storefronts to gain access to buildings or violently smashing store windows and doors with hammers and grabbing an unknown quantity of items. Wherever it happens, it leaves a community's faith in government and law enforcement shaken.

The very capable Joy Edwards, superintendent of 12 Division administration, informed my office in Mississauga–East Cooksville how Peel police are fighting back against these criminals, and they're winning. While retail theft is a prevalent crime, it saw a decrease in Mississauga–East Cooksville of roughly 10%, with 1,121 thefts in 2024 and 1,002 in 2025. Peel police, one of the best police forces in the country, is out combatting this organized crime that endangers staff and customers; it endangers our community.

In September 2025, Peel police launched a special enforcement team in Mississauga as a pilot project to deal with break-ins and auto theft. In May this year, once they realized that a more coordinated response was needed to address organized retail crime, they expanded the team's mandate. It is now known as the break and enter, auto and retail—or BEAR—unit. This year alone, Peel Regional Police have made 611 arrests and laid 1,276 charges in connection with retail theft. I was also pleased to see the results of Peel Regional Police's Project Filcher, a targeted investigation addressing repeat retail theft across Brampton and Mississauga that led to 65 arrests and the recovery of over $250,000 in stolen merchandise.

But commending our officers is not enough. We need to back our brave officers in this battle, and they need to know that this government is exploring and legislating tools to crack down on organized retail theft, which is a $9.1-billion issue province wide. I am pleased that we are moving forward with a dedicated prosecution team for organized retail theft, building on the success of similar specialized teams already established. The Ministry of the Attorney General will create this team to prioritize the most serious cases and provide early investigative advice to police.

We will also continue to urge the federal government to amend the Criminal Code to recognize assaults against security guards as an aggravating factor at sentencing. Further, Ontario is exploring automated licence plate recognition—ALPR—technology on major provincial highways to help combat retail theft. The government will also examine options to address the costly misuse of manual fire alarm pull stations, which are often used as a distraction during organized retail thefts.

Let me reiterate why this is important. Organized retail crime continues to fuel violent criminal activity in our communities, including drug trafficking and robberies, extending beyond simply stolen merchandise. These are not isolated crimes; this is a chain reaction we need to stop.

This is exactly the message we walked away with when I joined Premier Doug Ford and Solicitor General Michael Kerzner at Queen's Park for a critical round table on retail theft earlier this year. We promised to strengthen enforcement, back our police services and ensure repeat offenders are held accountable to keep our communities safe, and we are doing just that with this bill.

Speaker, let me move to another important community safety issue: human trafficking. Human trafficking remains one of the most disturbing and heartbreaking crimes happening in our province. What makes it even more devastating is this: The average age of those trafficked into sex trade is 13 years old. These are children—vulnerable, targeted and manipulated. Some 70% of victims identified by the police are under 25 years of age. Behind every statistic is a young person whose trust was broken, whose safety was stolen and whose future was put at risk. That is why today matters. That is why this bill matters.

In February this year, I was at the Provincial Human Trafficking Symposium held in Mississauga. We heard from Victim Services of Peel and the Peel Regional Police, but, most importantly, we heard from the survivors, frontline workers, social service agencies and policy leaders gathered in that room. In one voice, everyone made a commitment: This is a fight we refuse to lose.

This bill, I am happy to note, aligns with Ontario's renewed anti-human trafficking strategy for 2025-30, which received a $345-million boost to prevent exploitation, protect victims, intervene early and hold offenders accountable—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Sorry to interrupt the member.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Seeing the time on the clock, it is now time for private members' public business.

Report continues in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Edith Dumont, OOnt
Speaker / Présidente de l'Assemblée législative: Hon. / L'hon. Donna Skelly
Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day
Deputy Clerk / Sous-Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Julia Douglas, Meghan Stenson, Christopher Tyrell, Wai Lam (William) Wong
Temporary Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes par intérim: Jeffrey Haskins

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Allsopp, Tyler (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	
Anand, Deepak (PC)	Mississauga—Malton	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London—Fanshawe	
Babikian, Aris (PC)	Scarborough—Agincourt	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia—Lambton	
Beattie, Jeff (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Bell, Jessica (NDP)	University—Rosedale	
Bethlenfalvy, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (PC)	Pickering—Uxbridge	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Bowman, Stephanie (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du troisième parti
Brady, Bobbi Ann (IND)	Haldimand—Norfolk	
Bresee, Ric (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	Deputy Speaker / Vice-Président Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)	Markham—Stouffville	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Cerjanec, Rob (LIB)	Ajax	
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough North / Scarborough-Nord	Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)	Willowdale	
Ciriello, Monica (PC)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Clancy, Aislinn (GRN)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Clark, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby	
Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire du troisième parti
Cooper, Hon. / L'hon. Michelle (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associée délégué à la Santé mentale et à la Lutte contre les dépendances
Crawford, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	Oakville	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises et de l'Approvisionnement
Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC)	Mississauga—Lakeshore	
Darouze, George (PC)	Carleton	
Denault, Billy (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Dixon, Jess (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Dowie, Andrew (PC)	Windsor—Tecumseh	
Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Response / Ministre de la Protection civile et de l'Intervention en cas d'urgence
Fairclough, Lee (LIB)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	
Firin, Mohamed (PC)	York South—Weston / York-Sud—Weston	
Flack, Hon. / L'hon. Rob (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Premier / Premier ministre Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Leader, Third Party / Chef du troisième parti
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gilmour, Alexa (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Gualtieri, Silvia (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Hamid, Hon. / L'hon. Zee (PC)	Milton	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Gaming / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et des Jeux
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 Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Jordan, John (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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 Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Lahey, Susan (PC)	York—Simcoe	
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	
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
McCarthy, Hon. / L'hon. Todd J. (PC)	Durham	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
McCrimmon, Karen (LIB)	Kanata—Carleton	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
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	
Oosterhoff, Hon. / L'hon. Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et de l'Agroentreprise
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	Deputy House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
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, Hon. / L'hon. Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries / Ministre associé des Industries à forte consommation d'énergie
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, Hon. / L'hon. Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	Minister of Sport / Ministre du Sport
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Chris (IND)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shaban, Fatima (NDP)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Skelly, Hon. / L'hon. Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Speaker / Présidente de l'Assemblée législative
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre associé des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Smyth, Stephanie (LIB)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée des Petites Entreprises

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon. Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	Associate Minister of Artificial Intelligence Adoption / Ministre associé de l'Adoption de l'intelligence artificielle
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Attorney General / Procureur général associé
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
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	