Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

No. 94A

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Nº 94A

1st Session
44th Parliament

Tuesday
24 November 2026

1re session
44e législature

Mardi
24 novembre 2026

Speaker: Honourable Donna Skelly
Clerk: Trevor Day

Présidente : L'honorable Donna Skelly
Greffier : Trevor Day

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

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

ISSN 1180-2987

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 24 November 2026

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 24 novembre 2026

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Good morning, everyone. Let us pray. In fact, let us have a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECT ONTARIO'S NORTHERN AND RURAL COMMUNITIES ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 POUR PROTÉGER LES COLLECTIVITÉS NORDIQUES ET RURALES DE L'ONTARIO

Mr. Pirie moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 155, An Act to enact the Ontario Northland Transportation Corporation Act, 2026 and the Respecting Rural Ontario Act, 2026 and to amend various other Acts / Projet de loi 155, Loi édictant la Loi de 2026 sur la Société de transport Ontario Northland et la Loi de 2026 sur le respect de l'Ontario rural et modifiant diverses autres lois.

Hon. George Pirie: It is a privilege and a pleasure to rise for the second reading of our government's proposed Protect Ontario's Northern and Rural Communities Act.

I want to indicate that I'll be sharing my time with my friend and colleague the Minister of Rural Affairs. I want to commend her for her contributions to this bill, which recognize the importance of our rural communities and rural economic development. I also want to recognize the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for bringing forward a private member's motion that formed the basis for part of this legislation, as the Minister of Rural Affairs will explain in her remarks.

Speaker, I'm pleased that we're able to work together on initiatives such as this, because rural and northern Ontario are essential to our provincial economy. They power our resource sector, produce our food, support tourism, drive economic activity, and they are ready to grow. That is why our government believes in taking a coordinated approach to economic development.

The bill before us brings together the efforts of five partner ministries because supporting economic development in rural and northern Ontario requires collaboration. It requires government to work together, it requires communities and industry to work together, and it requires long-term planning that looks at both immediate challenges and toward future opportunities.

Last week, the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade and I held a round table with business leaders in North Bay. It was a great discussion about how we can unlock opportunity. As the business leaders shared what they needed to help them grow, there were three clear themes: They need more skilled workers; they need more access to capital; and they need for government to move faster and continue cutting duplication and red tape.

This bill provides the next steps for two of these asks. We are continuing to clarify our regional development programs that support economic growth, resulting in more access to needed capital, and we are building our government's work on streamlining processes that reduce red tape and duplication.

At its core, this proposed legislation will help ensure that northern and rural Ontario have the tools, infrastructure and opportunities needed to succeed in an increasingly competitive and uncertain global economy.

The proposed legislation includes a broad range of measures to cut red tape, support responsive and effective services and strengthen our transportation network. Together, the measures in this bill and the regulatory measures that we announced yesterday would eliminate an estimated 21,000 days in administrative burden and save businesses more than $500,000 in annual compliance costs.

If passed, these initiatives will support economic growth, strengthen competitiveness, improve safety measures and enhance connectivity while making it easier for businesses, communities and workers to succeed across Ontario.

These measures would allow more online approvals for companies in good standing instead of requiring a cheque to be mailed or delivered to a government office. This would allow governments to operate more processes at the speed of business. These changes will reduce internal government red tape to allow government staff to focus on supports that matter to people and businesses, and they will maintain our important public safety and environmental protections.

I also want to be clear that streamlining is about government process; it does not impact the requirement for Indigenous consultation. Economic development will not happen without the First Nations. It is about creating opportunities for prosperity for everyone. Through this proposed legislation, our government is helping build stronger communities that are well positioned for future growth and opportunity.

This legislation comes at an important moment for our province. We are living in a time of economic uncertainty and facing challenges to our sovereignty unlike anything we have faced previously. Ontario's workers and businesses continue to operate in an increasingly complex and challenging global environment.

Around the world, jurisdictions are competing to attract investment; countries are working to strengthen domestic supply chains; businesses are adapting to changing trade patterns; industries are confronting technology that is transforming rapidly at a pace that is increasing daily; and governments everywhere are looking for ways to improve competitiveness while supporting economic growth. Ontario must be prepared to meet these challenges. It is why we continue to invest in infrastructure. It is why we continue to fortify key tariff-impacted industries. It is why we continue to support communities that help power Ontario's economy.

Economic growth does not happen automatically. It comes with strong infrastructure, competitive industries and efficient government, and it depends on communities that are equipped to attract investment and seize new opportunities. Rural and northern Ontario are essential to that effort.

Despite their relatively small populations, these communities provide many of the resources, energy, food production and tourism assets that underpin much of Ontario's broader economy. Their contributions support jobs, investment and economic activity in vast areas across the province. Their continued success is vital to Ontario's long-term prosperity.

For generations, northern and rural communities have helped build Ontario. Our government recognizes and appreciates these contributions, and we are committed to ensuring these communities remain well positioned to succeed in a rapidly changing economy.

The legislation we are debating today is about supporting that economic resilience across Ontario, and it's about seizing opportunities in an economy that continues to evolve and become more competitive every year. Most importantly, it is about the people: helping workers succeed, helping businesses grow and helping communities thrive.

Jurisdictions across North America are competing for investment, jobs and economic success. Businesses face choices about where to invest. Workers face choices about where to build careers, and communities face choices about how they position themselves for future success. Governments therefore have a responsibility to create the conditions that encourage growth and opportunity. We must ensure our infrastructure supports investment, that our government processes are responsive and effective and that our communities have the tools they need to compete. The measures contained in this legislation contribute to these objectives by helping strengthen connectivity, improve governance and support economic development across northern and rural Ontario.

0910

That is why I'm pleased to bring forward this bill that addresses our economic environment and measures that support economic growth such as our transportation networks, for communities in rural and northern Ontario are separated by significant distances. Transportation is not simply a matter of convenience; it is a necessity. It is how workers reach jobs, businesses access customers, people reach health care and services. It is how communities remain connected to one another and to the broader provincial economy. That is why transportation remains such a central pillar of our government's approach to supporting economic growth throughout northern and rural Ontario.

Last week we were pleased to announce the latest step in our efforts to strengthen the transportation network: the return of the Northlander on December 10—and a reminder to everyone that tickets go on sale later this week. Bringing back the Northlander after it was cancelled by the previous government has been a monumental effort. It's been a huge effort: building new stations, purchasing and repairing the tracks and procuring and testing the train sets.

Speaker, to support that return and position the Ontario Northland to support future transportation improvements, our government is proposing changes to update the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission Act. Ontario Northland plays a vital role in connecting people and communities across the north. That act hasn't been changed since it was developed in 1902. It provides transportation services that many residents, businesses and communities rely upon. The proposed changes contained in this bill would provide Ontario Northland with a clearer mandate, modern governance practices and greater operational flexibility. These changes would strengthen accountability. They would improve operational effectiveness. They would help ensure Ontario Northland has the tools necessary to meet future needs and support long-term growth.

Ontario Northland's legislative framework was first enacted in 1902 and still provides the authority for the agency to build and maintain telegraph poles as well as setting the telegraph rates. I don't think people have used the telegraph in quite some time. As we continue to strengthen and expand the transportation networks, we need to ensure that Ontario Northland has a modern legislative framework that enables their continued success.

Speaker, the return of passenger rail service to this transportation corridor in the north represents more than the restoration of a transportation option. For the people from Toronto to Timmins, it represents an investment in connectivity, an investment in economic opportunity and an investment in the future of northern Ontario. Reliable passenger rail service can help support tourism, strengthen regional connectivities and open access to essential services.

Not only can it provide additional travel options for residents, but it will also contribute to the broader economic activity throughout the region. For many communities, improved transportation connections can help create new opportunities for growth, investment and development. Our government recognizes the importance of this. That is why we continue to take steps to strengthen the transportation systems that connect people, communities and businesses.

That is why we are investing in a 2+1 pilot on Highway 11. That is why we widened Highway 11/17 from Coughlin

Road to Highway 582 and from Highway 587 to Pearl Lake and started construction to widen Highway 11/17 from McGuire Road to Coughlin Road. It's why we are rehabilitating a 16.8-kilometre stretch of Highway 17 between Echo Bay and Highway 548. It's why we recently announced the replacement of the Hearst truck inspection station and the addition of 14 kilometres of new passing lanes on Highway 11 and why we have introduced legislation to move the four-laning of Highway 69 forward faster.

But Speaker, there is always more work to do. We are also proposing amendments to the Highway Traffic Act to strengthen compliance with the DriveON vehicle inspection program. The changes would introduce a targeted enforcement tool that would allow vehicle technician misconduct to be addressed earlier. If the infraction is limited to the individual, it would allow enforcement to be targeted without shutting down the whole centre, as happens right now. While this may appear to be a technical administrative change, its impacts would be meaningful.

Vehicle inspection centres play a critical role in protecting road users by ensuring vehicles—including cars, trucks, buses and trailers—meet required safety standards. When disruptions occur, they directly affect businesses and workers who rely on those services. This is especially true in rural and northern communities where alternative options may be limited and travel distances may be greater. The proposed approach would help address issues earlier and reduce the likelihood of unnecessary disruptions. As a result, services could continue operating more effectively, and communities would benefit from improved continuity and reliability.

Our government is also proposing to increase the minimum fine for excessive vehicle noise from $60 to $200. I don't think there's an individual here in this chamber who hasn't been affected by loud noise at the wrong time and the wrong place, so this is a welcome move. Communities across Ontario have consistently expressed concerns regarding excessive vehicle noise.

People want to enjoy their neighbourhoods. They want to be able to go home, relax and enjoy time with their families. They want communities that are safe, welcoming and enjoyable places to live. We've heard from people from both urban and rural Ontario who are impacted. I hear about this from the people in Timmins all the time, and the surrounding communities. This proposal would strengthen deterrence and reinforce compliance with Ontario's vehicle noise requirements across Ontario and reflects our commitment to ensuring that transportation systems work not only for economic development but also for community well-being, safety and quality of life.

As we make investments across the north, our planning must consider not only today's needs but tomorrow's opportunities. That is why our government is updating the Northern Ontario Transportation Plan. Planning for the future allows us to be more efficient so that the passing lane we build today supports and informs future highway expansion. The updated plan will build on the progress made since 2020 and provide a vision for the region's transportation network through 2051.

While we work to address immediate concerns, long-term planning and prioritization is essential to support future growth and ensure infrastructure investments continue to meet the evolving needs of northern communities. The plan will help guide future priorities across highways, rail, ports and aviation. Our government is ensuring that the investments we make today will also result in northern communities that remain connected, competitive and well-positioned to seize future opportunities, and the north is full of future opportunities.

As we work together to face global challenges, a strategic long-term approach to investments is essential, not just in transportation but in everything that we do. That has been the strategy of the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund, and in this bill we are proposing changes that would formalize that approach.

The Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. is a key economic development agency, better known as NOHFC. The NOHFC supports economic growth in northern Ontario by investing in businesses, communities and organizations. It has supported business and development and helped attract investment in northern Ontario. It has provided funding that assists municipalities, Indigenous communities, not-for-profit organizations and economic development proponents in pursuing opportunities that create jobs and support growth across northern Ontario. The latest intake of this fund developed 350 permanent jobs.

0920

Across northern Ontario, the impact of the NOHFC can be seen in communities large and small. Its programs have helped businesses expand operations. They have helped organizations undertake projects and support local economic development. They have helped communities position themselves for future success.

While the organization has long had a vice-chair, it has never been formally addressed in legislation. Through this bill, we are proposing to clarify that. This legislation proposes to add a new guidance section to the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Act. This change would serve an important purpose. As we face trade challenges and tariff impacts, it is more important than ever that investments in economic development are focused and strategic.

In June 2025, the NOHFC board passed a motion to focus on supporting projects that strengthen the economy and help sectors and communities respond to economic challenges in the face of US tariffs. We want to create and support tariff-proof jobs. This direction included focusing on investments and projects that respond rapidly to emerging issues in sectors and communities impacted by US tariffs. It also focused on supporting economic growth, innovation and creating and maintaining jobs in northern Ontario for the long term.

Now, we are proposing to add a guidance section to the legislation that would help establish a clear understanding of the NOHFC's role and mandate when using its fund to promote economic initiatives in northern Ontario. It will

reinforce the objectives that guide the NOHFC's decision-making. The proposed guidance section would clearly articulate the corporation's mandate in using its fund to support economic growth and prosperity across northern Ontario, its communities, priorities, stakeholders and partners. It will help ensure an understanding of the important role the corporation plays in supporting northern communities.

I want to provide a few examples of strategic investments that the NOHFC has supported over the last few years. The Thunder Bay Port Authority received $804,000 to expand its staging and storage area at the Keefer Terminal by 10 acres, increasing its capacity for goods such as wind turbine parts, steel and oversized cargo. This is incredibly important because, as everybody knows, 85% of the products that are shipped from the Port of Thunder Bay are shipped internationally.

The expansion will allow the Thunder Bay port to increase cargo volumes and reinforce Thunder Bay's role as a competitive gateway to interprovincial and international trade. As we pivot away from our dependency on US markets, these announcements and this facility will be critical to achieve that objective. That's not only a northern Ontario objective; it's an Ontario objective and it's a Canadian objective, right there in Thunder Bay.

We recently announced $2.63 million to help eight northern companies expand their launch operations, purchase equipment and create approximately 100 good-paying jobs in the mining supply and services sector. The NOHFC provided $1 million to help Koch Grain Elevator in Earlton build a grain transloading facility. The development of this new facility will increase grain exports from northern Ontario, reduce shipping costs, open new markets and improve delivery reliability.

We have invested in tile drainage, increasing the productivity of farmland, helping to grow the agriculture sector. We have invested in industrial parks that are attracting new businesses and jobs to Ontario. The amendment we are putting forward through this bill will continue to guide the NOHFC board towards these strategic investments.

Our government is continuing to look at strategic investments that will support economic growth, such as the announcement last Friday in Sault Ste. Marie that the federal and provincial governments will contribute $250 million to support the development of that port. The city will transform approximately 90 acres of industrial and brownfield land into a modern transportation hub connecting marine, rail and highway networks. This investment would strengthen supply chains and improve connections between northern Ontario, southern Ontario and global markets, and strengthen a critical piece of northern Ontario's transportation network. The port will help businesses reach new customers, attract investment and support 2,150 direct jobs and 2,120 indirect jobs annually across the province, right there in Sault Ste. Marie.

The investments we are making, the red tape we are cutting and the services we are improving all work together to create a better environment to grow businesses and create jobs for the people of Ontario.

I want to speak about one red tape item in this bill that some people at home or even in this room may not have been aware of: the reservation of trees for the crown on private property. That means you may own your land but not the pine in your backyard. That may belong to the government—the crown.

Let me share a little history: In legislation dating back to 1901 and 1908, the government provided crown land to veterans and settlers but reserved trees for their own use—the crown. Now, Speaker, you'll be pleased to know that about 70 years ago the government already reduced some red tape by removing reservations on trees on crown patent land on or before April 1, 1869. These landowners were automatically given ownership of their trees. Through this bill, we are taking further steps to reduce red tape by giving other impacted landowners the trees on their own property, while maintaining municipal restrictions and environmental protections.

Speaker, I want to return to a principle that has guided the development of this legislation from the very beginning: When northern and rural Ontario succeed, Ontario succeeds. That principle is simple but is also profoundly important. The communities that make up northern Ontario and rural Ontario are not on the margins of our provincial economy; they are central to its success. They are home to workers, entrepreneurs, municipalities, Indigenous communities, businesses and industries that contribute to Ontario's prosperity every single day. They help attract visitors, they help create jobs, they support investment, and they help build a strong and resilient economy.

Our government believes in the future of northern and rural communities. We believe in the potential that if we keep working together with all our partners, step by step, that future will not be shaped by any single measure, investment or policy decision.

This bill is putting forward steps that will continue to move forward our work on economic development, steps that build on the work that we have already done: the work to bring back the Northlander; the work to address passing lanes, safety measures, and the expansion and four-laning of our highways; the work to invest in the economy of future northern Ontario, from roads to the Ring of Fire to the port in Sault Ste. Marie and the expansion of the port in Thunder Bay, to broadband and energy infrastructure; the work to invest in the future of northern communities, from Algoma Steel to Tenaris to Generation Mining and Georgia-Pacific, to name a few.

Today, we are taking another step to support our economic growth and expand on these opportunities. The proposed legislation before us is designed to make it easier to do business, support economic growth and strengthen the long-term competitiveness, connectivity and resilience of northern and rural Ontario. It reflects a continuation of commitment to long-term prosperity.

Economic growth is ultimately about improving people's lives, creating opportunities for workers, helping businesses succeed and supporting families and commun-

ities. It's about ensuring future generations can build successful lives in the places they call home. That is what this legislation and all our work seek to support.

Our government is choosing to build. We are choosing to invest. We are choosing to modernize, and we're choosing to create conditions for long-term growth. That is exactly what this legislation will accomplish.

Speaker, I may be biased, but I believe Ontario is built on northern and rural communities. Northern Ontario, especially, is a community of communities. Our distances are magnificent: Nine tenths of this province is in northern Ontario; southern Ontario is one tenth of the province. Northern Ontario has one tenth of the population; southern Ontario has nine tenths of that population. Our population peaked in 1996, and our bill means that the population and the growth opportunities and the development prosperity will continue in northern Ontario, because it has been paused too long.

0930

Throughout the province's history, they have demonstrated resilience, determination and optimism. They have adapted to change, they have overcome challenges and they have continued to contribute to Ontario's success. This legislation is intended to support those efforts and to recognize these communities as the backbone of this province.

As you're aware, in 1902, when the T&NO was developed, it was developed from North Bay to Cochrane. Cochrane was supposed to be "the Winnipeg of the north" because in one clay belt, the northern Clay Belt, there's 10 million acres of arable land, greater than the arable land in Manitoba and equal to arable land in southern Ontario. It's the same soil. They're formed from the glacial lakes.

That development of the agricultural land was paused as the mining riches in northern Ontario were found. People like my grandfather, who came into northern Ontario to farm, started to mine. As you know, my father was born in 1920 in a house behind the mill, and I've been involved with resources from that time, as my family has been, but we're rooted in the agricultural roots in the Ottawa Valley.

Agriculture will be one of the biggest pillars of the northern Ontario economy based on what we're doing on tile drainage programs, and you can see the wealth that's being created in the lesser Clay Belt in New Liskeard—and position northern and rural Ontario for continued success in the decades ahead.

I encourage all members of this House to join me in supporting this bill and the opportunities it can create for the people, businesses and communities in northern Ontario.

Quite frankly, in northern Ontario, we have what the world needs. I tell our people in northern Ontario, "This is our time." Every single element of our economy—this is our time. We have to celebrate what we have in the ground and our ability to get that resource out of the ground as we pivot away from our dependence on US markets. This is Ontario's time. It's northern Ontario's time, and, quite frankly, it's Canada's time.

With that, Speaker, I will conclude my remarks and turn it over to the Minister of Rural Affairs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): I recognize the Minister of Rural Affairs.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: It's my pleasure to join the Honourable Minister George Pirie in the debate this morning because, I have to tell you, the passion that you just heard over the last 30 minutes is genuine. It's been an absolute pleasure being his seatmate and also being able to see him share his love for the north so genuinely. From the very first day that we met in the Timmins area, I won't forget the manner in which he introduced me to his north and the potential that it held.

And so, to come full circle with this legislation is absolutely a special moment, I think, for both of us because we are dedicated to ensuring that everyone in this House understands that we have a moment ahead of us, as Minister Pirie just mentioned. We need to embrace it, and we need to work collaboratively across government. We have so much opportunity, and when I travel across Ontario, that's what leads my discussions in terms of opportunity to build strong local economies, attract investment, create jobs and new opportunities for growth.

I've greatly appreciated the collaboration between our two ministries, and our sister and brother ministries as well. While we have different mandates, there is a cross-section that brings us all together to make sure that rural Ontario—our communities throughout this province—has the right supports from all of government.

I want to recognize, as well, that not only at the ministerial level but also on the ground, the Ministry of Rural Affairs has stunning expertise and people dedicated across this province. They work so incredibly hard to make sure that they understand the needs on the ground and that they prepare our not-for-profits, our Indigenous communities, our municipalities and our small businesses for the opportunity to embrace what we know is coming. By working together, sharing ideas and listening to communities, we've been able to develop a bill, proposed legislation, that reflects both the unique strengths of northern and rural communities across the province and, most importantly, also pinpoints priorities that unite them, particularly now when economic headwinds and increasingly complex issues are giving them a reality check every day.

Northern and rural communities are ready to grow. I have every confidence in that, Speaker. They're ready to innovate, and they're ready to contribute even more to Ontario's overall success. I am so incredibly proud that, through the leadership of Premier Ford, our entire government recognizes that as well, because what our rural communities need—and our businesses and the individuals that are leading by example—is a government that gives them a hand up. They need a government that recognizes their potential and understands their challenges, so that we all together can be prepared to be partnering to build a solid future.

That's exactly what this proposed bill, Bill 155, is all about. It's truly inspiring to see individuals and companies embrace the moment that we're talking about. In south-

western Ontario, I've seen first-hand plans to reshore business back to Ontario. In eastern Ontario, I've met people who, through our provincial programs, have developed global marketing plans that are helping them extend their reach and bring back the ROI, if you will—the return on the investment—to Pembroke. I've seen municipalities and not-for-profit organizations being able to access support to build plans and strategies to, again, make sure that they're prepared to meet the moment as well.

As I've often shared in the past, my very first job out of the University of Guelph was to serve as a rural community adviser in the regions of Peel and Halton. I was just over the moon to be in MPP Racinsky's riding yesterday, along with Minister Pirie and our colleagues, to announce this legislation. It was full circle for me, if you will. So much of what I did as a rural community adviser has inspired a lot of foundational elements that now are appearing in this brand new ministry called the Ministry of Rural Affairs. I stand on the shoulders of so many people—bosses, friends and community champions: Christine Dukelow, Ken Knox, Jack Hagarty, Ruth Marcou, Don Pullen, Carm Hamilton, Terry Sullivan, Barry Sinclair, Craig Steven, Richard Hamilton, Ann Gordon, Senator Rob Black, Gabe Ferguson and Pat Mighton.

In particular, Pat Mighton was a pioneer in developing skill and building capacity. She was a mentor and an inspiration. Throughout her career as executive director for the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program, she ensured people across this province proud to call rural Ontario home had the opportunities to discover their passion and to discover their ability to lead by example. We lost Pat last week, and, on behalf of so many, I would like to share my sincerest condolences to Dennis, Wendy, Dave and her entire family. Pat may have been small in stature, but she was an absolute giant amongst us, always leading by example. I am very, very confident that her legacy will be lasting and undoubtedly live on throughout rural Ontario.

Applause.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you.

Speaker, Bill 155 before us today reflects our government's continued commitment to ensuring the northern and rural communities have the support they need to succeed in an increasingly competitive, complex and rapidly changing economy. One of the key objectives of this proposed legislation is to strengthen how our government supports economic growth and opportunity, particularly in small, rural communities throughout Ontario. This proposed legislation represents an important step in modernizing how rural communities and rural economic development are supported in Ontario. Our government is seeking to establish, for the very first time, a stand-alone legislative framework focused specifically on rural Ontario. It's a surreal moment, I must say.

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This framework would help ensure that authorities supporting rural economic development are aligned with the Ministry of Rural Affairs and the ministries responsible for delivering programs and services dedicated to seeing a future that is bright and strong and, most importantly, supported by the Ontario government. In doing so, we would be strengthening our ability to help deliver responsive and effective supports that help rural communities remain strong, competitive and resilient.

For the Ministry of Rural Affairs, this proposed legislation would, if passed, ensure that rural economic development programs and advisory bodies are supported by modern, effective and dedicated governance. It would formally recognize Rural Ontario Week in legislation, thanks to the great work of the MPP from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. Rural Ontario Week is an opportunity to highlight vital contributions that rural communities make to our province every day, all year. It would further demonstrate this government's ongoing commitment to enable rural Ontario as a full partner in Ontario's growth and prosperity.

These proposed changes are about ensuring that the structures supporting rural communities remain responsive, effective and accountable. They are about ensuring that rural economic development programs and bodies advising different programs and opportunities operate with clear direction and clear responsibility.

The proposed legislation is about ensuring that government can continue to support in a way that reflects the needs and, most importantly, the realities in small-town and rural communities across Ontario.

Speaker, those realities that I just referenced can look very different from one region of the province to another. What works in Huron county, for example, may not be the same in terms of what is needed in supports in Rainy River. What a municipality needs to support manufacturing growth may differ from what another community needs to attract tourism investment, expand local food processing or strengthen its workforce.

Yet despite these differences, communities across rural Ontario consistently tell us that they want the same thing. They want the opportunity to grow. Our government stands with them to help them realize that opportunity. They want to attract businesses and investment. They want young people and families to see a future in their communities. I think about Red Lake. The mayor from Red Lake passionately shared that he wants to see his community grow so that families can see a future and a home, as opposed to a fly-in community. I think it's a perfect example of how our entire government can come together and support that vision that the mayor has, and we're going to keep working toward that.

That's one example of why this proposed legislation matters. Because when government programs are aligned with realities on the ground, with clear responsibility and clear accountability, communities will have greater confidence that decisions are being made efficiently, resources are being directed effectively and support is reaching the people who need it most. That, Speaker, is absolutely what I mean when I talk about the importance of building capacity in small-town and rural Ontario.

The proposed bill, Bill 155, would, if passed, establish clear lines of responsibility for the Rural Ontario Development Program as well, and for the advisory bodies that inform rural economic development funding decisions. It would help ensure our government continues to benefit from a rural lens and local expertise as new opportunities and challenges emerge.

At this moment I'd like to give a shout-out to Jim Ginn. Jim has just retired from municipal politics. He had a celebration over the weekend. Jim served 23 years in municipal politics in Huron county. He served as warden as well as mayor for Central Huron and carried on a family legacy. It was Jim Ginn who talked about, for the very first time—and I brought it to the House based on his passion—the importance of laying down a rural lens on everything that we do.

This bill reflects that importance. This bill reflects the opportunity to further strengthen the rural lens that we place on programs and services that help support small-town and rural Ontario.

If passed, this legislation would also update the Rural Economic Development Advisory Panel by continuing it as the Rural Ontario Advisory Panel—not a lot of difference, but when you peel away the layers of the onion, there is. This change would better reflect the modern Rural Ontario Development Program and the broader work under way to support rural communities across the province, again, in the spirit of building capacity.

The proposed changes would establish clear accountability for program delivery and advisory functions. They would also help to ensure that rural economic development programs and advisory bodies remain focused on delivering results for the people, businesses and communities they were created to serve. Ultimately, these proposed changes are about better positioning our government to support rural communities so that they continue to compete, grow and succeed, as I mentioned before, in an increasingly complex and rapidly-changing economy.

The changes are also part of our broader efforts to protect the overall provincial economy, because when rural communities succeed, Speaker, I humbly suggest and put forward that all of Ontario succeeds. When rural businesses grow, Ontario grows, and when communities across rural and northern Ontario have the tools they need to attract investment and create jobs, our province becomes stronger and more resilient. That's why this proposed legislation is such an important part of our government's efforts to protect jobs, strengthen communities and create opportunity across every region in Ontario. And Speaker, that work has never been more important.

Across Ontario, rural communities are helping drive economic growth in sectors that are critical to our province's future. We've had many wonderful announcements throughout rural Ontario in terms of supporting small businesses and entrepreneurs, and we're going to continue to see that investment because the return is so, so important.

Rural Ontario and small towns across this province are home to innovative manufacturers, tourism operators, world-class agriculture production and food processing, mining and service companies.

I just attended a Santa Claus parade on Saturday night, and I had to smile: There was Sifto salt with a very innovative and unique float that encompassed the spirit of Compass Minerals. Compass Minerals is actually the largest operating-under-fresh-water salt mine in the world, and it's in Huron county, along the shore of Lake Huron. It's that type of dedication over the decades that we need to be thinking about, because while that company is 100 years old, they see a bright future, especially with the government and the leadership of Premier Ford.

Small businesses and entrepreneurs also have opportunities to create jobs and, most importantly, close to home. Collectively, we're creating an environment whereby young people can see their future in their hometown. They can see a bright, bright horizon whereby they know they can have great careers that will enable their families to grow up in small-town, rural Ontario as well, and that matters.

These communities are not standing still. They're adapting to new technologies, responding to changing economic conditions and identifying new opportunities for growth in the face of significant headwinds.

At this time, I'd like to give a shout-out to Associate Minister Matt Rae. He brought MPP Vickers and myself together for a wonderful announcement, recognizing that 7,800 homes have been connected to broadband and fibre, and that reliable Internet is so, so important these days. We were in Welbeck. The announcement was staged at the Welbeck Sawmill, and the important part is, the efforts that we saw there were a collective partnership across 25 municipalities. We won't stop until that work is done because our communities aren't standing still. There is no way our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, is standing still either. Our role as government is to ensure that they have a strong partner so that they can continue to deliver, plan for the future and, most importantly, evolve to meet the needs of today and tomorrow.

Rural Ontario is not separate from Ontario's success story; it is central to it. Rural communities help feed our province and the world. They produce goods that are sold across Canada and around the globe. They support manufacturing supply chains. They generate tourism activity and deliver second-to-none hospitality. They produce energy, and, as I alluded to earlier, they create jobs that strengthen our provincial economy. That is why investing in rural Ontario is ultimately an investment in Ontario itself.

But now I want to talk a little bit more about enabling opportunity. Bill 155, if passed, does not just create economic growth. Let's be real: Strong economic growth requires a clear vision and a coordinated plan for the future, and that's what we're striving to present.

As members may know, in January 2025, the Ministry of Rural Affairs launched Enabling Opportunity: Ontario's Rural Economic Development Strategy. Our government's strategy for working collaboratively to strengthen and protect rural communities is spelled out across three

key pillars: supporting business development and attraction, growing the rural workforce, and creating safe and strong communities. These pillars are embraced in every small town, in every community, in every region of Ontario. They're designed and brought to life by the people who choose to call rural Ontario home, for rural Ontario.

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The strategy reflects what we heard from municipalities, businesses, economic development organizations, Indigenous partners and community leaders, like Pat Mighton, across rural Ontario. Those conversations highlighted both the tremendous opportunities that exist in rural communities and the need for coordinated action to help communities and the businesses that call them home realize their full potential.

The strategy serves as our government's whole-of-government plan for advancing rural economic prosperity. It identifies key priorities that government and rural communities can work on together, while bringing together the many supports available across government for growth, attracting investment and, as I've alluded to throughout this entire debate, most importantly, creating opportunity.

Speaker, the strategy recognizes something those of us who live and work in rural Ontario have always known: Rural Ontario, northern Ontario, is not defined by its challenges. It's defined by its opportunities. It's defined by the ingenuity of local businesses. It's defined by the determination of local municipal leaders. It's defined by the strength of local workers and, most importantly, the resilience of communities that continue to adapt, innovate and grow.

When the Ministry of Rural Affairs engaged communities during the development of the strategy, we heard, right across Ontario, countless examples of leadership and innovation that we need to embrace, use as examples and, most importantly, inspire. We heard from municipalities looking to revitalize downtowns and attract new investment. We heard from employers seeking to create jobs, invigorate planning and expand their operations. We heard from organizations working to remove barriers and create new opportunities for the next generation.

What united those conversations was the belief in the future of rural Ontario. Just like Minister Pirie said moments ago, it's our time in northern Ontario, and I would like to add that it's our time in northern and rural Ontario. A belief that with the right partnerships and the right support, communities across this province can continue to thrive and contribute to Ontario's long-term prosperity: That belief is reflected in the rural Ontario strategy. It is reflected in this proposed legislation as well.

Most importantly, Speaker, this strategy recognizes that rural economic development is not the responsibility of a single program or a single ministry. It requires collaboration across government. It requires strong, brave local leadership. It requires partnerships with the communities we serve.

With this proposed legislation, we are building on our government's commitment to rural Ontario. We're proposing to modernize the structures that support rural economic development. We are seeking to support better alignment across government. We are building on a long-term vision that will help rural communities, most importantly, remain strong and competitive, so that there's a bright future right across Ontario.

Now, I want to turn for a moment and reflect on the importance of formally establishing Rural Ontario Week. This proposed legislation continues a measure that is both meaningful and long overdue. It would formally enshrine Rural Ontario Week in law. We recognized Rural Ontario Week informally for the very first time at the Bruce county 2026 International Plowing Match and Rural Expo. On that amazing piece of farmland, so much was happening to celebrate and showcase what rural Ontario is all about.

I want to recognize my colleague MPP Billy Denault, whose motion created this opportunity. MPP Denault's motion called for the designation of Rural Ontario Week and, most impressive, he received unanimous support from this Legislature. That unanimous vote reflected a simple truth: Members from every corner of this province understand the important role that rural communities play in Ontario's overall success. Rural Ontario helps to feed our province in so many ways, figuratively and literally. It helps to power our economy, literally and figuratively. It supports businesses, industries and supply chains that reach far beyond municipal or provincial boundaries, literally and figuratively. And most importantly, it is home to hard-working people whose contributions strengthen every region of this province.

This year, Ontario—when we celebrated its first Rural Ontario Week—gave stakeholders and communities the chance to recognize people, businesses, organizations and community leaders who help make a difference in the communities in which they live. It highlighted the innovation, resilience and leadership that can be found right across this amazing province. It reminded us all that the work that these individuals do and these businesses provide play such an important role in building a stronger province.

Throughout the week, communities across Ontario found their unique ways to celebrate. I was just heartwarmed with the manner in which our stakeholders, municipal leaders, local businesses, agricultural organizations, economic development professionals and community groups came together to showcase the people and industries that help make their communities succeed. It was an opportunity not only to celebrate achievements but also to tell our story of rural Ontario, and that story is far from over—far from over—because the future is bright.

Speaker, one of the things I have learned as Minister of Rural Affairs is that while rural communities are great collaborators and partners, they're not waiting for someone else to define their future, and that's what I like—and we need to remind people about. Every day, municipal leaders, business owners, community organizations, Indigenous partners and economic development profession-

als are thinking about how to create jobs, how to retain jobs, how to attract investment and build stronger communities for future generations.

Our ministry engaged extensively with partners across rural Ontario as we developed the strategy that I spoke about moments ago, Enabling Opportunity: Ontario's Rural Economic Development Strategy. We followed up by hosting summits across Ontario as well, and we kicked off our conversations, actually, in Timmins, Ontario, associated with the FONOM conference. Our summits were designed to create a forum for communities to reflect on our strategy that we had introduced but, more importantly, to share ideas, identify ways to make a difference and to discuss challenges and priorities shaping their economic future.

Most importantly, they provided an opportunity for communities to learn from one another, build new partnerships and help inform the next chapter of resilience and rural economic development across the province. Wherever we went, people were talking about opportunity. The horizon is bright. There are no limitations. We did not talk about declining small towns; we talked about the opportunity to continue growth. That's why programs matter, programs that reflect the realities on the ground.

At this point, in my final minutes, I want to talk about the Rural Ontario Development Program. While planning is essential, planning not only is essential in terms of laying down a path forward—that that plan also holds people to account and, most importantly, is measurable. But in that spirit of measuring success, we also need tools that translate ideas into action. It's where the rubber meets the road, if you will. The Rural Ontario Development Program plays a vital role in that regard.

The Rural Ontario Development Program recognizes that the best ideas for economic development originate locally. Speaker, we are seeing the impact of these investments in communities right across this province. Through the Rural Ontario Development Program, known as ROD, our government is supporting projects that help communities attract investment—just like a lightning rod—strengthen local economies and create opportunities for long-term growth. For example, the Ontario East Economic Development Commission was approved, through the program, to develop a plan to promote eastern Ontario as a destination for investment and job creation in sectors such as advanced manufacturing as well as agrifood production. By bringing communities together around a shared economic vision, this initiative is helping to strengthen regional competitiveness and position eastern Ontario for future growth.

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Programs like the Rural Ontario Development Program are critical to helping communities invest in community infrastructure rehabilitation, support economic diversification and create conditions for growth. We hear this from rural communities time and again, and that's exactly what this proposed legislation seeks to support. By updating our rural economic development framework, modernizing governance and recognizing the importance of rural communities, we are helping ensure that rural Ontario remains strong, competitive and resilient, most importantly for generations to come.

In my final minutes, Speaker, I want to share with you that Bill 155, this proposed piece of legislation, is about ensuring rural communities have the tools, the support, the leadership and the recognition they need to continue to build capacity in order to grow and succeed. It would strengthen the framework that supports rural economic development, and it would reinforce our commitment to helping rural communities remain strong, competitive and, most importantly, a place where people can have confidence that they can live, work, play and raise a family with pride. Speaker, the future for rural Ontario, under the leadership of Premier Ford and our entire government, is bright, and our government as a whole is committed to being a strong partner in that future.

As I said in the start and I'll conclude by saying, this has been a surreal moment for me. The things I learned in my role as a rural community adviser have helped shape the impact that I've had on the Ministry of Rural Affairs. Just this past Friday, I was at a housing forum hosted by the county of Bruce. There was an individual there who actually worked for my mom as a summer student in the municipality of East Wawanosh. His name was Wayne Caldwell.

Oh, by the way, I should say hi to Mom. In 15 years, I don't think she's ever been home to really see me debate. I think she's tuned in this morning, so hey, Mom. Welcome to the House.

Wayne Caldwell was using a tried-and-true type of facilitation that I recognized immediately, and it made me smile. It made me reflect on the importance of making sure that anyone and everyone who wants to make a difference in rural Ontario is collectively coming together to share ideas and to identify priority actions. Our government stands with them. The future of rural Ontario is inseparable from the future of Ontario itself because, Speaker, when rural Ontario succeeds, Ontario succeeds.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): Questions?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My thanks to the members who made their speeches this morning. A question for them: One of the pressing issues in northern Ontario, according to my colleagues who represent ridings in the north, is the growth of wildfires, the lack of adequate fire suppression, a lack of resources to help residents deal with smoke. Why is it that this bill doesn't address that pressing issue for the north, which is going to have both life consequences and economic consequences?

Hon. George Pirie: The answer is very clear: Because we already have. We've heard my colleague right there from the MNR talking about the actions that the MNR is doing to strengthen the response to the forestry sector and the wildfire sector.

I think the response was phenomenal, and we've got a colleague right there as well who was involved with that response. That was an epic climate event that went from the Manitoba border right to Lake Nipigon. And almost immediately, there were more forest fires ignited in that

climate event than all of last year. The response was phenomenal, and it was coordinated. So the answer is, we already are.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): Question?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Good morning, everyone. Again, this is another big bill coming down with many different things. Some go together; some don't go together, but you think they go together for some reason.

I'm just wondering if you can tell me how much engagement and consultation you've done thus far with Indigenous communities and where we see their voices in this bill.

Hon. George Pirie: We obviously have constant communication with Indigenous communities. It's part of who we are within this government. I think the member will know that I served on Wahgoshig Resources Inc. That was a 100% owned entity for Wahgoshig First Nation. So it's in our DNA.

We never stop consulting with the First Nations. As we know, and as we've said here, nothing is going to happen without the Indigenous people. We have been—and I personally have been—involved with that dialogue since the days of Placer Dome. We understand that that's our mandate.

We're totally dedicated to the discharge of the duty to consult, and we do it on a regular basis—not just a regular basis; every single day. That's how we interact with Indigenous communities: as partners—as full partners, the way it should be. As you know, as I've said, nothing is going to happen without the Indigenous people.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): Question?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Northern Ontario's economy is driven by industries such as mining, forestry, agriculture, manufacturing and transportation. These sectors create good-paying jobs, support hard-working families and contribute significantly to Ontario's economic success.

This question is to the Minister of Northern Economic Development and Growth. Organizations like the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. play an important role in helping these sectors grow and adapt to changing economic conditions. By establishing a clear economic development mandate in legislation, our government is reinforcing the corporation's role in supporting growth and, yes, opportunity across the region.

Can the minister explain how this legislative change will help ensure the corporation continues to support industries that are critical to northern Ontario's prosperity?

Hon. George Pirie: Thank you very much for the question. That's exactly why we made the change legislatively, to focus on tariff-proof jobs. We know there are challenges, and we are not through with—for a long way—the challenge with tariffs.

You will see our investments in Thunder Bay on the port, Sault Ste. Marie on the port. You see our investments in Sault Ste. Marie to support the steel sector and manufacturing sector. You see our investments in the agriculture sector as we invest in tile drainage. You see us invest in the mining sector, especially the critical minerals that are absolutely required not only for the EV revolution but for national defence. We just heard, and we announced a few weeks ago, the discovery of scandium.

So yes, that's what we're doing: We're pivoting ourselves to reduce our dependence on US markets through the NOHFC to focus on tariff-proof jobs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): Question?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Through you, Speaker: The behaviour of the government during last year's wildfire season in northwestern Ontario was utterly shameful. People did not show up from the ministries—either the MNR or disaster preparedness—until a week after people had been forced to evacuate. Communities had burnt to the ground. It was a colossal disaster. People did not even hear that they needed to evacuate until the fire was at their backs. So do not say that was a phenomenal job; it was shameful.

What I would like to know is what does the government plan to do to be pre-emptive for next year so that we never experience something as bad as that again?

Hon. George Pirie: I disagree utterly with that statement. That response was a success. That was almost instantaneous combustion with that disaster. Everybody did their job. And you don't have to be on the ground to do your job. You're communicating with people and communities all across that fire zone. It was a tremendous success. And what our response will be has already been told by the minister of MNR—about building wider water bombers.

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I'll tell you we did a great job. All you have to do is talk to some of the people that were involved there—all of them, in fact—that said we did a great job to respond to that. Everybody did their job, as it should have been.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): Question?

MPP George Darouze: Thank you to the Minister of Rural Affairs for her comments this morning and for everything she does to support rural Ontario. I've welcomed her to Ottawa—including our rural villages like Metcalfe—multiple times, and I appreciate her work.

The minister knows this story, but going back to when I was at city council, my rural communities in Ottawa always felt that they should be able to apply for the Rural Ontario Development Program, and the minister acknowledged our unique rural areas and made that change.

I was wondering if the minister could talk about the important benefits the ROD program has and how it can continue to support rural villages such as mine right in Carleton.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I appreciate the question from the member who so proudly calls Ottawa home. He has served for years, not only as a municipal officer and councillor but most importantly as our colleague, as a member of Provincial parliament. MPP Darouze has brought forward a zest for eastern Ontario like we've never seen before. He digs right in and gets solutions, and the manner in which we modernized and evolved the Rural Ontario Development Program is a perfect example of that.

I met him when he was a councillor, and I learned first-hand about how the rural wards of the city of Ottawa were feeling like they were left behind. So we dove into it, and we really took a look at how rural wards and larger upper tiers, if you will, were being left out. Therefore, we adapted the program based on postal codes and their realities to make sure that all rural communities have access to the Rural Ontario Development Program.

Mayor Sutcliffe was here yesterday. I had the pleasure of meeting with him, and I was thrilled to be able to join the MPP and his mayor in Metcalfe earlier this summer to celebrate funding that enabled a very vital program to support the continued growth of that community. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): Questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: To the minister: If she knows that Ontario is losing 319 acres of farmland every day, why is the government not doing something to stem that loss of vital agricultural land?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I think Minister Pirie and I were both jumping to answer that, because there's so much opportunity when you take a look at that horizon. When you look at 50,000 acres in northern Ontario ready to be formatted—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): It's now time to move on to members' statements.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ELLIOT LAKE

MPP Bill Rosenberg: Speaker, talking about finding a great place to live, work, play and do business, there's a community in northern Ontario that stands out: the city of Elliot Lake. Built on uranium mining in the 1950s, the community grew rapidly. When the mining industry left, Elliot Lake reinvented themselves as a pioneer in affordable retirement living. Today, Elliot Lake is built on resilience, opportunity and an exceptional quality of life for all ages and backgrounds.

Surrounded by hundreds of lakes and vast forests, Elliot Lake is an outdoor enthusiast's paradise. Fishing, golfing, hiking, cycling, cross-country and downhill skiing, ATV-ing and snowmobiling—there is something for everyone.

Elliot Lake offers amenities expected in a much larger urban centre. They have a hospital, schools, shopping, restaurants, services and recreation facilities, including the newly opened Rogers Arena. Everything in Elliot Lake is only six minutes away.

Elliot Lake offers an opportunity to get more value for your money, regardless of age. If you're looking for affordability and a better work-life balance, the community offers an attractive alternative. For businesses, there are available opportunities for investments across many sectors, with over 20 new businesses in the last four years.

What makes Elliot Lake special is the people. It's a community where neighbours look out for one another and where you can really, truly feel like you belong. If you're looking for a place to call home, a place to invest, a place to build your business or just a place to go and visit for a few days, I encourage you to take a closer look at Elliot Lake.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

MPP Lisa Gretzky: November 25 marks the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and the start of 16 Days of Activism. We must confront the truth: Gender-based violence is deeply entrenched in our institutions, communities and justice system.

The Sloka case, the case involving five former World Junior hockey players and a recent post by the National Post that framed a young woman's sexual assault—her rape—by two hockey players as "unwanted threesome" all highlight the systemic challenges survivors face when seeking accountability and justice. These cases raise questions about consent, power, institutional responsibility, whose voices are believed and whose future is prioritized over another.

We can't ignore femicides, court backlogs that lead to dismissed assault cases, or the continued victim-blaming and shaming that silences survivors and shifts responsibility away from perpetrators. Gender-based violence is physical, systemic, institutional, psychological and economic. We must challenge the attitudes and structures that enable it.

The 16 Days of Activism must be more than a campaign or a series of statements or wearing a purple scarf. It must include government action, justice, dignity and a future where every woman, girl and gender-diverse person lives free from violence and fear.

Lydia's Law and the Intimate Partner Violence Epidemic Act are important legislation that every Conservative MPP voted against. Government statements must translate to meaningful action and accountability, otherwise, every victim, every survivor, every last one of us will remain Jane Doe.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Adil Shamji: Mr. Speaker, this year, I conducted a community survey to understand the factors that are leading my constituents to feel unsafe in Don Valley East. Issues of violence and inadequate safety measures scored high, but the greatest concern, shared by 59% of respondents, was traffic safety and dangerous driving—and I can totally see why. One of the most frequent complaints in my office relates to the horrendous situation on Don Mills, south of Eglinton, where Ontario Line construction has become profoundly disruptive. Frequent lane closures and dangerous swerves have created confusion and congestion for drivers and pedestrians alike.

The province has made another part of my community less safe as well. There was once a speed camera on Leslie Street, south of Lawrence, which has been removed by the Premier without any other measures to control road safety. Consequently, speeding along this section has increased by 233% in a very busy school zone.

My constituents also want to know why violent crime has gone up by 35%, fraud has increased by 48% and 157 prisoners have been lost from provincial jails under the Premier's watch—so much for protecting Ontario.

I won't stop standing up for our community safety, and I just wish we had a Premier that would the same.

BRAMPTON SANTA CLAUS PARADE

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: I rise today to recognize the 32nd annual Brampton Santa Claus Parade, which took place on Saturday, November 21. This beloved community tradition brought the magic of the holiday season to life as families, children and visitors gathered to enjoy an evening filled with festive floats, colourful displays, music and, of course, the arrival of Santa Claus himself.

As someone who had the pleasure of taking part in this year's parade, it was wonderful to see the excitement on children's faces and the enthusiasm of everyone who came together to celebrate this special occasion.

I want to extend my sincere thanks to the Rotary Club of Brampton for organizing this wonderful event, along with all the volunteers, participants and sponsors who worked tirelessly to make it possible. Events like these remind us of the importance of community traditions and the special memories they create for families.

I wish everyone a safe and happy holiday season.

CMHA THAMES VALLEY ADDICTION AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I rise today to acknowledge an incredible organization that serves our community in London North Centre: CMHA Thames Valley Addiction and Mental Health Services.

During RNAO's Take Your MPP to Work campaign, I had the immense honour of visiting the RAAM clinic team at 200 Queens Avenue and heard directly from the amazing people who pour their heart and soul into supporting those experiencing mental health and addiction challenges.

The stories they shared about helping people transform their lives were truly inspiring. When people are hanging by a thread, this team is there for them. Their non-judgmental approach ensures that people feel respected, heard, treated with dignity, compassion and, most importantly, become hopeful again.

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CMHA TVAMHS provides phenomenal community-based supports and services, but the government still doesn't pay them fairly or equitably compared to acute care workers. This must be fixed.

I submit to this House a grave concern: The withdrawal management program in St. Thomas—a required first step to enter the HART hub system—is scheduled to close. They have helped over 1,500 people—more than 650 Londoners, many of whom are working full-time—to start beating their addiction and living again. Ontario Health has requested a wind-down plan, potentially shuttering at the end of March 2027. This program keeps people out of the ER and helps them keep their jobs. I trust the government will not allow these beds to close.

Speaker, while many of us will be enjoying Christmas and the holiday season, many on the CMHA Thames Valley team will be navigating some of the most difficult cases and looking after people who need them the most. To our community heroes at CMHA Thames Valley Addiction and Mental Health Services, thank you for changing lives.

CÉRÉMONIES DU JOUR DU SOUVENIR À GLENGARRY–PRESCOTT–RUSSELL

M. Stéphane Sarrazin: Je souhaite aujourd'hui souligner l'engagement et le dévouement de nombreuses personnes de ma circonscription de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell qui ont contribué aux cérémonies du jour du Souvenir au cours des dernières semaines.

Les cérémonies ont eu lieu dans plusieurs communautés, notamment à Alfred, Alexandria, Apple Hill, Casselman, Cumberland, Embrun, Hawkesbury, Limoges, L'Orignal, Maxville, Plantagenet, Russell, St-Isidore, Vars et à Vankleek Hill pour en nommer seulement quelques-unes.

Je tiens à remercier sincèrement les membres de la filiale de la Légion royale canadienne, les organismes communautaires, les bénévoles, les anciens combattants et toutes les personnes qui, année après année, consacrent leur temps à organiser ces cérémonies. Grâce à vous, nous continuons à rendre hommage à celles et ceux qui ont fait le sacrifice ultime pour notre liberté et à nous souvenir de ceux qui ont servi notre pays avec courage et dévouement.

Malheureusement, plusieurs cérémonies ayant lieu le même jour et souvent à la même heure, il m'est impossible d'être présent partout. Cette année, je n'ai pas pu assister à aucune cérémonie puisque j'étais à l'étranger pour représenter la province de l'Ontario lors d'un sommet international. Sachez toutefois que malgré mon absence, j'étais avec vous en pensée et que je partage pleinement ce moment de recueillement.

À toutes celles et ceux qui ont contribué à ces cérémonies, merci du fond du coeur pour votre engagement et votre dévouement à préserver notre devoir de mémoire.

LABOUR DISPUTE

MPP Robin Lennox: National Steel Car has been on strike for 104 days—1,200 USW 7135 members are fighting for fair wages and safe working conditions, something that should be guaranteed to every single worker in Ontario.

Steel car workers know what happens when workplace safety isn't prioritized. One of their workers tragically died at work in 2022. Many other workers have shared stories of near misses on the job, and many more workers than that have suffered workplace injuries. USW 7135 aren't just fighting for themselves; they're fighting for the next generation of steelworkers coming up who deserve fair work and safe working conditions. We stand in solidarity with those workers today.

We can't talk about supporting workers without talking about fair wages. There is still no place in Ontario where you can work full-time at minimum wage and pay all of your bills. In Hamilton, a living wage is $23.10, significantly more than Ontario's minimum wage right now. And at the same time, the cost of a two-bedroom apartment in Hamilton has gone up 29% in the last five years. The cost of groceries has skyrocketed, and many Hamiltonians are having difficulty making ends meet.

If you're working full-time and you can't afford rent and groceries in the same month, your government is failing you. We need the government of Ontario to step up and guarantee fair wages for fair work in this province.

FIREFIGHTERS

Hon. Laurie Scott: Today I would like to recognize the outstanding firefighters who serve and protect our communities in Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. Each and every day, our firefighters show courage, compassion and a strong commitment to saving lives and keeping our communities safe.

Earlier this month, the Kawartha Lakes Fire Rescue Service held its annual awards and recognition ceremony. They honoured 32 firefighters for reaching important service milestones and celebrated 13 retiring members. These firefighters marked decades of bravery and dedication. While some are just starting their careers, others have served for more than 20 years, and I want to especially congratulate Frank Spry, who dedicated 50 years of service to the city of Kawartha Lakes. Thank you, Frank.

As well, the township of Cavan Monaghan recently unveiled a new firefighter monument to honour those who gave their lives in the line of duty. The first name on the monument was Captain Orville Thertell. Thank you to Captain Thertell's family and to all the men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

Recognitions like these remind us of how much our firefighters do to protect us. Whether they are just starting out, celebrating many years of service, or retiring, our firefighters always show up when you call upon them.

To every firefighter and their families in Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and across Ontario, thank you for your service, sacrifice and dedication to keeping us safe.

CAM GUTHRIE

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I rise today to say thanks to someone who has devoted himself to serving Guelph for the past 16 years.

Cam Guthrie served as mayor from 2014 until his final meeting last week and served on council prior to that. Most of you know Cam from his time as chair of the Ontario Big City Mayors.

Cam's love for Guelph is apparent in his passion for the city, and during his time as mayor, he was instrumental in helping the city grow and evolve.

On a personal note, I want to thank Cam for being a friend and partner serving our community. He was a steady hand during the pandemic, and he never let a federal or provincial grant pass him by. He shared my commitment to making Guelph a "yes in my backyard" city when it comes to housing, and we worked well together to secure funding for supportive housing in our community.

As chair of the OBCM, Cam worked tirelessly to call attention to the impact of homelessness on residents and local businesses in communities across Ontario.

Cam's legacy will be felt in the months ahead and in the foundation he laid for our new mayor, Leanne Caron.

This Friday, we will be cutting the ribbon on the new south end rec centre. Next year, Guelph will open our new central library, host the Memorial Cup and celebrate its bicentennial.

I invite you all to come visit Guelph, share in the festivities and personally thank Cam Guthrie for his service.

STEP UP FOR CELIAC CAMPAIGN

Ms. Laura Smith: A few weeks ago, I joined Kyle Baker, his family and our great community at Thornhill's Pomona Mills at the Step Up for Celiac costume walk.

Kyle is a special young advocate. He's here today. He's the inspiration behind Celiac Strong.

Celiac disease affects approximately one in 100 Canadians, and 90% of Canadians with celiac disease remain undiagnosed. Kyle's initiative is built on using his own personal experience to raise awareness and encourage understanding and empower others living with the disease. He wants to support them, and through his social media platform, Kyle has a very large following. He has gained over 4,600 followers, sharing gluten-free recipes and finds and his daily experiences living with celiac disease since the age of three.

For kids living with celiac, sometimes something as simple as attending a birthday party can leave them feeling excluded, and Kyle is working to end that. He's promoting a welcoming and supportive community so all kids can feel included.

We had a great time on our walk. We shared gluten-free Halloween treats and enjoyed the morning walking in costume through the beautiful Pomona Mills.

Speaker, leadership has no age requirement, and Kyle is such a special and wonderful example of that. We're incredibly proud of Kyle and the difference you're making. Keep inspiring others, keep making a difference and keep being Celiac Strong.

WEARING OF SCARVES

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services on a point of order.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for members in the House to wear their purple scarves in the House today.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services is seeking unanimous consent for members to wear purple scarves in the House today. Agreed? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Michael Parsa: I'd like to welcome to the House members of the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses.

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A reminder to all my colleagues here to meet us after question period for a group photo.

Thank you very much for being here. Thank you for all you do for members of our community.

Hon. Kevin Holland: Visiting from Thunder Bay today, we have Sarah Jensen, board president of CHF Canada and Thunder Bay co-op member.

Also, from the Thunder Bay Professional Firefighters Association is president Robert Sheppard and vice-president Kyle Solomon. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. John Fraser: I would like to welcome Ottawa Mayor Mark Sutcliffe and Sueling Ching, president of the Ottawa Board of Trade, and the massive contingent that's here from Ottawa today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Rob Flack: I would like to introduce members of the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada: Allison Chase, Tim Ross, Simone Swail.

And I would also like to introduce a local firefighter from my riding, Mr. Daryl Smith, president of the St. Thomas Professional Firefighters Association.

Have a great day at Queen's Park.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Today, I have members of family viewing the veterans memorial: Rob, Samantha, Jim and Susan Norwood, and the woman I owe everything to, my mother, Brenda Darling.

Mr. Will Bouma: On behalf of the Brantford Professional Fire Fighters Association, I would like to welcome Josh Van Horne, Jaclyn Housworth and Gavin Jacklyn to the House today.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: I would like to welcome, from Women's Habitat of Etobicoke, Carla Neto, executive director; Alicia Whyte; Kaylee Muise; Maha Fatima; and Ashley Fraser.

MPP George Darouze: It's a pleasure to introduce a large delegation from the city of Ottawa here today, with the Ottawa Board of Trade. They have a reception tonight at the library event room at 5 o'clock. I will invite all members to join us. Welcome to your House.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to welcome made-in-Canada Candu Energy and the leadership team to Queen's Park, and welcome and encourage everyone to join us at the MaRS building this evening for the reception.

Hon. Zee Hamid: I would like to welcome Andrew Croll, VP of the Milton Professional Fire Fighters Association.

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: We have members of the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance who are joining us today for their advocacy day. We have Jan VanderHout, president; we have Steve Peters, chair of the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers; we have Andrew Hendriks from Hendriks Greenhouses; Rodney Bierhuizen from Flowers Canada Growers; and Brian Gatcke from Foliera. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Speaker. I want to welcome Jennifer Chamberlin. She's the executive director of New Starts for Women shelter in Red Lake, Ontario. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I would like to welcome everyone from the Association of Family Health Teams of Ontario, with a special shout-out to Dr. David Schieck from Guelph Family Health Team and NP Jodi Colwill from Minto-Mapleton Family Health Team; also, the co-op housing federation folks, with a special shout-out to Twilla Maybury from Beaver Creek Housing Co-operative and Elana Harte from the Central Ontario Co-operative Housing Federation.

MPP Catherine McKenney: It is my pleasure to welcome members from the Canadian housing federation who are visiting us here today: Doug Sider from the Golden Horseshoe Co-operative Housing Federation, Sarah Burnett-Murray from the Collective Housing Co-operative, Monica Brodeur from Pinecroft co-operative homes and Diana Yoon from CHF Canada.

Thank you for your continued efforts, and welcome to your House.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I would like to welcome Renee Moores from Naomi's House women's shelter in Winchester today.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I would like to welcome to the House today Riley Spigarelli, the executive director of Bethesda House in my riding of Durham.

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: I would like to welcome, from the Jean Tweed Centre, Belinda Marchese, the executive director, and Julia Bloomenfeld, the clinical director.

Mr. Lorne Coe: [*Inaudible*] Marc Bonin and Christopher Phillips from the Whitby fire service. Welcome to Queen's Park.

MPP Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to welcome Sylvie Guenther, who is the executive director of Hiatus House, and thank her entire team for all the incredible work they do in Windsor and Essex county.

Hon. Brian Saunderson: It's my pleasure to welcome Samantha Jones, executive director at My Friend's House, a women's shelter in Collingwood. I congratulate her and thank her for all the important work she does.

Hon. David Piccini: It's a great pleasure to welcome members of OPFFA here: Dan, Tyler, Stephanie and Howard, whom I met with.

A special shout-out to Dan Worrall, who will be retiring in August—thank you for all you do—and to Nancy Johnston from Cornerstone, who's joining us today at Queen's Park. Welcome—

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Madam Speaker, please let me welcome to the Ontario Legislature Michael Smith, the president of the Toronto Professional Fire Fighters' Association.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): We're out of time, and I just want to remind members you may come back at 1 o'clock. Please, do not take it personally. I know how awful it is when you're sitting there and you hope to introduce somebody. To our guests, it's my fault that your name wasn't introduced, but members, you can come back at 1 o'clock.

I do want to draw your attention, however, to the Speaker's gallery. Joining us today is Ms. Emel Derinöz Tekin, the consul general of the Republic of Türkiye.

Also in the Speaker's gallery is the Honourable Steve Peters, who was the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario for the 39th Parliament and the member for Elgin–Middlesex–London for the 37th to the 39th Parliaments, and also another familiar face: the Honourable Bill Walker, who represented Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound in the 40th, 41st and 42nd Parliaments.

From my riding, and also with the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance: Jan VanderHout. Welcome, Jan.

It is now time for question period.

QUESTION PERIOD

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, Speaker. This question is for the Premier.

This morning, the emergency room wait time at Sault Area Hospital in Sault Ste. Marie was six hours and 10 minutes. At the North Bay Regional Health Centre this morning, the ER wait time was six hours and 18 minutes. At Toronto General Hospital, just down the road, this morning, the ER wait time was six hours and 49 minutes.

Yesterday, we presented a motion to call for a freeze on firing health care workers. The government voted against it. I would like to know how this Premier plans to fix emergency room wait times if they are going to continue to fire front-line health care workers.

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you for giving me an opportunity to talk about the Emergency Department Action Team, something that we put in place earlier this year that is actually going into those emergency departments to see exactly how they can improve flow, how they can improve access. And we've seen some incredible results already.

We've had the EDAT team go into Windsor regional. We've had the EDAT team in Ottawa. They are currently in Barrie. What they are finding is, when you send experts into an emergency department, when you work with clinical experts within those emergency departments, you actually get results. That's what we're doing with this Emergency Department Action Team.

We'll continue to do that work because we know that it is very stressful for our patients when they are waiting in an emergency department—waiting for access—and that's the work that we are surgically doing to make sure that they have access.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, clearly not good results, Speaker, because in Barrie the emergency wait time this morning was five hours and 56 minutes. In London, at Victoria Hospital, emergency room wait times were eight hours and 45 minutes, which was actually shorter than another option in London, at University Hospital, where wait times were 10 hours. And in Kitchener, at WRHN @ Midtown, emergency room wait times were 22 hours and 29 minutes.

This is a disaster. We have to end the wait times. Why does this government think that firing health care workers—front-line health care workers—is a path to fixing emergency room wait times?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, I was remiss. I didn't speak about the fact that the association of family health teams is actually here in Queen's Park today, and I want to give a shout-out and a thank you to the work that they have been doing.

Because when we attach primary care providers with patients, we see that the CTAS 4s and 5s—the individuals who had no choice but were going to emergency departments because they didn't have access to a primary care provider—are actually getting that access, and we're now seeing those numbers decrease in our emergency departments across Ontario. That's the all-of-government approach to ensure that as we make surgical investments in our health care system, we see impacts in other parts of the health care system.

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So to all of the primary care providers, to the nurse practitioners, to the family health teams, to the community health centres: Thank you for continuing to attach patients because it is absolutely assisting our health care system, our hospital partners.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, eight and a half long years ago, this government promised to fix the wait times disaster, the hallway health care crisis. That's the answer? We're not getting anywhere. I'm going to send all this information over to the minister so that she can see for herself what the wait times are like across the province of Ontario this morning.

Front-line health care workers are overworked. They are burning out. We know that the solution is not to fire health care workers; it is to hire more. It is beyond belief

that this government would have chosen yesterday to vote to fire health care workers instead of hiring them.

Why won't this government stop firing our front-line health care workers and end the wait times?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Let's talk about some individual results that are making an impact. North York General Hospital has demonstrated how innovations such as a rapid assessment zone can help patients receive care faster by streamlining emergency department processes, reducing bottlenecks and improving patient flow. Thank you, North York general. Windsor Regional Hospital has implemented a range of initiatives to improve patient flow and reduce wait times, including ambulance off-load programs, enhanced bed management, and expanded surgical and diagnostic capacity.

The member opposite continues to talk down this world-class health care system we have in Ontario. I'm going to defend it, and I'm going to invest in it under the leadership of Premier Ford.

DATA CENTRES

Ms. Marit Stiles: So out of touch, Speaker, so out of touch—honestly.

I'm going to go back to the Premier. As I'm travelling around the province of Ontario, here is what people are telling me: They're telling me over and over again that the cost of everything is going up. Whether it's groceries or utility bills or rents or mortgages, there is no question that families out there are struggling with the higher cost of things, and they cannot take one more thing on their monthly bills.

But instead of helping to put money back in people's pockets, this government is paving the way to speed up mega AI data centres in communities all across this province, and they are leaving the door wide open to higher bills for families. The Premier has openly said that more data centres are coming sooner rather than later and that everybody needs to just get out of the way.

What is the Premier's plan to make sure people don't pay higher utility bills for his mega AI data centres?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries.

Hon. Matthew Rae: Thank you to the Leader of the Opposition for that very important question. Our government has chosen to act. We're not going to stick our heads in the sand with this new technology. We brought forward the Data Centre Playbook, choosing to build the economy of the future. We made it very clear in that playbook, and we will bring forward, colleagues, legislation to this House, and they will have an opportunity to vote on that legislation soon to ensure that data centre proponents in the province of Ontario pay the full cost of electricity in this province.

We're going to go one step further. We're going to ensure they're actually going to pay for the infrastructure that they need to help bring that power to them as well, because we're going to learn from other jurisdictions in the world, and we are going to protect Ontario taxpayers and protect the ratepayers of Ontario.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I would say to the member: Tell that to the people of Cambridge.

I'm going to go back to the Premier. The Toronto Star has reported that thanks to a new AI data centre, the demand for energy jumped by nearly 30%—this is a massive surge—and this sudden rise in demand for electricity has meant that someone has to foot the bill. You know who is footing the bill for it? The families in Cambridge, that's who—they are footing the bill.

The Premier didn't have many nice things to say about people who may not want a data centre in their community, so what does the Premier have to say to families who are having to shoulder higher electricity costs because of his mega AI data centres?

Hon. Matthew Rae: Through you, Speaker, to the member of the opposition: The local utility company has been planning for infrastructure upgrades in Cambridge and the region of Waterloo since 2018, well before the advent of this new technology around data centres. That demand, colleagues, was driven by new homes coming to Cambridge. Under our leadership, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is getting more homes built in Cambridge, obviously needing more electricity to support those homes.

It's also population growth, seeing more people put down roots in the region of Waterloo and Cambridge—good-paying jobs that we're attracting to this province. Since 2018, under the leadership of Premier Ford, we have attracted $235 billion of new investment in the province of Ontario, creating one million jobs. Obviously, with that increased investment and expansion of our industrial base, we need more electricity, and electrification is occurring.

We'll all continue to be there for the city of Cambridge.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I was listening, Speaker, and I'm going to go back to the Premier: 30% higher utility bills—you're okay with that?

People are not okay with that. They're already struggling with the rising rents and groceries, and your government has done absolutely nothing to address those issues. Simply saying that AI companies should pay for their energy use is not the same as having laws in place to protect residents from shouldering those costs.

The Premier is choosing American big tech over families who are already struggling to pay their bills. You want to move full speed over and ahead of these people. You want to bulldoze over their concerns when they are saying very clearly that they do not want their monthly bills to go up. It's not like they're saying no just for the sake of saying no. You are not listening.

Will you bring in a provincial moratorium now on AI data centres until there are guardrails to protect people's bills?

Hon. Matthew Rae: Speaker, the members of the opposition want us to stick our heads in the sand and allow Donald Trump and the Chinese Communist Party to control our data. We will continue to stand with the people of Ontario.

As I mentioned, we brought forward the data centre playbook. That is retroactive, Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Hon. Matthew Rae: They're heckling me now, Speaker. They don't want to know what we're going to do to protect ratepayers in the province of Ontario.

It is retroactive, and as I mentioned in my earlier response, it is fully the cost of electricity and some. They're going to help pay for that infrastructure.

Speaker, they're going to have the opportunity to vote on that piece of legislation when we bring it forward to this House. But they also have an opportunity to vote on a piece of legislation that will support the local utility in question on the PULSE report and what we brought forward to this place, ensuring they're able to fund the $120-billion infrastructure we need in our LDCs. Will they stand in their place and support that and protect ratepayers in Ontario?

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

RESPONSABILITÉ GOUVERNEMENTALE

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: This government is in a downward spiral, and taxpayers are paying the price. We hear the empty claims in endless ads over and over again about their attempts to protect Ontario. Speaker, they are just empty words.

Look at the facts: Ontario had a rising unemployment rate long before US tariffs. Mortgage delinquencies are approaching that of the financial crisis. Of the $5 billion promised to help businesses affected by US tariffs, the government has only sent $140 million out the door to help. Billions on ballooning contract costs, pet projects and a career college scandal that ran for years right under their nose.

My question to the Premier: When will he stop throwing good money after bad and stop the self-serving ads?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: If the members opposite—

Interjections.

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

The third party will come to order. The government side will come to order.

You can start the clock.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, the best ad is to come, I assure you.

But I will say this: If you want to strengthen the economy, you do not choose a leader who hiked taxes 17 times. I understand we've sort of really got under the skin of the Liberal Party because we are telling the people of Ontario the facts: 17 times, the Trudeau Liberals hiked taxes. They increased energy rates by $1,000. The leader was endorsed by Kathleen Wynne's former energy minister, who imposed an experiment that led to the highest energy costs in the history of Ontario.

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Madam Speaker, we will take no lessons from this party who will make life unaffordable for every Ontarian. We're going to double down on tax relief for every Ontarian in this province.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Speaker, try as he may to be a spin doctor instead of an energy doctor, he should know the numbers do not lie. Ontarians pay $47 million a day servicing the debt. That's $1,400 a year for every taxpayer. This fiscally irresponsible Conservative government will add $71 billion of debt to Ontario's books in the next three years, on top of the $160 billion they've already added.

Why is this government saddling Ontarians with so much debt? Because they have not grown the economy and can't balance the books. More than 40% of the debt comes from operating deficits that this government said—promised—would be eliminated by 2024.

Through you, Speaker, to the Premier: Will he finally say, « Ah, désolé, mon plan a échoué »?

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Madam Speaker, through you to the member opposite: I think she just mentioned that we haven't grown the economy. She should check her facts. When we took over from that failed party over there—$830-billion GDP. We have today, and we just announced, $1.3 trillion—almost half a trillion dollars higher.

Yes, we have borrowed some money to build the infrastructure, but guess what? Our debt is lower than when they were in power. Our debt-to-GDP is lower, so we're better fiscal managers than they are. And we didn't have to do it through tax increases. We actually cut taxes—personal income taxes, corporate taxes, HST taxes, small business taxes—right across the board. That's what the people of Ontario want. That's what we're delivering.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: It's not just me saying their plan is failing; the credit agencies are saying it too. Earlier this month, S&P fired a warning shot at this government—at this minister—saying they have two years to get their books in order or a rating downgrade is coming.

S&P's downgrade on the outlook means there is a one in three chance our province will lose its AA rating. And the finance minister is brushing it off? He would not have made light of this very serious warning when he was a rating agency executive.

Speaker, because of this government's scandals and bad choices, more of taxpayers' hard-earned money is paying interest instead of making hospitals, schools and communities safer.

To the Premier: When will you and your failing government finally come up with plan to actually protect Ontario?

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Ah, spin, spin, spin, Madam Speaker—

Interjection.

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

I apologize to the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Elle tourne, tourne, tourne. She spins, spins, spins. Let's look at the facts, Madam Speaker. In 2009, that great credit rating agency, DBRS—what did they do to the credit rating of Ontario when the Liberals were in power in 2009? They downgraded them, followed by Moody's in 2012—downgraded Ontario. In 2015, S&P—downgraded. What happened two years ago? DBRS increased the rating to AA, and S&P upgraded it to AA.

She knows the facts. In fact, our interest expense to revenue is lower than it was when we took over. The debt is lower than when we took over. The actual economy is higher. And what about the million jobs that we've created in this province in the intervening years? She knows the facts.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Ontario needs a Premier who is focused on making life more affordable. Families, workers, students: They are frustrated that life is only getting more expensive. Instead, the Premier is focused on how the Ontario PC Party will afford the next election. That's what sits at the centre of this OSAP scandal: partisan political donations. Hundreds of thousands of dollars flowed from private, for-profit career colleges to the PC Party. Just like that, the government changed the rules that let those colleges get more and more OSAP. The current Minister of Emergency Preparedness benefited the most. Now, hundreds of thousands of students are paying the price.

Speaker, to the Premier: Given that your current Minister of Emergency Preparedness raked in the most cash from career colleges that we know are responsible for potential fraud, why is she still a minister?

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

Hon. Nolan Quinn: You know, it's really interesting when the member opposite brings up donations from private institutions when she herself received donations from private institutions, members that are linked to career colleges. That party can continue making hypocritical allegations, but we're going to focus on—

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

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I withdraw.

Speaker, we're going to continue focusing on bringing back integrity to the OSAP system. These are very serious allegations that have been brought forward of serious fraud against the Ontario taxpayer.

Just last month, Career Colleges Ontario sent us a letter highlighting further concerns with their agency members: 33 of them have backdated the applications prior to August 1 to be able to get the old grant-to-loan ratio; 24 campuses have been suspended, with another 13 under review. This is continuing to evolve.

If the Liberals want to continue to trivialize it, that is on them. But ultimately, we take this very seriously. That's why we called in—

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

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Speaker, I'm just going to say, I'm not sure that member wants to get into a war on integrity with me.

The government's obsession with donations is how we got here. It's how we keep ending up here, scandal after scandal. This government granted the bad actors their wish: a way to sign up students that weren't really students and a way to collect tuition guaranteed by OSAP and paid for by the Ontario taxpayers. The bad actors are allowed to get away with it.

When the Ontario Liberals exposed the truth, only then, despite years of red alerts, was something done. We haven't even heard a peep from the Minister of Emergency Preparedness in all of this—

Interjections.

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

The government side will come to order. I will begin warning and naming people.

Back to the member—please finish your question.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Ontario families are already suffering through an affordability crisis.

Through the Chair, Speaker, to the Premier: Help me understand why they have to pay for your failures?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Listen, Madam Speaker. Let me just say this. I'll put the record of this Progressive Conservative government next to the record of that Liberal government any day of the week.

But look, if they think for a second that they're going to run and hide from the record of their new leader, they've got another thing coming, because it was their leader who put a carbon tax on small, medium and large job creators across this country, let alone every man, woman and child. It is that leader of the Liberal Party who said that we should keep our oil and gas resources in the ground. It was that leader of the Liberal Party who happily stood in his place and repealed tough-on-crime legislation that would keep criminals in jail. It was that Liberal leader who brought forward legislation that would kill mining industries across the country.

While that Liberal leader was worried about paper straws, we were investing in the Ring of Fire. While that Liberal leader was hugging a thug, we were putting police on the ground to make our communities safer. And when

he was raising taxes, we were cutting taxes to make life more affordable. I'll put our record besides theirs—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order. The government side will come to order.

I recognize the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Speaker, for generations, OSAP has helped Ontario families get past the financial barriers between them and an education. Under this Premier, that barrier just keeps growing. Unemployment is rising. We know that intimate partner violence is also rising. The cost of living is rising. Families are struggling to hold on to steady incomes through no fault of their own.

1100

And we have heard countless stories of how education offers a promise of a future. It gives hope. This government broke OSAP, which helped deliver that promise to those families.

Speaker, will the Premier fix OSAP and restore the promise for hundreds of thousands of students trying to get an education in this province?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The irony of the question—the Liberal Party believes they have some sort of moral superiority on the issue of affordability when just the last time they were in government, they increased tuition on students every single year. Your record is the highest tuition in Canadian history. Who are you to lecture any party in this place on affordability?

You created a carbon tax that increased prices on families and mothers just to pay the goods, to put food on the table for their kids. You opposed gas tax cuts.

Every step of the way, the Liberal legacy is higher taxes and unaffordability. You chased 300,000 jobs out. There is no one in Ontario that wants Trudeau 2.0 back in this province.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Speaker, I was at the Redwood shelter for the graduation ceremony of their HVAC and tech programs, and there was barely a dry eye in the place. The valedictorian said she used to be afraid, she used to see the world as happening to her, and then the shelter gave her power and a voice that she was using to inspire other women.

But like so many other programs in this sector, training funding is coming to an end. Year after year, these shelters do not know where the next bit of money will come from.

Will this Premier stabilize this sector, annualize the funding and spend the money on the services that women who are fleeing abuse need?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity.

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: I really appreciate the member bringing up that HVAC program that the young women went through because it is programs like that that our government invests in. The Investing in Women's Futures Program invests in that program to see women who have gone through extremely traumatic, difficult, challenging times in their lives have the opportunity for training and an opportunity to rebuild so that they can have and achieve financial independence.

That is the future that our government is working for, and that plan is backed by $1.4 billion of investment that our government invested through Ontario-STANDS, because we know that when we support women and the organizations—many that are here in this room—to do the work, we are seeing women who are safer and able to take care of their families with dignity and respect.

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

MPP Alexa Gilmour: This government can wear as many purple scarves as they want, but when they spend $9 million on a study for a fantasy tunnel under the 401 when this sector asks for $10 million in preventative measures and doesn't get it, this government knows full well that the budget is too small.

Last year, gender-based violence took the lives of 40 women who should be here. Meanwhile, shelters meant to protect them turned away hundreds more.

Survivors and advocates from across the province are at Queen's Park today, and they'd like to ask the Premier about his priorities. If he can find $2 billion for the parking lot of a luxury spa in downtown Toronto, why can't he find the money to end intimate partner violence?

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: Madam Speaker, let's take us back: In 2022, our government signed the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence. In 2023, we released Ontario-STANDS and committed $1.4 billion to that strategy.

Out of those investments, we've invested in shelter bed access—over 300 beds, $27 million towards that to expand support. We have also invested in the centralized assaulted women's hotline—significantly made those investments to make sure that women have somebody who's going to answer their call when they need it.

Madam Speaker, our government has taken serious action—action that other people talk about—to invest in these organizations because we know they need the support to be able to capture every single woman who is out there looking for it.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Stephen Blais: Good morning, Madam Speaker. My question is for the Premier.

The government has repeatedly promised to recover Ontario taxpayers' money lost to their OSAP scandal, but a promise to get money back is not a plan to get money back. So exactly how does the government plan to recover it? Like their tough-on-crime approach, is the Premier just going to send a letter, or is he going to actually take real, decisive action?

The Premier has never been shy about going to court to get what he wants. He went to court to cap nurses' wages. He went to court to keep his cellphones secret. So surely,

he could demonstrate some equivalent level of enthusiasm for recovering taxpayers' lost money. We deserve more than assurances; we deserve a plan to get our money back.

Madam Speaker, to the Premier: Do you even know how much money was lost, and what is your plan to get it back?

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

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I know that member has heard me say it in this House many times: One dollar to fraud is one dollar too many. That's why we brought in KPMG forensic auditors to ensure that we get the confidence back in the system that we need when it comes to private institutions and OSAP, Speaker.

Since 2020, we have done over 3,200 individual OSAP investigations. We have been taking this very seriously since 2020. Since March 2019, we have done over 1,700 inspections of career colleges with a further 700 investigations into those exact same career colleges. That is why we have referred it to the Ontario Provincial Police and we brought in KPMG: because bad actors have taken advantage of the OSAP system, which is intended to support students with their upskilling and their up-training for future careers.

We are going to ensure that we get the confidence back in the system before we release another taxpayer dollar towards the private institutions.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: Madam Speaker, the government can tell a 22-year-old nursing graduate exactly how much she owes down to the penny, but it seemingly can't do that for private career colleges. We do know, however, that the government and the Conservative Party can count their fundraising dollars. The Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Response has raised tens of thousands of dollars from private career colleges.

Perhaps it's time they spent time minding the public purse and a little bit less time on the family business. Ontario taxpayers deserve an accounting. After thousands of investigations we just heard about, after consulting firms were brought in to look at it, can the government tell us how much money they lost and when do they plan to get it back?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: That member needs to look behind him. The member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore received donations from members that are associated with career colleges. The member from Scarborough–Guildwood, just two months ago, was at a career college graduation. They're throwing rocks when they're in a glass house, Speaker.

Ultimately, we take these allegations very seriously, and that is why we have suspended all OSAP payments across the private institution sector.

Interjections.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: They can continue laughing about this, but these are serious allegations. That is why we brought in forensic auditors to ensure that the bad actors—the serious actors—are going to be held accountable. The Ontario Provincial Police and the Auditor General have been notified.

Before we release another taxpayer dollar for its intended use—to help students upskill and up-train—we need to have confidence in that system.

Interjections.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: They can keep yelling all they want, but we're focusing on getting the results that we need to release those dollars back to—

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

LANDFILL

Mr. Anthony Leardi: My question is for the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: Stop being racist.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I will ask the leader of the third party—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

I will ask the leader—

Interjection.

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

I will ask the leader of the third party to withdraw.

1110

Mr. John Fraser: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Stand and withdraw.

Mr. John Fraser: Sorry. I withdraw.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order. Order. The next person who speaks—this is twice now. Honestly, the next person who speaks out is out.

The member for Essex.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Thank you, Speaker.

This question is for the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. Every day, hundreds of trucks travel west on Highway 401, bringing useful products to the people in Essex county. We appreciate the skill and the dedication of Ontario truck drivers.

But also, every day, hundreds of trucks pass through Essex county from all corners of the province on their way to dumps in Michigan. Those garbage haulers add wear and tear on our highways, and they add to air pollution. This is bad for the environment and bad for our community.

Speaker, it has never been more important to find sustainable ways to manage Ontario's waste.

Can the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks speak to some of the innovative solutions that communities in Ontario are using to manage their waste closer to home?

Hon. Todd McCarthy: I do want to say how well represented the good people of Essex are by the excellent member for Essex, our deputy government House leader.

I have said in this House before, but it's worth repeating in answering the question, that 40% of our commercial waste is trucked to landfills across the border. And here at home, we have less than 10 years of landfill capacity left. As our own capacity declines, relying on international systems and the whims of a foreign leader—we cannot accept that risk.

The solution starts, therefore, with diverting more waste from landfills. And nowhere in Ontario, I may say, do we do it better than in my community of Durham. The Durham York Energy Centre turns 140,000 tonnes of residential waste, which would ordinarily not be recycled, into enough electricity to power 10,000 homes each and every year. That is the solution we must embrace. Energy—

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Speaker, I thank the minister for that response.

At home and around the world, energy-from-waste is increasingly being adopted as a modern solution to waste management challenges. There has never been a time that's better than today to find innovative ways of converting waste to energy, while recovering valuable resources. Ontario has the technical expertise and the skilled workforce that can get these facilities built. The only thing missing is the willpower to move forward. For far too long, red tape and delays have made it difficult to get energy-from-waste facilities built.

Can the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks share how the Building Ontario Faster Act, if passed, will help promote the adoption of innovative resource recovery and energy-from-waste—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Todd McCarthy: Thank you again—through you, Madam Speaker—to the member for Essex for that timely question.

Bill 140, if passed, tells the world that we are open for business here in Ontario in energy-from-waste—and it not only includes producing energy, as I've indicated; it includes recovering valuable resources that would otherwise be destined for landfill.

Each year, our Durham York Energy Centre recovers the equivalent of 36 million aluminum cans and 3,000 cars' worth of steel. It's good for our environment, and it's very good for our economy.

That's why we've proposed to accelerate the approval process for new energy-from-waste facilities in Ontario by recognizing the biogenic portion of municipal waste as a renewable resource. This will help make projects eligible for a streamlined renewable energy approval process, if Bill 140 is passed.

INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Speaker. This government is once again pushing forward a bill to fast-track development by stripping important measures to protect the environment and threatening sacred burial sites. This Bill 140 is the younger sibling of Bill 5. Instead of upholding First Nations' cultural heritage rights, this government is putting these very rights at risk and overriding the role of archaeologists.

To the Premier: Will this government acknowledge that they have missed the mark and repeal Bill 140?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism.

Hon. Graham McGregor: We've been working in partnership with First Nations communities, with rights holders, to make sure that we deliver a system that is tough, fast and fair. We're not simply increasing our approval timelines and maintaining protections. As the member will know, First Nations are concerned with the system we have and don't accept the premise that the protections we have currently are sufficient, so we're working with rights holders directly, engaging with communities directly to make sure that we build a system that is tougher, faster, fairer, has better collaboration with First Nations communities—and delivering an 80% reduction in approval timelines so we can get development moving, get shovels in the ground on projects intentionally.

Now, the member will know well that if you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together. That's what this government is doing with engagement from communities across Ontario. Moving together, we're going to build a system that's better for the future for everyone.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Speaker, the government's own resources acknowledge that any site within 300 metres of a water source has high archaeological potential. The impacts of Bill 140 are especially concerning in the Ring of Fire region along the Attawapiskat River where the ancestral burial sites and artifacts are still undocumented. This bill puts these sites at risk.

Through the Speaker again: Will this government repeal Bill 140 and commit that no development will take place in the Ring of Fire region without the free, prior and informed consent of all First Nations impacted?

Hon. Graham McGregor: Thank you and meegwetch to the member for the question, and it's an important one. The member will know the standards and guidelines do not say anything within 300 metres has high archaeological potential. The standards and guidelines today say it may have archaeological potential which, of course, is interpreted by municipalities—444 municipalities across Ontario where we have various interpretations, which is exactly the problem we're trying to solve to make sure

we're protecting what is sacred to First Nations communities—and, frankly, sacred cultural heritage to Ontario—in a meaningful way, doing it consistently.

We've been engaging with First Nations, with rights holders over a year and a half on this work. We've had 100 one-on-one meetings with 60 First Nations communities, multi-regional meetings. And we've set up, actually, with the Anishinabek Nation, representing 38 First Nations communities, the first-ever historic protocol agreement between the ministry and their nation. The member doesn't talk about that. The member should talk about that because we've got a great record on engagement.

This is a great policy—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Members, if I could just have your attention, I'd like to draw your attention to the visitor's gallery where we are joined by the Honourable Todd Smith, the representative from Prince Edward–Hastings in the 40th and 41st Parliaments and Bay of Quinte in the 42nd and 43rd Parliaments.

I'm sure you'd like to be down here this week, wouldn't you?

Question?

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Yesterday in this chamber, the Minister of Colleges and Universities called the struggles that people are facing as a result of this OSAP sandal "frivolous." I seem to recall his boss said basically the same thing last week. I am appalled that this government seems to have no empathy for the people who are now struggling because of this government's actions.

Today, my question is about oversight. In 2018, the Auditor General warned about problems with OSAP oversight. In 2020, she warned it again. In 2021, she warned again about OSAP oversight. And then in 2023, Career Colleges Ontario was so concerned they recommended bringing in law enforcement. In 2025, the federal government and Career Colleges Ontario both warned this government about suspicious activity.

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Why did it take this government seven years to do something about all these warnings?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I said the Liberal Party is frivolous, and I think Ontario knows that. There have been three elections in a row; they're sitting on the rump, not even having official status.

But we take these allegations very seriously. We've done over 3,200 individual inspections into OSAP. These are very serious allegations. We've done over 1,700 inspections of career colleges since March 2019, with another 700 investigations into those specific career colleges. But we're adding more guardrails to ensure that we have the confidence we need to be able to re-release OSAP because I understand the impact this has on the good students and good institutions that are caught up in this.

I'll remind the member opposite: I fully understand the impact this is having on the good students, but because it was more widespread than initially thought, we had to pause the OSAP system until we get the confidence back. But again, I'll remind the member opposite that just last month, Career Colleges Ontario further highlighted more institutions they have concerns with as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Kanata–Carleton.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: So this government ignored seven years of warnings, and then when they finally did act, they punished the innocent people who were already struggling.

This government's job is to protect people when they need it, to stand up for them. Let the justice system deal with the perpetrators.

Then this government hypes a bill that they suggest will deal with the OSAP scandal. And what's contained in the—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Treasury Board President has been named. Kinga Surma, please leave the chamber.

Miss Surma was escorted from the chamber.

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

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: So what was contained in this bill? Retroactive protection for the minister and his staff from future prosecution.

It's so sad that none of us were surprised that the priority of this government isn't helping the people that they've harmed; it's protecting the Premier, the minister and their friends.

Question: Will any minister over there tell us specifically what they're doing to help people who were so badly harmed by this government.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: With urgency, we're bringing legislation this session so that we can re-release OSAP back to the students that need the dollars.

But ultimately, this comes down to serious criminal allegations against bad actors that have taken advantage of Ontario taxpayer dollars. We had to pause the system when it comes to private institutions because we need the confidence to be able to release those dollars. That's why we're adding stricter student identity verification requirements; enhanced KPIs including graduation rate, employment rate; the threshold for audit will be lowered; we're imposing caps on OSAP-funded enrolment; and we're also excluding predominantly online programs

But I'll remind the Liberals the serious allegations we're speaking of, because they think this is a joke. Third parties were completing coursework on behalf of students. They were completing exams in as little as six minutes. They were filling out all of the OSAP applications from one single IP address.

Speaker, these are very serious criminal allegations. They can continue to trivialize it. That's why we've brought in the Ontario Provincial Police and brought in forensic auditors to bring back confidence into the OSAP system.

HOMELESSNESS

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: We are entering the coldest months of the year, and still, 85,000 people in Ontario are homeless. More and more women are staying in violent relationships because they have nowhere to go. In my community, people continue to live in tents while we have supportive housing beds that sit empty because there are no operating dollars for providers. Nobody, no matter their political stripe, wants to see that happen to their neighbours.

Greens have proposed a solution that would raise $27 billion and end homelessness right now: a tax on multi-millionaires and billionaires. But this government would let the ultra-rich pay less taxes. They would rather let homelessness grow to 300,000. They would rather overload supportive and transitional housing and watch waitlists grow than ask their wealthy donors to pay their fair share. That's despite the fact that 90% of Canadians support a tax on extreme wealth.

Speaker, my question to the Premier is, what's more important: housing people or helping billionaires?

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

Hon. Rob Flack: I thank the member opposite always for her passion and her care.

Part of our plan has always been to protect Ontario's most vulnerable. Speaker, that is why we work closely with our municipal partners, the 47 service managers and 10 DSSAB managers we have throughout this province.

We are investing record amounts of money to support housing and to homelessness, close to $3 billion. Let me tell you where it comes from: $2 billion invested in key support—homelessness prevention up 40% since 2023; homelessness and addiction recovery, HART hubs—over $500 million; encampment support—the new deal for Toronto, the new deal for Ottawa; Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit. The list goes on.

We understand, Speaker, that this is a national concern. It's a provincial concern. I met with my cohorts, the ministers of provincial housing, in the last few weeks. We're on a plan to get this fixed.

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I want to thank the minister. He has always been a kind colleague.

This government likes to say that a tax like this would make life more expensive for Ontarians. Let's see whose life would be more expensive. Raise your hand if you have wealth of over $100 million—okay, nobody.

So I'd like to walk the Premier through what a wealth tax would mean for the super-rich and what it would mean for Ontarians struggling to get by. Taxing the rich might mean one less yacht for Galen Weston. If he had to pay 5% on his $22.7 billion, he would be left with a measly $22.5 billion—poor Galen.

But for the people of Ontario, a wealth tax would end homelessness, fix our schools, end hallway health care or bring OSAP back for students across the province. So my question to the Premier: Can you explain to the people of Ontario why an extra yacht for Galen Weston is more important than ending homelessness, fixing—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Before the minister speaks, I just would like to remind people about a comment earlier—that if you do continue to speak out, you will be ejected from the chamber.

I recognize the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Rob Flack: One thing is for certain: This government, under this Premier, under this Minister of Finance, is not for raising taxes, period. People work hard in this province, Madam Speaker. They work very hard, and, in fact, they probably pay too much tax as it is now.

We need to continue to lower taxes. We need to grow the economy. That's how it's worked for eight years. That's how it's going to continue to work. That is why we are closely monitoring our agenda.

When it comes to homelessness, Speaker, understand this: There is compassion here. Homelessness should be rare. Homelessness should be brief, and it should be non-recurring. I quote the minister of housing from New Brunswick with those words.

We sat together at the federal-provincial-territorial meeting two weeks ago. We were imploring the federal government to support our homeless shelters, support our homelessness plan through capital dollars and also through operating dollars. Without that, the job will not get done. We call on the federal government to step up and get their part of the bargain done.

INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

MPP Paul Vickers: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Infrastructure. Whether you live in a growing town, a rural community or a First Nations community, access to safe drinking water and reliable waste water systems are essential to daily life, public health and economic stability.

Aging pipes, treatment plants and related infrastructure are placing increasing pressure on communities of every size and on the families who depend on those services every day. Residents rightfully expect clean water when they turn on the tap and systems that can handle both current demand and future challenges.

Speaker, through you, can the minister explain how this government is helping municipalities and First Nations protect existing homes, upgrade critical systems and keep essential water and waste water services reliable for a long—

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

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, thank you to the member for his tireless advocacy for the constituents he represents. I agree; safe, reliable water infrastructure is something we need, something our communities depend on.

That's why our government has committed more than $875 million through the health and safety water stream as a part of our $4-billion plan through the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program, or MHIP. It has supported 120 projects in 127 municipalities and First Nations, just like in my own riding in Cramahe and Brighton. It's supporting more homes so that people like Todd Smith can move into our community, establish roots.

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We're really proud of the people we're attracting to Northumberland–Peterborough South. This reliable infrastructure is supporting growth for healthy, strong and vibrant communities.

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

MPP Paul Vickers: Thank you to the Minister of Infrastructure for the thoughtful response.

While protecting existing homes is critical, we also know that municipalities need reliable infrastructure to support growth and the housing development our province requires. Communities across the province are still carrying the weight of decades of neglect by the previous Liberal government.

For smaller and rural municipalities, especially those that do not levy development charges, finding the necessary funding to build and maintain essential infrastructure such as roads, bridges and water systems can be a significant challenge.

Speaker, through you, can the minister tell the House what additional supports our government is providing for those communities and how municipalities can take advantage of this to plan for the years ahead?

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you to the member for the question. We recognize that this infrastructure needs to support municipalities of all different shapes and sizes, rural and northern alike. That's why, partnering with the federal government, we launched the new $1-billion non-development charge stream through the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program, or MHIP. This is going to help eligible municipalities build and maintain critical infrastructure in every corner of the riding.

And it's not just communities like mine; it's Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, where former member Bill Walker lives. We're supporting these communities in growing.

Speaker, I'm excited to say to every municipality across Ontario that this stream is now open until December 2. I want to thank the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the housing minister, who had me out to speak to them. Intake is open now. We're working with these smaller municipalities to make sure they take advantage of this critical infrastructure to support growing and vibrant communities. I look forward to seeing the applications—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

DATA CENTRES

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is for the Premier.

Last year, two power companies in Cambridge were told that urgent growth in electricity demand required urgent investments to increase the power capacity. The reason? A large new data centre.

At a press conference in Guelph on August 13, the government promised that the cost of electricity will have to be fully paid by those data centres. Just months later, we've learned that Cambridge residents and businesses are footing higher bills for this sudden surge in power demand. So the public is subsidizing private wealth, and this government is not doing anything about it.

The public and business service delivery and procurement minister, Minister Crawford, called data "the new gold." Someone is getting rich, Madam Speaker, but it's not the residents in Cambridge.

My question to the Premier is, why are residents left paying the bills?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries.

Hon. Matthew Rae: To the member from Waterloo, as I've said earlier today in question period, data centres will pay their own bill and the full cost of their electricity for their power. And this is retroactive, Speaker, because we weren't going to wait on the sidelines and not take advantage of this opportunity. We have potential investment we can build on to attract this investment in Ontario, and so we're going to step forward and do that.

But as I mentioned, we're going to ensure they pay their full cost of electricity and then some. They're going to help build out that transmission they're going to need for those potential data centres.

And as I mentioned earlier, the city of Cambridge, and in particular this local utility and the IESO, have been planning for additional demand and growth in that area of our province for over eight years, since 2018. That is because of our government's ability to attract investment to the province of Ontario: $235 billion since 2018, helping create—

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Madam Speaker, they weren't planning for a 30% increase in costs. And Cambridge is not alone. In cities across Ontario, utilities are struggling to absorb the cost of new infrastructure as the data centre boom expands. And there's no transparency here. The Toronto Star only learned this by searching through the 20,000 regulatory filings at the Ontario Energy Board. We saw a similar level of secrecy when Cambridge residents were forced to file a freedom-of-information request to learn about the chemical spill at a data centre in their own backyard.

AI ambitions cannot come at a local cost, whether financial or environmental.

Minister, will you put safeguards in place to ensure that these decisions are made transparently, with resident feedback, so they aren't left holding all the risk and paying higher bills?

Hon. Matthew Rae: Through you, Speaker, to the member opposite: I'm pleased to share with that member that our government is already taking action with the Data Centre Playbook, Bill 40—which they voted against—ensuring that we're choosing to build the economy of the future in Ontario on our terms and conditions, ensuring we're having meaningful economic development.

Obviously, data security is very important in this environment, but also local benefits to the communities that these potential data centres are located in.

Our number one job as our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, is to ensure we are protecting ratepayers and protecting Ontarians.

Speaker, I find it ironic for the member from Waterloo, who sat in this place and supported the former Liberal government while they increased energy prices across this province by $1,000 a year and drove families in Ontario to energy poverty—we will not do that.

Despite the Liberals electing Justin Trudeau's—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Ted Hsu: Speaker, it's our job to keep tabs on this PC government while the people must deal with daily life being so much harder under these guys.

Bill 143 lets the CEO of the Ontario Financing Authority exempt any of their records, back to January 1, 2025, from disclosure under freedom of information. The OFA are the government people who manage Ontario's borrowing, investments and financial risk.

The province of Ontario has, for decades, accessed the capital markets and managed cash flow through debt issuance or repurchases, interest rate and currency derivatives, or money market operations.

When I asked at the technical briefing, "Why hide from freedom of information now," officials were unable to give a real answer.

Why does this government need to hide from freedom of information now, after so many decades of capital markets operations?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Peterborough–Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: I want to thank the member opposite for the question because it gives an opportunity for us to clarify his misconception and how wrong he is in this.

This is about procurement and ensuring that companies that are applying to supply the province of Ontario or procure things from the province of Ontario have an opportunity to protect proprietary information. You still have every opportunity to go through FOI to get every detail about it, with the exception of anything that is proprietary technology.

MEMBER'S APOLOGY

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

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, with regard to my earlier remarks, I apologize to the member; I apologize to you, all my colleagues, and the table. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): There being no further business, this House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1138 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

MPP Susan Lahey: I am pleased to welcome two professional firefighters from the town of East Gwillimbury today: Bryan Argue and Nelson Aguiar. They are joining me in the Legislature today, in the gallery. I'd like to recognize them and thank them both for their dedication and service to our community. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Graham McGregor: I want to introduce some guests I didn't get to in the morning. From the Brampton firefighter association, we've got our president, Brent Robillard; Kane Demers from the executive; and Rich Kelly, Chris Terry and Mike Roy, who are all here. I'm looking forward to meeting them this afternoon. They do a great job for their members.

Ms. Laura Smith: I have the honour of welcoming Kyle Baker and his lovely family, who I believe are still in the building enjoying our gorgeous Legislature. Kyle is the creator behind Celiacstrongx.

I also want to welcome Chelsea Lam, who is our page captain today. She came today along with her parents, May Chau and Kar Wah Lam.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I'd love to wish a warm welcome to Sylvie Guenther, the executive director of Hiatus House; as well as Shay Currie and Sean McNamara from the Windsor Professional Firefighters Association; and finally, Richard Lee and Matt Marchand from the Ontario greenhouse growers' association. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mme France Gélinas: I would like to introduce Mike Squarzolo, president of the Sudbury Professional Fire Fighters Association, as well as Chris Zawierzeniec, president of the health and safety committee of the Sudbury Professional Fire Fighters Association.

I also want to welcome some people from the Ontario family health team association: Stephen Beckwith, executive director for the South East Toronto Family Health Team as well as chair of the board of the Association of Family Health Teams of Ontario; Alyssa Spooney, executive director for Huron Shores Family Health Team; and Dr. David Schieck, one of the physicians at the Guelph Family Health Team.

It was a pleasure to meet them.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I would also like to welcome, from the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, Thunder Bay members Robert Sheppard and Kyle Solomon.

Hon. Doug Downey: I have two guests here today: Eric Webster with the Barrie firefighters' association, and Joe Baker, also of the same association and on the board of the International Association of Fire Fighters.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

SAFER DRINKING WATER FOR A HEALTHIER FUTURE ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 POUR UNE MEILLEURE SALUBRITÉ DE L'EAU POTABLE POUR UN AVENIR PLUS SAIN

Ms. Pasma moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 157, An Act to enact the Safer Drinking Water for a Healthier Future Act, 2026 / Projet de loi 157, Loi édictant la Loi de 2026 pour une meilleure salubrité de l'eau potable pour un avenir plus sain.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Would you like to speak to the bill?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: This bill is co-sponsored by the MPPs for Toronto–Danforth, Nickel Belt and Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

The Safer Drinking Water for a Healthier Future Act would require the government of Ontario to implement the federal guideline for concentrations of lead in drinking water. It would require all public sector organizations in Ontario to annually test each water fountain and tap that are used for drinking water and to publicly report on the results. It would require each broader public sector organization to establish a drinking water management plan. It sets out what those plans would include, including public reporting, and it allows the minister to issue compliance orders to ensure that these steps are being followed.

PETITIONS

CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: The Thunder Bay jail has been long known as a death trap with infrastructure the government has called "out-of-date" and that no longer meets the needs. The government planned to replace it with the new Thunder Bay Correctional Complex but last year announced that both would stay open.

Speaker, people keep dying in the old Thunder Bay jail. In 2020, one of my nephews, Kevin, lost his life in the jail. Even just last week, we found out that another person being held there has lost his life.

Across the province, Ontarians are concerned, and over 70 people have already signed a petition calling on the Thunder Bay district jail to be shut down when the new complex opens. It also calls for the government to reallocate funds towards building and operating community infrastructure in Thunder Bay, like permanent and supportive housing.

Speaker, I support this petition. I will sign it, and I will ask Yuvki to bring it to the Clerks' table. Meegwetch.

CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I would like to present a petition about permanently closing the Thunder Bay jail, known in our region as a death trap. The government promised to close the jail and also close the older correctional facility once the new facility was open, but now they want to renovate. One of the reasons is that there are so many people on remand. That means that they either couldn't get bail or, more likely, couldn't afford to get bail. So they're awaiting trial, and yet everybody is warehoused. The Premier is talking about having three people per room, which violates human rights. We know that we need to be able to hire more guards for these positions. Most of all, we know that the money could actually be going into supportive, permanent, affordable housing; that there are other ways of dealing with the situation we have there. So it's extremely important that that jail actually be shut down.

I fully support this petition, and I will sign it and give it to Ryan.

OPTOMETRISTS

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I have a petition here today that talks about optometrists. I'd like to thank Carla May from Amherstburg, Ontario for sending this petition in. It talks about how optometrists are highly trained doctors in Ontario and that they have some very essential functions to fulfill. It talks about how people could go to their optometrist to get regular treatment but that perhaps that treatment should be expanded to allow optometrists to do more within their scope of practice. I think that's a good idea. That would help people get the kind of medical care that they need. They would be able to get the medical care they need when they need it and where they need it. That's particularly helpful in smaller places and rural places that might not have as much access to emergency departments as larger urban centres.

This petition calls upon the Legislative Assembly to consider expanding the scope of practice for optometrists so that they can continue to help their patients get the kind of care that they need where and when they need it.

I support this petition, and I will sign it. I'll hand it to this fine page, Leo, and ask him to bring it to the Clerks' table.

DISASTER RELIEF

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I am pleased to rise on behalf of my constituents to table a petition entitled "Expand ... Disaster Recovery Assistance for Ontarians," which has been signed by residents across Ottawa West–Nepean and, in particular, from Crestview and other neighbourhoods that were heavily impacted by the Canada Day flooding but haven't received any support from this Conservative government. It has been four months since the flooding, but residents are still grappling with the cleanup and restoration of their homes. Many of them have just been

informed with finality that they're not going to receive any help from this Conservative government, even as they are facing what could be lifelong financial implications, significant costs that are not being covered by private insurance. The program is completely and utterly broken. It does not cover every home, even though it was one single storm that caused the flooding in Ottawa, regardless of what street you live on or how the water came into your home.

1510

So the residents of Ottawa West–Nepean are calling on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to expand the disaster recovery activation to include all Ottawa residents who were affected, and to ensure that all eligible expenses are covered consistently for Ontarians, regardless of what street they live on, and that there be clear, fair and consistent eligibility for all people across Ontario.

I wholeheartedly support this petition. I will add my signature to it and send it to the table with page Eva.

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Mme France Gélinas: I'm proud to present this petition that has been signed by 560 people, many of them nurses. It's called "Stop Privatization and Support Staffing Ratios." It is a petition that has been circulated by the Ontario Nurses' Association.

Basically, what the petition talks about is that understaffing is negatively impacting the quality of our public health care system, causing long wait times, unreliable access to care, and unmanageable workloads for the people on the front lines.

Understaffing causes burnout for nurses, which drives them out of the profession; right now, one in five are registered but not practising.

Nurse staffing ratios will help restore our public health care system and ensure quality care for the patient.

Nurse vacancies and burnout decreased in other jurisdictions following the implementation of ratios, and nurse retention improved.

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 19, the Patient-to-Nurse Ratios for Hospitals Act, and support Ontario's public health care system.

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

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I'm also proud to be presenting a petition from the Ontario Nurses' Association entitled "Stop Privatization and Support Staffing Ratios."

I often hear members of provincial Parliament get up to speak glowingly about our health care workers, nurses in particular. But words are just wind, and actions are needed to back that up. If we truly respect our health care workers, we need to come out there and we need to support them.

What's happening today in Ontario, which is what the nurses are talking about, is burnout—burnout in huge numbers. Where are the ratios? Nurses are spread so thin in hospitals that they are burning out. Every day becomes difficult when they're trying to do their best to help those who are under their care, and it's very, very difficult with the current ratios in Ontario. In fact, so many are now being driven from public institutions to go to work for private agencies.

This petition addresses that. This is calling for the respect, the funding and all that is necessary for this government to do to ensure that the ratio of nurses to their patients is one that makes sense.

I of course will be supporting this petition, signing my name and giving it to page Hera.

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm very pleased to be able to present this petition that has been signed by nurses in Oshawa and across the Durham region. Over 560 nurses and health care enthusiasts have signed this petition and want their voices heard in this space. It is entitled "Stop Privatization and Support Staffing Ratios."

All of us value a strong health care system. It's the nurses who are sounding the alarm repeatedly on what is needed and where the challenges are.

In this petition, they flag the challenges of understaffing, which is having a negative impact on the quality of our public health care system. Longer wait times result—unreliable access to care, unmanageable workloads, deskilling of health care work, and many more issues.

Understaffing causes burnout for nurses and health care professionals, and it's driving them out of the profession, which should concern all of us.

Nurse and health care professional staffing ratios would restore our public health care and ensure quality care across the system.

We have seen an undermining of our public health care system by taking money out of the system that should be used for staffing.

Nurse vacancies and burnout have decreased in other jurisdictions where they have followed the implementation of ratios, and they have improved nurse and health care professional retention.

So they are calling on this Legislature to mandate staffing ratios for nurses and health care professionals across Ontario for the whole system, to develop staffing ratios in consultation with nurses and health care professionals and their unions—nothing about them without them, right? They know what they need to do their jobs. Listen to them.

They are calling on the Legislature to use health care funding to ensure that Ontarians can access the care they need within the public system, rather than privatizing.

We deserve a strong health care system.

I will affix my signature and send this to the table with page Matthew.

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

MPP Jamie West: My petition is similar to those of my colleagues. It's from the Ontario Nurses' Association and is entitled "Stop Privatization and Support Staffing Ratios." They've made the argument very well so far, and I know there are other people who have petitions.

I went to a graduation at Laurentian University. I met a young lady who took nursing—the full course—and at her graduation told me she will never work in this field, because she has been set up to fail.

We can't have a system where people cannot do a reasonable amount of work, where they are deciding to quit—in many cases, deciding to quit when they have a Learn and Stay grant and saying, "I'll pay the tuition; I'm not working in that field," or where they're burning out due to mental health and fatigue.

I support this petition to have these staffing ratios for nurses and health care professionals.

I'll affix my signature and provide it to page Ryan for the table.

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: I rise in support of this petition. It's entitled "Stop Privatization and Support Staffing Ratios."

We know in this province that the nurses—their ratios are not supporting what they should be in health care. We need to establish the ratios, because we're seeing that they're suffering, they are understaffing. We see them burning out. We're seeing it's driving the nurses out of the profession.

We know the health care professional staffing ratio will restore—we see in other jurisdictions where they establish ratios that it does improve the quality of work for nurses and also for the health care professionals, and the retention is better, but also patient care is increased.

They're asking this government to implement the "staffing ratios for nurses and health care professionals across the Ontario health care system. Develop staffing ratios in consultation with nurses and health care professionals through their unions. Use health care funding to ensure that Ontarians can access the care they need within the public system"—and not privatization.

I fully support this petition. I will sign my name on this, and I will give page Leo the petition to bring to the Clerks' table.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I want to thank the Canadian Federation of Students for this petition entitled "No to OSAP Cuts! No to Tuition Hikes!"

What this petition is calling for is, grants not loans, and to remove all interest on OSAP loans, stop the tuition hikes, and of course, halt government interference on admissions, student fees and so much more.

In my community and many communities across this province, finances and the cost of education is becoming a barrier for post-secondary education, and this is only getting worse under this government.

What we are seeing and we continue to see is that Ontario students pay the highest post-secondary costs in the entire country. Having grants and having that help to be able to go to university so that you're not worrying and having to work two or three jobs while you're in post-secondary studies, is a big difference-maker. Many people now are not able to even go to college or university because of these short-sighted decisions to cut OSAP here in the province of Ontario.

I, of course, will be signing this petition.

We here in the official opposition will continue to support the students. Let's stop these cuts of OSAP. Let's make education affordable in the province of Ontario.

COST OF LIVING

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm rising to table a petition entitled "A More Affordable Life In Ottawa West–Nepean."

1520

My constituents are being incredibly squeezed by the cost of living in Ontario. The costs of groceries and housing have both skyrocketed. People are having difficulty being able to afford all of their expenses, and yet this government hasn't been doing anything that will make a difference for them when it comes to balancing their bank accounts at the end of the month.

There are really simple things that we could be doing, so that's what this petition is calling for:

—that the government take action on the housing crisis, so that people have access to affordable housing;

—that we raise wages for workers, so that people can actually afford to live on what they're earning;

—that we crack down on price gouging by corporations that are taking advantage of people; and

—that we invest in public health care and we ensure that nobody has to dip into their pocket to pay for vital health care in Ontario.

I agree with my constituents, so I'm going to sign this petition and send it to the table with page Hera.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECT ONTARIO'S NORTHERN AND RURAL COMMUNITIES ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 POUR PROTÉGER LES COLLECTIVITÉS NORDIQUES ET RURALES DE L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 24, 2026, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 155, An Act to enact the Ontario Northland Transportation Corporation Act, 2026 and the Respecting Rural Ontario Act, 2026 and to amend various other Acts / Projet

de loi 155, Loi édictant la Loi de 2026 sur la Société de transport Ontario Northland et la Loi de 2026 sur le respect de l'Ontario rural et modifiant diverses autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): Further debate?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I would like to share my time with the member for Mushkegowuk–James Bay.

Bill 155: There's nothing particularly egregious in it. However, it says, "protect Ontario's northern and rural communities," and it doesn't do a heck of a lot to do that.

I'd like to go back to the subject of the wildland fires of this summer and talk about the failure of the government to respond appropriately, in a timely way, and to actually take responsibility for what took place this summer.

It was July 13, I believe, when Collins burned to the ground. People escaped; there was a fire right at their back. We've all seen the photographs. My office immediately started calling the MNR. I am the elected MPP for a region a great deal of which burned this summer, but no one would talk to us. We called the Ministry of Emergency Preparedness, but not only would they not talk to us; they blew us off. They said, "Well, there's one person assigned to every municipality to be in charge of emergency management." Could they tell us who that was? No, they would not. It was shameful. We went to the hotels, we met with the evacuees, and we found out from them what was going on. We also discovered their rage at the stories that they were being told that were not accurate.

First of all, the member from Timmins would be wise not to talk about things about which he has no knowledge. He claimed that it was an instantaneous combustion. That is far from the truth. There was smoke in the region a week ahead of when it changed and became a crisis. People called the MNR, and the MNR at that time thought, "It's okay. Don't worry. You don't need to evacuate." But things changed very quickly and people were forced to evacuate, but unfortunately there was no one to tell them that they had to get out. In the case of Collins, it was a rail worker who got in touch with the leadership and said, "You've got to go now—now." And that is not the only community—many, many outfitters were burned to the ground. Whitewater Lake burned to the ground. Clearwater Lake's cottages and permanent residences—18; only two left out of 20—burned to the ground. So let's not talk about an adequate or a fantastic response.

A week later, who showed up in town after the community had raised money, had been gathering clothing, had been gathering food to support the evacuees who had been in the city for a week at that point? The Premier showed up. The minister of MNR showed up. The Minister of Emergency Preparedness showed up. They did not reach out to one single First Nations chief—not one. They did not reach out and speak to one single evacuee. Chief King from Gull Bay happened upon the press conference and said, "What are you doing here?" The minister for the MNR said, "Oh, hey, do you want to talk about mining?" Talk about insulting. His whole community had been evacuated to Thunder Bay, and that's all the minister could say. And then they got on their private jet and they left—nothing, not a word, no communication. It's hard to believe that it was that bad.

And to say instantaneous combustion—I'm sorry; that's a joke. What the minister and everybody here should know is that there are actually three fire investigations taking place right now, and what we would like to know is when those will become public. Where he got his information from, I do not know.

Another thing that we know is that the forecasting models need to be looked at and probably changed, because part of what happened this summer is the effects of climate change. This is a government that does not like to acknowledge that climate change exists. Well, guess what? It has changed fire behaviour dramatically.

So I do not blame at all the people on the ground. We know that not enough firefighters were hired. We also know that the helicopters weren't booked. We know that there weren't water bombers. The new water bombers aren't expected to come until 2030. The list goes on and on. There were not simply enough qualified people on the ground able to do the work to help these communities and, frankly, possibly to have saved some of them. We won't know that.

What we do know is that this government has chosen, year after year, to be reactive to fires and pour money into it after the fact, and bring in people from out of country with no experience in boreal fire suppression, spend buckets of money instead of being pre-emptive and restoring a full-time wildland firefighter force, which we used to have before the Mike Harris government got rid of them, and doing that preparatory work—surveying the forest, getting a sense of what exactly is happening there and what we can expect in the summer.

I will move on from there.

We have a lot of talk about the Northlander. I'm very excited for the people of northeastern Ontario that they will be getting rail service. I want to point out that there has not been passenger rail service on the North Shore of Lake Superior to Thunder Bay since 1990, and that is when Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney cut all of that. At that time, it was rerouted to the Highway 11 corridor. I have no desire to take away that service from people there.

People may also know about Budd cars. This was something new to me. Budd cars are diesel cars that run on main lines. They're passenger cars. There's one that goes to Sudbury. There's one that goes to White River. Again, it's incredibly hard to get from White River to anywhere else. You can get to White River—it's a very small community—but you can't get to any of the other communities on the North Shore. So I am continually getting questions about, can we get passenger rail back to northwestern Ontario? It's not an easy question to answer. But when the government is waxing poetic about rail providing all these services to the north, please make a distinction between what part of the north you are talking about—there's northeast, there's northwest, and there's the Far North.

I would like to talk about northern airports—27, I believe, airports in the Far North that are not adequate to purpose. Tom Meilleur, who owns one of the airlines—sorry; I should have written it down. He presented to the pre-budget committee in January 2026, and I'd like to read—actually, he said it's 29, so I can correct myself:

"Across northern Ontario, 29 remote airports operated by the Ministry of Transportation serve as the lifeline for those communities, connecting communities to health care, food, essential goods, emergency services and year-round mobility.

1530

"Yet these lifelines are failing. All of these airports are outdated, non-compliant with current regulations and incapable of supporting future growth. This is not a new problem; it has been deteriorating for decades.

"The crisis in the northern remote airports was put to the committee, and we came up with the 2025 Nishnawbe Aski Aviation Needs Assessment ... clearly outlining the scale and urgency of the crisis up north. Runways are too short and too narrow, limiting investment in new-generation aircraft"—which are bigger, so could carry more people—"and preventing the use of modern approach procedures. Navigational approaches require higher minimum descent altitudes, because the infrastructure cannot support safer, lower-visibility operations. Large gaps exist in weather reporting, creating uncertainty and reduced operational predictability. Service levels are inadequate, including insufficient de-icing, low staffing levels and inconsistent operational coverage. Terminal buildings are undersized or outdated, lacking proper screening areas and equipment."

This might just sound theoretical, but it's not. And we had some pretty interesting, curious discussions about how Billy Bishop airport was somehow going to improve access to health care for people in the Far North. It was a pretty silly discussion, because it had nothing to do with reality.

What we do know is that just in the last couple of weeks, four First Nations communities were not able to have any airplanes land at all. Those airports were completely shut down, which means that people were not able to get medevaced out of those communities. And why was that? Because the weather system had broken down. It wasn't working.

That is one of the things that Tom Meilleur has raised a number of times—that the area is not adequately covered by weather stations that work well, are efficient and give pilots and the people on the ground the predictability they need to have in order to land. In a way, it's another case of insufficient weather monitoring, partly maybe related to what we saw with the wildfires, maybe a little different. But there is a connection.

Again, protecting Ontario's northern and rural communities is something we really need. It's not the first time it has been raised. It was raised long before I became an MPP. It's not a new problem.

I'm going to switch gears here a little bit.

There is something in this bill that addresses noise from cars and raising the fines. If anything is going to happen with that, well, I hope you've got the enforcement capacity to actually do it. On that subject, I want to acknowledge the work of my colleague from Toronto Centre, who, before becoming an MPP, worked tirelessly on this issue as a member of Toronto city council. We're happy to see it here. I'm not entirely sure that it can be enforced.

I'm also going to say, actually, that the place I live in Toronto—this actually matters to me. Until about 1 or 2 in the morning, there are people racing up and down Davenport with these really loud mufflers. It's quite interesting, but not good for sleeping well.

We could also go on to talk about the noise of jet planes that they wanted to bring to Toronto, but I'll leave that for other people to dissect.

I want to look at services in the north. Well, we still don't have broadband everywhere. We still don't have cell service everywhere—and I can be fairly specific. Shuniah is right next door to Thunder Bay. I don't know why, but they do not have reliable cell service. It's a very strange thing.

Highway 11: We all know that the Ministry of Transportation is planning on adding 14 kilometres of passing lanes along Highway 11. Actually, we now have 24/7 staffing at the inspection station in Shuniah, and people are very, very proud because we all feel like we had a hand in making that happen. The complaints have been there for years. In fact, it was empty for most of the time after it was built, so I can tell you I certainly heard about that—"Every day, I drive past the station, and nobody is there. Why did they put $30 million into this station?" However, there are now people there, and there are MTO people on the other side of the highway as well. We are thrilled with that. There are some other issues about staffing that I'll get to probably another day.

I want to point out that the distance between Hearst and Nipigon, along Highway 11—there are hardly any, if any, passing lanes. It's a two-lane highway. So, we are going to get 14 kilometres of passing lanes at some point. It's on the books. We don't actually know when it will start. It's 402 kilometres between Hearst and Nipigon. But 14 kilometres of passing lanes will help. It's a start. We know we need a lot more. We know that that highway needs to be twinned—or at least the 2+1. The government has re-announced the 2+1 project in North Bay. I don't believe it has actually started yet. I think that announcement came when I was first elected in 2022, so we're waiting and hopeful that it will start.

I also want to point out that there are 243 kilometres between Thunder Bay and Ignace, and there are also no passing lanes there—or very few. It's really dangerous, very difficult. There are thousands of trucks coming through all the time. There are no rest stops. There are a couple of small places—one in Longlac, one in Long Lake; very close together—where trucks can pull over, and then a tiny little convenience store in Beardmore that is open sometimes when people come through. It's great when they're open.

The reality is that Highway 11 has no shoulders to speak of. They are half shoulders, and the rest is soft. It's not safe to pull over, even in a small passenger car, and it's definitely not safe to pull over in a commercial vehicle. The vehicles simply roll if they actually pull off the highway. No rest stops—no place to use a bathroom, no heated washrooms in winter. And for anybody who's from the north, you know people understand that sometimes, okay, you use the bush—but you can't, because you can't pull off safely. It's not safe to pull off the road, so you have no options. And what this means is that people drive further than they should because there's nowhere to stop, so they prefer to wait until they can actually get somewhere where there might be real facilities and clean facilities.

There is a very long way to go to protect Ontario's northern and rural communities.

I want to talk a little bit about rural Ontario and also the challenges with rural roads in Ontario. We've heard of a number of tragedies of farm workers who wind up having to move between places in the middle of the night on their bicycles, and two were killed recently. It's not the first time we've been approached about rural roads and the need to invest more in them and to invest in at least some lighting in some places. So I'd like to put that on the record—that that is something that is very much needed.

As for protecting the north, I want to remind people of the industrial development that took place at Grassy Narrows, where, how many generations later, people are still being poisoned by mercury. That is one of the very legitimate reasons that people don't feel safe when the Conservative government eliminates environmental protections, which they've done with Bill 140, a bill that directly attacks environmental safety and attacks the integrity of First Nations as well.

1540

Finally, in my last minute, I want to point out that we've lost 67 WSIB workers in Thunder Bay, over 250 in northern Ontario. If you go to work in a mine, if you go to work in an office, any job that you have, if the WSIB is not there to catch you if you have an injury, then that is not a good job. You can promise jobs all you like, but if there's nothing there to support the people when they actually are in need, then you have failed. The fact that the WSIB seems to spend all of its energy returning money to corporations off the backs—directly undermining workers who need that money and have been denied their claims—it's completely unacceptable, and it really puts the question to what the heck is a Working for Workers bill if that protection is not there, and this government is deliberately removing the protections from working people.

I will stop there and cede my time to my good colleague from Mushkegowuk–James Bay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): I recognize the member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Merci, monsieur le Président. Thank you, Mr. Speaker—

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Oh, did I swap too soon?

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: It's all right. Don't worry about it.

When I started reading the bill, the Protect Ontario's Northern and Rural Communities Act, 2026, of course, coming from northern Ontario, I was expecting definitely more—kind of been left on my appetite, if I can say that.

Tu sais, quand on regarde un titre—puis il y a quelque chose avec ce gouvernement-là. Ils ont, je dirais, un talent pour donner des titres à un projet de loi—puis un beau titre, on s'entend. Ce sont des titres que tu dis : « Écoute, on s'attend à de quoi de ce projet de loi. » On s'attend à avoir une surprise—ou pas une surprise, mais de la viande dans un projet de loi que, je peux vous le dire, si on le mangeait, on serait maigre pas à peu près.

Je peux vous dire qu'on resterait sur notre appétit puis je peux vous dire qu'il n'y a pas grand monde qui mangerait au souper, parce qu'il n'y a pas grand-viande dans ce projet de loi-là.

Mais ceci dit, that being said, this government calls it the Protect Ontario's Northern and Rural Communities Act, but where are all the actual measures to protect the people who live and work in these communities? We don't disagree with what is in the bill, but we are concerned with everything that the government has chosen to leave out.

Dans le Nord, nos communautés, comme je disais, ont besoin de plus que des changements administratifs. Parce qu'il y en a beaucoup dans ce projet de loi, des changements administratifs. Elles ont besoin d'investissements concrets, de bons emplois et d'un avenir économique stable.

Vous savez que dans la première section—je peux dire « schedule » 1. The first schedule talks about the Crown Forest Sustainability Act. Forestry is an economic backbone of many northern communities, including Kapuskasing and Hearst in my riding, and of course, a lot of other communities up north when it come to forestry. The government has outlined ambitious objectives for growing Ontario's forestry sector, improving competitiveness and developing new markets for our wood products, yet Bill 155 focuses largely on administrative changes to forestry licences. Streamlining the process may be helpful, but it raises a much larger question: How will these changes address the challenges facing forest operations today?

When I saw the bill, of course I called some of—most people don't know this: I was born and raised in Dubreuilville. It's now a mining town, but, formerly, Dubreuilville was a forestry town. I was raised in forestry. I worked in sawmills. I started on piling wood, and then I became a tradesman. I worked in the sawmill for many years, and then I moved to Timmins, worked in waferboard plants, went back to sawmills, then I got involved in unions.

But forestry is something that is dear to my heart because my family still works in forestry. My brother works in Quebec, in a paper mill. My dad was a foreman in forestry. He started as a mechanic, but he went on to be a supervisor. So I learned a lot about forestry. I remember, when we were kids, we would go check out his employees, because he was a foreman. I learned how they built roads, and he was explaining to us how forestry works. Of course,

when I grew up, I learned about sawmills and I learned about the different industries.

What forestry is asking is not exactly what's happening. As much as they consult the government, they come and see us also, and we get the same sales pitch. And when you look at what the government is proposing, well, it doesn't really say what the industry is asking.

Fait que, je ne voulais rien que vous le répéter un petit peu en français, parce que je trouve que—pour ceux qui ne le savent pas, je viens de l'industrie. Je suis né à Dubreuilville, comme vous le savez, mais là je reste à Kapuskasing, Hearst. Écoute, ma région, on survit de l'industrie forestière. Oui, les minières s'en viennent, mais beaucoup est déterminé par l'industrie forestière.

Ce qu'on voit, c'est qu'on est concerné. On n'a rien qu'à penser à Kapuskasing, là, qui est dans une transition, comme c'est là, avec le moulin à papier, pour devenir un « MDF ». Ils parlent avec des investisseurs. Ils ont eu de l'argent. Puis, écoute, je vais reconnaître—puis je suis le premier à le reconnaître—qu'il y a des bonnes choses que le gouvernement fait. Ils ont investi dans certaines choses. Tu sais, ils ont fait de la biomasse, pour reconnaître qu'il faut investir dans la biomasse. Il en reste beaucoup, puis je vais élaborer un petit peu là-dessus.

Mais quand ça vient à la biomasse, il y a un morceau de robot qui manque. Parce que la biomasse va créer de la chaleur, mais va aussi créer de l'électricité. Puis c'est bon pour l'industrie, qu'elle en crée, parce que ça réduit leurs coûts, mais qu'est-ce que tu fais du surplus d'électricité si tu n'es pas capable de le vendre sur le « grid », si tu n'es pas capable de le vendre sur le marché de l'électricité? Puis, on le sait : on a une pénurie d'électricité en Ontario. On sait que c'est pour ça que le gouvernement s'en va vers le nucléaire.

Puis, l'industrie forestière, s'il y a de quoi qu'elle demande au gouvernement : ils veulent avoir—ils ne veulent pas avoir tout le secteur. Ils disent : « On a besoin d'une petite partie avec des "power purchase agreements" qu'on pourrait revendre, créer de la biomasse, prendre la biomasse, le résidu dans le bois, l'amener dans la biomasse, réduire nos coûts d'électricité et réduire nos coûts de chauffage. On pourrait même la revendre aux municipalités, aider les municipalités, les petits villages aussi, pour chauffer ce qu'ils ont besoin de chauffer. »

Mais le surplus d'énergie, si on n'est pas capable de le revendre, on gaspille de l'énergie. C'est pour ça qu'un « power purchase agreement » est tellement important si on veut avoir, disons, un autre « pulp mill ». Si on voulait avoir un autre « pulp mill » en Ontario, si tu n'as pas de « power purchase agreement », they're not going to build it. Ils ne le bâtiront pas. Ça, ce n'est pas moi qui le dit; ce sont les experts qui nous le disent, puis le gouvernement le sait.

Pourtant, quand Kapuskasing était en transition, c'était une de leurs propositions qu'ils avaient, parce qu'on a des bons produits. On a une des meilleures fibres au monde. On avait une « TMP » qui était là, prête, puis on demandait qu'ils fassent comme Thunder Bay, Fort Frances puis Kenora, je pense, qui ont un « power purchase agreement ». Ils demandaient la même faveur pour qu'on puisse avoir le « power purchase agreement ». Le gouvernement a dit non : « Non-feasible plan—no, this plan is no good. »

What they're trying to get now is MDF to do furniture. If the government would have listened to the experts, who are the people on the ground, and given the PPA, probably Kap would be looking at having a new pulp mill where it would have made sense. If you don't have a PPA—that's why they had to change. But the government said no, it's not a viable plan. It is a viable plan if the government would have allowed giving them a power purchase agreement.

People might not know this, but direct employment from the forest industry is 51,000 people—when you compare it to steel, 24,000; compare it to automotive, 95,000. Direct GDP contribution is $5 billion—it's $5 billion for metal and steel, $2.5 billion from steel only and then for automotive, $14 billion.

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The forest industry hires a lot of people. The forest industry should be getting more investment than what the government is doing now. They have done something and I've said that. We recognize that. But compared to what they gave to steel and automobile? Not even close, not even close.

They are just asking this government for their fair share because there are employing. Yet we're seeing sawmills close, we're seeing people out of work when we could save these mills. There are solutions for saving some of these mills. If you only took the time to sit down with the unions, with the employers, with the municipalities, with workers, with First Nations, there are solutions to be found. Yet we turn a blind eye.

Tu sais, je suis après vous dire que juste pour l'industrie forestière, eux autres, ils emploient 51 000—des emplois directs. Pour le métal puis le fer, c'est 24 000. Ça c'est 16 000 directs avec l'acier. Puis l'automobile, eux autres, des emplois directs, ils en ont 95 000. Puis la GDP, notre contribution au pays, c'est cinq milliards. Le métal, le fer, c'est cinq milliards aussi—2,5 milliards qui vient du métal direct, du fer direct. Puis l'automobile, eux autres, c'est 14 milliards.

Fait que, l'industrie forestière contribue beaucoup à la province. Ce sont des milliards. Mais si on commence à regarder l'investissement que la province fait, comparé au métal, à l'automobile, je peux vous dire que ce n'est pas la même chose.

La seule chose que l'industrie forestière demande à ce gouvernement-là—je le sais. Ils font la demande, mais ils la font à nous autres à dire de pousser le gouvernement à donner leur juste part, je devrais dire—leur juste part. Parce qu'ils ont donné beaucoup plus à l'industrie du fer et l'automobile comparé à l'industrie forestière. Comme j'ai dit en anglais, je ne suis pas après dire qu'ils n'ont rien fait, là. Mais comparé aux deux, je peux vous dire qu'ils n'ont pas eu grand-chose. Si on compare, comme on dit, « apples to apples », pomme à pomme, puis carotte à carotte, je peux vous dire que ce n'est pas pareil pantoute.

Mais l'industrie le mérite parce qu'elle crée beaucoup plus d'emplois. Puis il ne faut pas oublier, là, que très souvent l'industrie forestière—ils sont dans des communautés où c'est la seule industrie qu'on a.

They are single-industry towns. Just imagine if a sawmill goes down, your single industry: What happens to all your investments? Yet these sawmills are going down—think about Gogama, Nairn; we're talking about—

Interjection: Terrace Bay.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Terrace Bay. I know Nakina is hurting and could be a potential shutdown in December. We're seeing mills shut down in Ear Falls. These mills are down. Yet what is this government doing?

Il y a des solutions à trouver. Ce n'est pas compliqué. Quand l'industrie est tombée et les employeurs venaient nous voir—dans ce temps-là, j'étais président de la section locale. On s'est assis ensemble. Ils ont voulu prendre avantage. Oui, ils ont essayé de prendre avantage de la situation. Mais on s'est assis, et on a dit : « Vous allez ouvrir vos livres, puis on va regarder les finances, puis on va trouver des solutions. »

Mais on a des situations où il y a des solutions à trouver, mais le gouvernement ne prend pas le temps de s'asseoir avec l'employeur, ne prend pas le temps de s'asseoir avec les syndicats, les travailleurs, les municipalités, puis les Premières Nations. Il y a des solutions qu'on pourrait trouver puis il y aurait des usines qui survivraient aujourd'hui. Ça s'est fait dans le passé, mais là, aujourd'hui, on aime mieux mettre l'emphase sur l'automobile, sur le fer, puis on prend les travailleurs forestiers puis on les envoie dans les mines.

Mais dès que l'industrie forestière va avoir décollé, par exemple, où est-ce qu'ils vont prendre les emplois? Parce qu'il y a de moins en moins d'emplois. Puis ce monde-là, ils veulent rester dans leurs communautés puis ils veulent travailler dans leur industrie, puis aussi sauver leurs maisons et tout le reste. Parce que si tu n'as pas d'emploi, qu'est-ce qu'elles font, les familles? Elles vont déménager. Les écoles vont se vider. Les arénas—il n'y a plus personne dans les arénas. Les communautés se vident.

On dit qu'on travaille fort, puis on est là—c'est quoi le titre encore? What's the title? Protecting Ontario, northern and rural? It's not helping, what you're doing. We should be giving more money to the forest industry. What the forest industry is really asking for is pretty simple, in a nutshell, and that would make a whole difference for them.

Do you know what they say? Fully restore the forest access road funding program, indexed for inflation. Mining uses their roads. Everybody uses their roads—hunters, fishermen, outfitters. We all use them, but who builds them? Forestry—but yet they have not increased the forest road access funding program, and they've been asking this for years. We need to reflect inflation.

They're also asking to expand the weight allowance for raw forest products under the Highway Traffic Act. They asked me. I know they asked the minister also—nothing on that.

They also asked, "Restore the sawmill chip program." I don't know—je ne sais pas combien de fois que j'ai parlé en Chambre de tout ça—le programme des copeaux, là. Quand ils disaient que Chapleau était obligé de déménager leurs « chips », aller porter leurs « chips » jusqu'à—ce n'est pas à Trois-Rivières, mais à—oui, c'est à Trois-Rivières. Ils ont emmené leurs « chips » au Québec. Ça n'a aucun sens, mais ils n'avaient pas le choix parce que—je sais qu'ils ont eu des octrois pour bâtir un « co-gen ».

Great news—the right thing to do. That's what I'm saying. That's the type of program we want to see. They have that, and I recognize what the government has done. That's one you've done for Chapleau. They will be able to burn their chips. But if you would give them a PPA, it would change the whole dynamics of the region also. Because now they can bring their chips, reduce their cost of electricity and then maybe sell it to the communities, sell the heat. It would change the dynamics in these communities.

Also what they're asking: Follow Alberta and US jurisdictions. Temporarily remove the remaining portion of the provincial fuel tax on diesel. I said this in the House also. We have owner-operators that are struggling. They have pieces of equipment worth millions, and they need help because right now, the forest industry is the most trade-impacted sector of the economy. Some $3.5 billion, or 47% of all Ontario forest product exports, are subject to the trade measures. Long-standing disputes and stacked tariffs make forestry in Ontario the most trade-impacted sector—not steel, not automobile: forestry.

Yet, on est l'enfant pauvre. Comprenez-vous ça? Je pense que the industry is telling you what they need to—and I'm not saying they're not recognizing—I'll repeat that because sometimes we tend to forget what you've done. There are good things you've done, but these are the things that could make a difference for them because they're saying your plan is good for the long term. It's short-term needs they need now to survive. That's the link that's missing. They keep telling me, "Guy, this is what we need. We need help now, not 10 years from now, not long term from now. It's right now when we need because we are struggling."

We're losing owner-operators. I can tell you if you lose the owner-operators, no company will be able to buy a piece of equipment. There are individuals who own these feller bunchers, delimbers, grapples. They're expensive to operate, but if they fall, the forest industry will be—truck drivers are the same thing.

Les chauffeurs, les camionneurs, leurs assurances pètent. On perd des camionneurs à cause des assurances. Qu'est-ce que vous avez fait pour les assurances des camionneurs? Je me souviens, j'avais amené une motion, vous l'avez tous supportée et vous n'avez rien fait avec. Pourquoi? Parce qu'à Brampton, les camionneurs sont importants, alors on ne peut pas aller contre ça, là. On ne peut pas aller contre les camionneurs de Brampton, et tout ça. « Belle motion, Guy, félicitations. » Zéro action là-dessus. Ce n'était rien qu'un beau show puis des belles paroles.

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Parce que moi j'avais amené la motion pour que le gouvernement fasse de quoi pour réduire les assurances

des camionneurs pour les régions du Nord parce que c'est encore des individus, des « mom-and-pop operations ».

Je regarde, parce que là, je m'en vais, je parle, et puis j'oublie.

Ces « mom-and-pop operations » sont passées de pères en fils, très souvent. Puis aujourd'hui, le père, il dit : « Mon fils, je ne te donne pas cette "business"-là parce qu'il n'y a pas d'argent à faire, et puis pas rien que ça, je ne t'endetterai pas. Ça ne fait aucun sens. » Je le sais, moi, il y a des familles qui me l'ont dit, qui ont eu des camionneurs toute leur vie, puis on dit : « Ce n'est pas vrai qu'on va endetter notre enfant dans ça. » Non seulement les camions—ce n'est pas la question du camionneur qui veut beaucoup, mais c'est le prix du fuel, on parle des assurances; ça ne finit plus.

Et tout ça à cause de nos routes, là, tout ça à cause que nos routes ne sont pas bien entretenues. On voit des accidents de camionneurs qui rentrent dans le clos. C'est pour ça qu'on vous demande au gouvernement de faire de quoi pour nos routes. Pourquoi qu'on vous demande de faire de quoi pour nos routes? Parce qu'on voit l'effet que ça fait sur nos assurances et sur les assurances des camionneurs qui, eux, sont étouffés par les assurances. Puis vous laissez l'assurance passer pour des voleurs puis étouffer des entrepreneurs, des entreprises familiales. Vous ne faites rien. Je n'ai jamais entendu une personne de votre bord dire : « On va faire la bonne chose. On va rédiger une loi pour restreindre les assurances de voler le monde, de voler les personnes qui arrêtent les assurances, les camionneurs ou les personnes qui font de l'abus. » Ce sont les assurances qui font de l'abus sur le monde qui ont les assurances. On est obligé de s'assurer—ils ont une licence pour voler. On va dire la vraie chose; c'est ça qui se passe. Et tout ce temps-là, par exemple, les camionneurs ou tous ceux qui ont des assurances, on est obligé de payer parce qu'on n'a pas le choix.

On a des routes, puis on a du monde qui conduit sur ces routes. C'est pour ça qu'on vous dit : « Allez dans les écoles, les institutions, puis commencez à vérifier comment elles enseignent. » On a amené des projets de loi, j'ai amené des projets de loi pour essayer d'améliorer la situation; vous votez contre. Mais vous ne réalisez pas l'impact que ça a sur le reste de la population du nord de l'Ontario, sur le reste de la province, ou bien donc sur le reste du Canada. Parce que quand la route ferme, ça impacte les finances de l'Ontario, ça impacte le financement du Canada. Ce n'est pas juste chez nous; c'est à la grandeur—des fois, deux jours, fermée. L'hiver vient de commencer, là, on n'a eu rien qu'une petite neige il y a trois semaines passées—rien qu'une petite neige qui couvrait. La route a fermé trois fois en deux jours. Ça n'a pas de sens.

Vous n'avez rien qu'à aller voir. Ne prenez pas ma parole; allez voir sur l'Internet comment qu'il y a des routes qui ferment inutilement par manque d'entretien des routes hivernales. Il faut que vous fassiez de quoi pour ça. Les assurances—après ça, on se demande pourquoi on perd les camionneurs, et après ça, tu sais, l'industrie souffre. Ils vous demandent leur juste valeur.

Je vais retourner sur mes papiers parce que je peux parler là-dessus une heure de temps.

Northern Ontario Heritage Fund, access and accountability: We can say the same thing for other investments in the north. We recognize that sometimes we need to modernize administrative processes in order to meet with the demands and delivery of the projects; however, people and businesses are facing such economic hardships that they need the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund to remain transparent, accountable and accessible to communities of every size.

Schedule 5 introduces new priorities around economic development, innovation and job growth. These are worthwhile goals. The question is whether small municipalities, non-profits, or local initiatives will continue to qualify and compete fairly.

Le Fonds du patrimoine du Nord de l'Ontario doit répondre aux besoins de toutes nos communautés, pas seulement aux grands projets. Les petites municipalités et les organismes communautaires doivent aussi avoir une chance équitable. Je pense que ça c'est un bon point. Je pense surtout aussi aux organismes franco-ontariens.

Tu sais, on dépend beaucoup de ce fonds du patrimoine de l'Ontario, puis les nouveaux règlements que vous avez établis, ça me donne l'impression que peut-être on va voir ces petits organismes-là ne pas avoir leur juste part. Parce que très souvent, même les petites communautés—parce que là, vous avez mis ça plus compétitif pour avoir, attirer, d'aller chercher du développement économique. Je ne dis pas que c'est mauvais, ce que vous faites là, mais il ne faut pas mettre ça comme juste la seule raison.

So it shouldn't be the only reason that economic development, innovation for job growth—it can't be the only solution, because francophones and all the other organizations—the non-profits—how are they going to do it, because they depend on this.

Les francophones et tous les autres organismes à but non lucratif dépendent très souvent de l'accès au patrimoine du nord de l'Ontario. Ça fait que la question se pose. Puis je peux vous dire, la question ne se pose pas à peu près.

On sait que votre record—le gouvernement, avec le scandale que vous avez eu dans différents ministères—you just have to think of OSAP right now, it's close to a billion dollars. Their record's not too good on that one. We can hear from the Minister of Labour—that record wasn't very good. So when we see stuff like this, well, you can't ask us not to think that maybe there's something behind that one too; maybe it's only going to be given to people well-connected, or big donors or donors to the party.

Tu sais, quand on commence à regarder le record du gouvernement—on n'a rien qu'à regarder ce qu'ils font avec le RAFEO, comme c'est là. Ce sont des milliards dont on parle; ce ne sont pas des millions. Ils sont près du milliard—de l'argent des contribuables qu'on ne verra jamais plus. C'est parti, cet argent-là.

Tu sais, ils peuvent dire que—ça fait trois ans qu'ils le savaient. Ils ont eu le temps de réagir; il y a eu des alarmes—écoute. C'était quasiment qu'on avait mis une

lumière sur leurs têtes, puis on avait dit : « Hé, ça flashe. Allume, légume », comme qu'on dit. Vous n'avez pas réagi, puis on parle de milliards.

On n'a rien qu'à retourner, si vous vous souvenez, avec le ministère du Travail : 10 millions de dollars donnés à un club de danseuses—$10 million given to an adult club—to well-connected people. Tout ça pour des donateurs bien connectés—écoute, encore, on sait qu'il y a eu, quoi, un déjeuner à 1 500 piastres l'assiette avec le ministère de la Santé? Puis que, là, on vous dit : « Bien, là, on change les règles. » Mais c'est pour ça qu'on se pose la question.

Institutions, like francophones and all the organizations that are unfunded, will they get their fair share? Because they depend on this a lot. Whereas that small town seeking support for tourism attractions or community facilities may not promise hundreds of new jobs, but projects can still make a real difference locally. Small communities may also have fewer staff to prepare complex applications—and that is a good point. For a small organization, the complexity of the applications—they keep saying, "We can't hire," so they have to bring in people and they're trying their best to make these applications. And a lot of them don't make applications because they say, "We don't have the staff to do it."

« On n'a rien qu'à penser à la complexité des applications. » Je ne sais pas combien de fois que j'ai entendu dire ça. J'ai entendu souvent que c'est la complexité de l'application, puis surtout pour les petits organismes. Fait que, si on commence à mettre ça encore plus compliqué, plus compétitif, bien, là, on commence à réduire encore pour les organismes qui en ont de besoin, qui font une différence dans nos communautés—that make a difference in our community. These small organizations make a lot of things for our communities. They make our communities better, but if we make it complicated or competitive—even harder to get—just imagine if they got the money that they're asking for.

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The government is changing the funding priority without clearly explaining how smaller communities, community organizations and local initiatives will continue to qualify. Economic development must benefit more than large corporations and major projects; it must also support the smaller business, non-profits and municipalities that sustain northern communities.

Speaker, we have seen what can happen when transparency and accountability are lacking in government funding decisions. I just talked about this, but I'll read it again because it's worth reading. Just look at the Skills Development Fund: The Auditor General found that 54% of approved applications were ranked "poor," "low" or "medium," receiving approximately $742 million in public funds, while hundreds of highly ranked applications were passed over. The Auditor General concluded that the selection process was not fair, transparent or accountable. That's not me; the Auditor General said that. We're not talking small money: $742 million in public funds. People that deserved the money didn't get it; some that shouldn't have qualified got the money. What does that tell you?

On this side of the House—you can't blame us. If the red lights are flashing, we react right away, not three years down the road.

That has to be clarified. The ministry has to clarify—will they be impacted? I haven't heard that, but when I see the writing, when I see what they're proposing, it is not very clear. We cannot afford to see the same fiasco repeated with the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund.

Nos communautés du Nord méritent mieux. Les décisions de financement doivent être prisent selon les critères clairs, équitables et transparents et non selon les considérations politiques.

The questions we could ask the minister are, will the government provide clear eligibility criteria, will funding decisions and regional allocation be transparent and will northerners be able to measure the actual results of these investments? When you look at all this, you say, "Who is going to benefit?" and "Will the smaller groups, or the smaller organizations, get their fair share?"

Si vous n'avez rien à cacher, pourquoi ne pas répondre aux questions que se posent tous les Ontariens? Les Ontariens le méritent. Pour une fois, soyez proactifs. Faites preuve de transparence dès le départ et démontrez que vos décisions sont prises dans l'intérêt de la population.

Public lands: I've got to touch on public lands. When I looked at it the first time, I said, "Well, I didn't see anything wrong with it." I know the—what's the newspaper that came out—

MPP Lise Vaugeois: The Trillium.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: The Trillium came out and said, "Is this another attack on First Nations? Is that what they're asking?" I didn't read it that way. The way I read it is that—being from northern Ontario, I see, a lot of the times, what is happening is that people will use crown land. There are nice lakes. They set up a place for camping, so they start building stuff. Yet when other people want to go camp there, they can't do that because the person will say, "Well, Guy is using that spot, but there is no other spot." And then Guy says it's his spot. That's how I think—it's to address this type of concern.

And also, sometimes, if you're a hunter—we've seen it; we've lived it. I know I've lived it many times. You want to go hunting, and then all of a sudden there's a truck parked right in the middle of the road or parked sideways and he says, "Well, I'm hunting there. You don't have access." Sometimes they block a big chunk of where you could be hunting. We've seen that also in moose hunting and deer hunting. There used to be an etiquette when you were hunting. When you saw a vehicle, you just turned around. You would respect—if you saw a hunter, you would wave. But now, this doesn't happen very much. So now, maybe that's why the ministry is trying to propose a way to try to avoid people who are parking vehicles, boats—it could happen on the lake also; I've seen it. I know I just moved a boat and I went in, but what if you can't move a boat, you can't physically do it? Then you're stuck.

I think this is what it means, but you have to ask the question: Is it also meant to try to say that if there's a blockade from First Nations on their traditional territory—is that also a way of trying to say that?

Was there consultation? The question should be asked: Was there consultation with First Nations on Bill 155? Maybe there was. But this bill just came out. I know on Bill 140, we heard from First Nations there was not very much consultation on that one, so do you consider Bill 140 consulted? A three-hour consultation? Not even three hours?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: No, it was three hours—that's it.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Yes, three hours—that's it.

So the question has to be asked: Was there consultation on Bill 155? Because I can tell you, if Trillium looked at it that way—and maybe Trillium doesn't understand the situation as it's happening on the ground. People put gates, people do other things like putting "Do not trespass" on crown land that's not even theirs. A lot of this stuff that is happening, there are complaints to the ministry to try to fix it, but the MNR already has that power, so do we really need this? I always thought that the MNR—the COs had the power to do that.

Sur la question de, je pense que c'est « schedule » 3—je ne veux rien que faire certain; c'est pour ça que je regarde. Non, ce n'est pas « schedule » 3. C'est « schedule » 7, qui proposait que s'il y a quelqu'un qui a une voiture, n'importe laquelle, une roulotte, ou un bateau qui bloque le chemin, et bien, tu ne peux pas faire ça sur le terrain de la Couronne parce que tu ne peux pas empêcher quelqu'un de passer sur le terrain de la Couronne. Ça, c'est la loi; ça a tout le temps été la loi.

Mais à cause que très souvent, il y en a qui voulaient aller, disons, camper sur le bord d'un lac. La place était limitée, il y avait du monde qui était déjà là, qui était établi pareil comme si c'était permanent. Des fois, ils se font des « shed » et puis ils sont installés là. Mais là, le monde qui vient camper, ils voudraient camper mais ils ne peuvent pas, ce qui fait qu'ils font des plaintes au ministère. Ça fait que peut être avec les plaintes, c'est de là qu'est venu ce processus-là qui voudrait commencer à limiter ce processus-là dans « schedule » 7.

Mais la question se pose, puis c'est pour ça qu'on a vu, parce qu'il y a un article qui est sorti sur Trillium, qui disait : « Est-ce que c'est juste aussi pour se donner encore plus d'outils pour que, si jamais des Premières Nations décident de faire un blocage, disons, sur »—parce qu'on entend beaucoup parler du Cercle de feu. Si une communauté ou des communautés décident de mettre un blocage, que ce soit pour quelque raison, est-ce c'est pour se donner encore plus d'outils pour les retirer de ça? Mais je ne crois pas que le projet loi C-5—il se fait probablement contester parce que les Premières Nations disent que ça entrave sur leur droit de traiter. Pour le 140, ils disent la même chose, et puis là tu aurais le "Bill" 155 qui ferait la même chose.

Moi la première fois que je l'ai lu, je ne l'ai pas lu comme ça, mais il y en a qui l'ont interprété de cette façon. Mais peut-être que c'est le temps, et peut-être qu'avec le débat qu'on va avoir, avec les débats et peut-être avec l'explication des ministres et des députés conservateurs, les personnes qui vont parler à propos du projet de loi vont le clarifier. Et peut-être que l'interprétation qui s'est donnée n'est pas la bonne. Peut-être que la mienne, non plus, n'est pas la bonne. Mais moi, ce que je vois dans ce projet de loi, et avec l'expérience que j'ai eue sur le terrain et puis en étant critique—moi, je l'ai vu. Et puis j'ai même demandé à nos recherchistes, et ils l'ont vu de la même façon que moi. Mais là, quand l'article est sorti, on a dit : « Bien, la question se pose. » Puis dans le débat, il faut en parler parce qu'il faut refléter les choses.

Fait que, y a-t-il eu de la consultation? Was there a consultation? On sait que—Bill C-5, there was not very much consultation. Bill 140 didn't get much consultation, but how about now on Bill 155? I heard Minister Pirie say, "Consultation is in our DNA," but I guess it wasn't for Bill 140, because Bill 140 was only three hours of consultation, yet First Nations were asking for a lot more consultation in that. They wanted you to move the bill—

Interjection.

1620

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Yes, a hundred meetings. Well, why were they asking to be available? There was a press conference from youth asking to speak on that, protecting the land—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): Through the Speaker.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: The land protectors were asking to be able to speak, but, no, there was no room to hear from them—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): Please, address through the Speaker.

I'll ask the House to come to order.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Speaker, why then are First Nations saying we were not consulting? I guess they're consulting—I'll say it, they probably are consulting with some First Nations. But when you have the Chiefs of Ontario, when you have First Nations coming here and saying that these bills are against their traditional rights, then there's something wrong with that picture. If you don't see it, I think there will be problems down the road.

That's why you're having these types of questions being asked. You can say you have—and I'm sure you have in some cases with some First Nations—saying that you haven't done—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): The Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: But I can tell when you have the First Nations here, the chiefs—I know the chiefs asked if they could participate. They were refused because there was only three hours of consultation on Bill 140. Well, three hours is not much for a committee to listen—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): Thank you.

Questions?

Ms. Laura Smith: One of the things that we're talking about with this bill is the modernization of Ontario Northland's legislative framework and the speedy delivery of reliable bus and rail service. I had the pleasure of going along to the former location of the Northlander. Getting it back up and running is super important, especially for the people who are getting older and have to make their appointments with their doctors. This is a critical piece of infrastructure—transportation that's really important. But what they need for the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission is new structural governance. It hasn't been updated since 1902. Doesn't the member opposite believe it to be deserved—a modern governance structure, to meet today's need?

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: We're happy to see the Northlander, but we've been waiting since 2018, since you announced it, so that's not speedy to me—speedy, to me, should have been, "Well, it's coming on December 10." We're happy to see it back, but it goes to Timmins and Cochrane—honestly, I hope that we can build it to go to Hearst and Kapuskasing and go further north also, because, like you say, people are getting older and they need it.

I'm not saying there's nothing good in your legislation. I never said that. I wouldn't say that. But there is some stuff that we're questioning. If we're going to say "protect Ontario's northern and rural communities"—then it should reflect the needs that northern Ontario needs, because there are needs.

To be honest, when we look at all that comes out of rural and northern Ontario, all the riches, and how poor for Ontario, sometimes, our roads are, the investment—because right now, if we develop what you're talking about, "l'infrastructure" cannot hold it because there's enough traffic on there. If we put more, it will be deadly on these roads. They're already deadly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): The member for Ottawa West-Nepean.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I want to thank my colleagues for their very thoughtful comments on what's in this bill and what's not in this bill.

I just want to follow up with my colleague from Thunder Bay–Superior North, who was talking about the lack of protections, particularly for the northwest. My colleague mentioned the wildfires, what happened this summer, and the lack of response from the government, and certainly timeliness and awareness of information. One thing that the community has been impacted by is the failures of this government's Disaster Recovery Assistance for Ontarians Program, which has also impacted residents of Ottawa and St. Catharines, I know.

I'm wondering if the member can elaborate on what changes should have been included in this bill to update disaster recovery assistance. What other measures do residents of the north need to be adequately protected against natural disasters?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I want to thank the member from Ottawa West–Nepean for the question.

There is nothing here, of course, for flood protection, which we have also experienced—not recently; about 10 or 15 years ago—and it was terrible. Really, what we're not seeing is the thinking ahead to how to prevent things from getting worse and worse and worse.

It has been quite distressing to hear about what has happened for people in Ottawa and people in St. Catharines who are still dealing with floods and sewage in their basements. That's really shameful. I don't understand why the government has not addressed those things. They're clearly disasters, and there should be funds for that.

But for the north to not even have communications with the representative for that region when so much of the region was burning to the ground—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): Questions?

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciated very much listening to both members from the opposition and their comments on the bill. Listening through their entire speeches, I was really struck by the fact that they have no direct criticisms of the content of the bill, and that the member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay said there are good things in this bill. So with no obvious—what do you call them? Poison pills, I think, is what they're typically called on the opposition side of the House. And with general support—I can hear that you want more; we always want more, but half a loaf is better than no loaf.

So I was wondering if I could ask the members across—through you, Speaker—if they and their caucus will be voting in favour of this piece of legislation, to at least do something for northern Ontario.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I can go along with that—half a loaf is better than no loaf.

But there are some concerns with the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund; I'm not sure how that's going to play out and whether that's going to wind up affecting francophone communities, who often draw on that fund for cultural uses. If the definition of the use of the fund changes, it may actually exclude those communities from getting what have been very important supports.

On the whole, I would say that this bill—I don't see a big problem with it.

I would say, though, that Bill 140 is full of poison pills, and it's most unfortunate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): Questions?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to both of my colleagues for their debate on this. Both of them talked about the passenger-railcar Northlander returning, and how it's returning to part of northern Ontario—the eastern side, and not much to the western side.

I know that both of my colleagues have talked about Highways 11 and 17, winter road maintenance, and the conditions of those roads.

I wonder if either of them would like to expand on how important it is to have passenger rail service in the north as another opportunity for people to be able to travel.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: The Northlander is very important. We've been waiting for a long time, and we remember the Liberals took it out.

One of the questions that was asked across was, "Why?" People are getting older in northern Ontario, and to be

honest, they're afraid of driving on our roads. That's why they want to use the train now. A lot of them want to visit or go to medical and hospital appointments, and they want to use the train, because they say they're afraid to use Highway 11. Either they've lost family members or they've seen too many—until you drive it in the wintertime and you've seen the amount of trucks. It doubles in the wintertime—Highway 11—because you don't use Highway 17, because there are too many hills and it's up, up, up; it is flatter, so it doubles. So people now are afraid, because it's a narrow road, with high snowbanks. If you're coming face to face with two trucks, you could die.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): Questions?

Hon. Doug Downey: My father drove trains for 35 years. In fact, he drove the Northlander when he was driving. I spent a lot of time, as a kid, riding on trains—although I don't think that was allowed, it was permitted. It gives me a bit of an insight.

My question is to any of the members in the NDP. When the Northlander was cancelled by the Liberals in 2012, they had a minority government. Can somebody explain why the NDP supported that?

1630

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: The Liberals closed it, and if you remember, back then, we had just come out of an election. We said, "Do not close it." Nobody wanted to go back to an election—except the Conservatives wanted to go back. But the fact is, the Liberals closed it, and we've been fighting to get it back ever since. We've been waiting since 2018 for you to bring it back—it was an election promise, and another election promise, and an election promise. And then it was coming back, and it had an accident—"Oh, we had to fix the parts. Now it's going to come back on December 10." It has to come back. We need the train back. But to go back—

Hon. Doug Downey: Are you going to vote for it?

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Am I going to vote for this bill? Ça reste à voir. Ça reste à voir. Je te laisse sur ton appétit. I'll leave you an appetite on that one.

We need the Northlander, but it can't—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): Further debate?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: It's always a pleasure to rise in this House, especially to speak on behalf of beautiful Beaches–East York residents.

I will be splitting my time with the enthusiastic, energetic, effusive, effervescent member from Scarborough–Guildwood.

Bill 155: I cannot express to you how relieved I was to finally be debating a piece of legislation that speaks about trees and water and fish and deer and land without painting it as red tape. That was my initial thought before really digging into this bill.

I always discuss how the only time this government ever mentions "environment" in their budget or in their conversations is in relation to the fiscal outlook, and the only time we hear "climate" is as it relates to the economy—and "green" is something they know only in terms of bonds, or a colour. In their world, increasingly severe and frequent floods and storms are merely generational weather events, while the extreme heat that kills hundreds of people is entirely detached from the greater patterns of global warming.

During the committee on estimates for the Ministry of Emergency Preparedness and Response, the government even confirmed that climate change should not be and is not the concern of that ministry. You can imagine my shock when I heard that.

This government prepares for and responds to merely freak weather events. According to this government, the increasingly severe climate remains "events"—not part of an identifiable pattern, and their cause stays unknown.

The issue with this backwards way of thinking is that it does not permit any form of proactive action. As long as floods and fires are extreme weather events and not symptoms of climate change, as long as this government refuses to acknowledge the climate emergency, then we will stay in a state of emergency.

The climate crisis is not going anywhere if this government continues to react instead of plan. As long as they deny that we are in a climate emergency, they are not obliged to stick to long-term plans, or make them, or prepare Ontario. They may continue to dismantle carbon emission reduction targets and strategy and push back recycling and waste diversion targets so far into the future that they can be sure that it will be another government's problem. Protections for wildlife and biodiversity can be whittled down to just words with no action, and nature can continue to be reduced and devalued as red tape, in favour of unbridled building on land that is not structurally sound enough to handle development after development—because the government has encouraged a water-taking free-for-all—and destruction of natural habitat leading to erosion, flooding and unchecked ecosystems. And this government will have the audacity to say that this destruction is all in the name of economic growth. In fact, their policies indicate that degradation of the natural environment is actually necessary to benefit the economy—whereas I say we can put "eco" back in the economy. They have passed countless bills doing just that.

The issue that this government glosses over, however, is that the homes we want to live in, the jobs we want to work on and the shops we want to buy from will not exist if the climate emergency continues and if we do not have a healthy environment, we lack safe air to breathe and water to drink and ground to walk on. People do not want to live in high-rise apartment buildings when—instead of beautiful orange and yellow sunsets—they are trapped in clouds of smog so thick that they have to keep their windows closed. Ontarians cannot get to their work when the roads are flooded. And shopkeepers cannot offer us goods if fires rage and ravage their warehouses. These are not far-fetched possibilities. They are the real effects of the climate emergency that have already been realized and will become more and more part of our daily lives.

While our province and country have certainly experienced the consequences of the climate crisis in recent memory—namely, the heat dome in British Columbia that

resulted in more than 600 people dying, heat-related deaths, or the fires just this past summer that destroyed Whitefish Lake First Nation here in Ontario, or the flooding and storm in the greater Toronto area and southern Ontario between September 2 and 3 that caused $563 million in insurance damage and countless losses of memories that are irreplaceable—it is heartbreaking to see how countries around the world have had to bear the consequence of government failures to act on climate change.

The floods in Nepal this summer were not a result of their doing. Importantly, the countries that do not emit the most still pay the biggest price. Canada has the third-highest greenhouse gas emissions per capita and constitutes 1.4% of global emissions, and the United States is responsible for 12% of emissions globally. In contrast, Nepal emits only less than 0.1% of global greenhouse gases. High greenhouse gas emissions translate to consistent warming, and with it a thawing of glaciers over time. This is what led to the flash floods this summer that wiped out homes and entire communities and resulted in the deaths of more than a thousand people. This is unacceptable.

Burning fossil fuels with no measurement or performance framework, no targets and no reduction plan is completely reckless.

Creating legislation that would allow the government to expand and insert new landfills where they please, instead of investing, providing education for and driving forward comprehensive waste-diversion measures, as they have been advised to for years—including four of my private members' bills that are just hanging there, waiting for you to scoop up and put into legislation—is not the governance track record of a global leader.

Clearing greenbelt farmland to cater to developer friends and hindering our province's food sovereignty, biodiversity and natural climate resilience is not the work of a government that holds the well-being of others in high regard.

As a province as resource-rich and as abundant in skill as Ontario is, we have an obligation not only to fellow Ontarians, but to every nation, to use our resources responsibly, sustainably and safely.

That is why I am excited to be debating Bill 155 today—to discuss the importance of Ontario's substantial natural assets, the ample ways they benefit us, and the absolute imperative it is to protect and cultivate them as they continue to grow and flourish.

When you are surrounded by so much green space, swimmable lakes all around us and air that is easy and healthy for us to breathe, it is easy to take these privileges for granted. As humans, we are not meant to take; we are meant to steward. Responsible stewardship demands that we think about how our actions are going to affect us, not just now but down the line, for generations and generations to come. It should not be a burden on future generations to clean up a mess that we left, and Indigenous teachings teach us to think of seven generations from now. I don't see that in any legislation here.

1640

Responsible stewardship requires tough decisions and long-term planning. You cannot make decisions to extract resources or disrupt nature based on short-term gain or what we need at the moment. We have the ability to create strategies that are rooted in evidence, in best principles of nature conservation, climate resiliency and sustainability. A lot of the resources we call "renewable" are only renewable as long as we treat them as such.

Today I will be focused on schedules 1 and 2, on the Crown Forest Sustainability Act and the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, respectively.

Schedule 1: The bill's first schedule allows the minister to renew a forest resource licence in the circumstances specified by the regulations, in addition to the existing one-time renewal of up to two years. Additionally, the act would repeal the regulation-administering authority of the Lieutenant Governor to control the harvesting of trees that are not in crown forests but are reserved to the crown.

Every single time I read that this government has left the details to be specified by regulations, I sweat a little, and so should Ontarians. This request allows unimaginable trust that this government frankly has not earned. This government is claiming that we should trust them to make the right choice—the one that will be beneficial for all Ontarians, not just a few—but the track record of this government shows that they have earned nothing of the sort.

There are ample examples of this government's questionable decisions—top of mind, of course, for students around our province is OSAP. This government slashed OSAP grants, making it so fewer youth could pursue higher education. Already-enrolled students were thrown into limbo, and eager high school students keen to move ahead with their future were left grasping at straws. What responsible government actually makes it so that less people are able to pursue higher education? What policy function does that serve? How does this help Ontario's future? As if this weren't bad enough, the government waited years before they launched into the investigations into bad actors in private career colleges, resulting in the current choking of OSAP that we have seen play out before us.

Bill 5 completely called into question the clarity and sensibility of this government's decision-making. In relation to species at risk, they thought that it was legislatively and environmentally sound to limit protections to where species rest and lay their eggs. Essentially, they saved the bedroom and the hospital room to have the babies but did not guarantee the safety of the stairs to leave the house for the commute for these creatures.

This government's laundry list of bad judgment continues. When the legislation indicates that rules are left to the minister's discretion, this government has only shown that their discretion is seriously impaired.

Remember when the government negated the duty for the minister to report on the full findings of the Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario, the COSSARO, and left the COSSARO classifications of species at risk to

the minister? Last time I checked, the minister did not have a degree in environmental science that would even remotely qualify him to be making these kinds of weighty decisions.

While this government's poor decision-making pervades all areas of this government, when it comes to the environment, their judgment is especially egregious. Acknowledging a problem is undoubtedly the first step in creating a solution. How do we expect the government to use their discretion when their discretion is not based in reality? If they understand trees—as is the focus of this schedule—as a resource that will continue to replenish regardless of how we treat it, which is the approach they have undertaken thus far, they are not operating from a place based on evidence and scientific knowledge.

So let's talk about trees. Forestry is a $5.2-billion industry contributing 51,500 jobs. There is no doubt that forestry is a sector that Ontario depends on and that we should champion. When people think of Canada, Ontario, they think of wood. They think of forests. This is an industry that will support Ontario economically and in community building for years to come. But if we want to be able to depend on it for years to come, we need to think about its long-term sustainability and viability.

This sustainability is prefaced on the principle of emulating nature. Forests feature natural disturbances. In fact, they benefit from them. There is a naturally occurring cycle of disturbances. Fires and pests occur within nature, targeting certain trees or sometimes the whole forest. Disturbances help clear out dead material, allowing more nutrient access of soil-dwelling organisms as well as outgrowth and new growth of smaller plants in certain cases. Fires can release seeds from certain trees and flower species to promote species growth, while certain insects depend on recently burned areas for egg laying and food scavenging. The matter released from these burns also returns nutrients more quickly into the soil, promoting soil fertility and, relatedly, ecosystem growth and biodiversity. This is the value of emulating nature.

However, scientific studies demonstrate that this government has digressed from this standard. A report out of an environmental management journal from 2025 evaluated five potential indicators of forest degradation during 2012 to 2021 for public forests in boreal northeastern Ontario, Canada, specifically comparing natural emulation versus timber maximization to determine if forestry industry practices align with natural cycles. The report concluded that current forest management practices did not mimic natural cycles. In fact, it found that the amount of forest disturbed per year was often higher than expected under natural fire regimes, and in some coniferous forest types, even exceeded the rate expected under a strategy that prioritized timber harvesting. Diverging from natural disturbances is often an indication that a practice is unsustainable, confirming that practices prioritize harvest and economic returns over ecological goals.

This issue and this government's inability to recognize and address its significance is perplexing for multiple reasons. First and foremost, following natural cycles is the answer. It is the golden ticket. Built into these natural processes is room not just for harvesting and a certain level of destruction, but it's also actually necessary and it is advantageous for the maintenance of good ecosystems to experience some level of death and rebirth within the organic ebb and flow of fires, pests and disease. If this government regulated industry to ensure that the cycles mimicked that which we find in nature, timber harvesting would continue and flourish and, simultaneously, ecosystems would preserve and flourish.

What is frustrating beyond belief is that this government keeps pushing for more and more and more. More does not always equate to better. This government cannot be trusted to monitor and maintain sustainability. So let's take a look at what lies in our province's future if the principle of sustainability is violated.

Fire: Not a distant memory are the fires from this past summer. If this government promotes unsustainable forestry, we are sure to see more fires. When we reduce tree cover and ground vegetation through irresponsible forestry techniques, the dry-out creates the conditions for a drier forest, and when forests are dry, fires are more likely to catch, spread faster and become more out of control. This not only kills remaining vegetation at an unsustainable rate, but it increases greenhouse gas emissions and decreases local biodiversity. This leads to a feedback loop wherein putting more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere creates higher temperatures, and with forests dry and vulnerable, the likelihood of future fires only increases and the process repeats. Round and round and round we go.

Ontario cannot afford more devastation. To engage in these reckless practices would be to knowingly sacrifice vulnerable communities. Evidence proves that more frequent and more severe fires are not just inevitable, but when we couple human-driven forest degradation with the climate crisis—make no mistake, this government knows this. To engage in any practice that would lend it to the unprescribed destruction of forests would be to co-sign the devastation of entire communities.

1650

We cannot talk about increased wildland fires without speaking about the heroes who respond to them, the firefighters. We met with the firefighters, actually, just today, and many of you probably have. They have a reception here in the House tonight and we should all heed what they have to say. Their asks are not unreasonable; they're basic asks for life-saving health measures for our first responders. We need more of them—we know that from the fires last summer, and every summer, actually—and we need to pay them appropriately, not seasonally. Make them permanent. Pay them for the dangerous work. Value them. Respect them.

When we fail to proactively invest in meaningful funding for fire prevention, including addressing climate change to ensure that we reduce the amount of out-of-control fires, we place a massive and unfair burden on wildland firefighters, making their work even more dangerous. This burden is worsened by the fact that wildland firefighters have told us time and time again that they do

not have enough resources. They log around 300 hours of overtime every summer—300 extra hours—and are paid only a little bit more than minimum wage and are contracted out in time frames that often do not reflect the changing wildfire season.

This is not proactive. This is not forward-thinking. These wildland firefighters must seek other work to fill in the gap, which has been seen to lead to frequent turnover from season to season. As a result, veteran wildland firefighters must devote their limited resources to training rookies season after season, and rookies must fill roles that require more experience and expert judgment that, through no fault of their own, they do not have at the time—they cannot have.

Moreover, due to the timing of the contracts and the lack of personnel and resources, these wildland firefighters are often unable to lend aid internationally and across provinces, despite expressing a strong duty to serve. So you want to do something for the north? Address the wildfire situation and respect the wildland firefighters.

I'm going to jump over to Schedule 2, because I'm looking at the time now. Schedule 2, this second schedule, permits hunting or trapping specially protected wildlife in circumstances prescribed by regulation. Protected wildlife may be bought or sold without a licence when prescribed. Can you imagine? The schedule also allows beaver dams to be damaged—the beaver's not that important to Canada, right?

Interjection: Yes, it is.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I'm being very sarcastic. I guess we're just going to get rid of our nickels.

The schedule also allows beaver dams to be damaged or destroyed without authorization, in circumstances prescribed by regulation and more. Who is thinking and dreaming this up?

Those are the words again: prescribed by regulation. I already recounted the perils of Bill 5. This is a continuation of that legacy of leaving species at risk vulnerable. Protecting wildlife has immeasurable benefits. Wildlife is not ornamental; it doesn't just belong at your cottage. They serve an important function in our ecosystems.

We talked at length with Bill 5 about the Blanding's turtle, and we know that turtles are a keystone species and they play such a vital role in maintaining the balance and health of our environment. Also, we know about the value of bees. If we want to eat ever again in our lives, we need to protect the biodiversity, the habitat—I just feel this government has no idea about animal habitat.

With this legislation opening up beaver dams to increased damage or destruction, the government needs to consider potentially far-reaching consequences. Beavers are renowned for their engineering prowess. Dams act as natural water filtration systems, trapping sediment and pollutants and therefore clarifying water downstream. These dams also fundamentally change the flow of water. Notably, they slow water, creating inhabitable spaces upstream that act as home to a multitude of birds' nests, fish in ponds and mink and otter in bogs, while herbaceous plants flourish near beaver dams, with a 33% increase.

With a change in water flow also comes the risk of flood. Experts have demonstrated that beaver dams can act as flood mitigators. How many floods have you had in your neighbourhoods of late? By inducing small floods, what would be a flood is absorbed throughout over the course of the watershed into the natural environment that can handle it before it overwhelms infrastructure. Moreover, removal of dams imposes risk of flooding, as a surge of water is sent downstream that was previously slowed by a dam.

Removal of beaver dams is not a frivolous issue. They should be approached with the utmost caution. I fear, solely based off this government and its track record, that our waterways will not benefit with such a decision.

We know that it's not just protection of the beavers and their habitat and our ecosystems, but also—for those of you who are familiar with sea lampreys and how invasive they are in our Great Lakes—we need to keep the dams there.

Going on to schedule 7 in my couple of minutes more: Much of what we are speaking about could actually be addressed, and I think much of our concern assuaged on this side of the House, if the communities that are affected by this legislation were also consulted. I spoke about this this morning, when I asked the minister a question about engagement—true engagement, true consultation. This schedule really calls the preservation of consultation and democracy into question.

I think many of us were puzzled to see the provision making it an offence to occupy public lands. What we are seeing here is an attempt to limit demonstration and feedback from the public. That should raise alarm bells for all of us, because why would a government who does not have anything to hide and is proud of their decision-making and initiatives and has genuinely consulted with people whose decisions would affect them feel the need to suppress the voice of Ontarians? That has been a prominent pattern of legislation over the last session: This government is working from the top down to legally remove transparency, accountability and collaboration.

One question that has been asked several times in this debate is, who was consulted when and what did they say, and where are their voices heard in this legislation? Because despite this government's claims, they do have a history of ignoring voices, specifically Indigenous voices. We've seen that with Bill 5. We saw it with Bill 140, when only one member of an Indigenous community, one chief, could actually come to committee physically, because it is cost-prohibitive, and you did not travel with that bill, and so you had 11 other chiefs online. That is so unfair and so insulting. It's not right.

Now I'll just whip to my conclusion: that I know we always need to be clear and repeat things, because this government hears feedback and instead of thinking "collaboration," they think "combat." Ontario needs development, and our province needs investment in industry, but I will never stand for the narrative that economic prosperity must come with the cost of ecological success. There is a way to build and a way to build correctly and

sustainably and safely. It is simply not true, the way this government thinks.

I hope my remarks underline how integral a healthy environment is for a healthy economy, and you can have both—or, really, an economy to exist, period. Moreover, these remarks should be used as a jumping-off point to spur discussion and consideration that will make this bill better, stronger and more beneficial to all. Hopefully, you'll listen to opposition members about this bill.

1700

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): The member for Scarborough–Guildwood.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Good evening, everyone. It is always an honour to rise in this House on behalf of the people of my beautiful riding of Scarborough–Guildwood and as the Ontario Liberal critic for transportation.

Today I rise to speak to Bill 155, Protect Ontario's Northern and Rural Communities Act, 2026. I will be addressing schedule 3, which amends the Highway Traffic Act; schedule 6, which establishes the Ontario Northland Transportation Corporation Act; and portions of schedule 7 if I'm able to—depends on my time—which amends the Public Lands Act

Although Scarborough is geographically very different from northern and rural Ontario, our communities do share many of the same struggles. We are constantly overlooked, underfunded and underserved by this government. Whether it is deteriorating infrastructure, lack of public transportation services, limited access to health care or a lack of investment in our communities, we are constantly fighting for our fair share. Our people work hard, pay their taxes and contribute significantly to Ontario's economy. Yet we are too often treated as an afterthought. Our postal code should never determine the quality of public services and infrastructure we receive.

When I first read the title of this legislation, I was so encouraged, I was happy, I was jumping up and down because I thought, there are going to be great things in this bill. It says, "protecting Ontario's northern and rural communities," which is something I have been advocating for in this House since I became the transportation critic.

I have travelled to northern Ontario; I have driven on Highways 11 and 17. So I am speaking from experience here today. I have listened carefully to the residents, municipal leaders, business owners and community advocates, and to the members on my right, preaching every time they've got an opportunity for this government to listen.

Every time I travel up north, I also hear clearly from northern Ontarians how tired—tired—they are of having to fight for the same basic transportation infrastructure that is given to the 400-series highways. They want safer highways. They want reliable transportation. They want to know that when their children leave for school, when their spouse leaves for work and when their loved ones travel to a medical appointment, they will return home safely.

Transportation is not simply about moving people from point A to point B. Transportation determines whether someone can get to and from their job, whether students can get to school safely and on time, whether a senior can get to a medical appointment on time, whether a small business can receive its supplies and the entire community can remain connected to the rest of the province.

Speaker, while there are provisions in this legislation that I welcome, there are also significant omissions and provisions that deserve much greater scrutiny. Because protecting northern Ontario requires more than putting the word "protect"—that's what I got excited about, the word "protect," but I could tell you so many things that are not in this bill. What is here about protecting health care in northern and rural communities, twinning of the highways, adequate snow plowing, truck inspections, safety on the road, the 2+1 highway? There is actually nothing in this bill that says that.

This bill requires action, it requires investment and, above all, it requires this government to continue to hold themselves accountable and to always be transparent to everyone in Ontario.

Schedule 3, Highway Traffic Act—vehicle inspection centres. I want to spend a little bit of time here. The Highway Traffic Act—concerning Ontario's vehicle inspection centre program and the enforcement of excessive vehicle noise and smoke. Under the current framework, when an individual vehicle inspection technician fails to comply with provincial requirements, the ministry's enforcement options are limited. It can revoke the technician's registration or it can shut down a whole garage. The legislation introduces an additional enforcement mechanism that allows the province to suspend only the individual inspection technician for non-compliance. This is particularly important in the northern and rural areas, where vehicle inspection centres are not necessarily located minutes away from one another. But the power to suspend an inspection technician does not mean more vehicles are being inspected. Let me say it again, and let's get this clear: The power to suspend an inspection technician does not mean more vehicles are being inspected. This amendment does not put more commercial vehicle enforcement officers on our highways, it does not increase the number of registered inspection technicians, and it does not open a single new vehicle inspection centre in northern Ontario.

Does this government even know how many vehicle inspection centres are currently operated across northern Ontario and how many registered inspection technicians are working at those centres? Does the government understand the distances that commercial vehicle operators in remote northern communities have to travel just to get their vehicle inspected? And after travelling those distances, how long are they waiting for inspections? Where is the commitment in this legislation to increasing inspection capacity in northern Ontario?

Speaker, we need more accessible inspection centres. We need qualified technicians who are complying with provincial safety standards. And we need consistent and effective enforcement on our highways.

So while I welcome that amendment, we cannot pretend introducing another enforcement mechanism is going to

resolve the systemic failures surrounding commercial vehicle safety in this province. Giving the ministry more enforcement powers without strengthening its enforcement capacity is simply not enough.

The Ontario Trucking Association had a campaign called Stop Illegal Trucking—"every hour Ontario's inspection stations are closed, uninspected trucks are on our highways." Earlier this month, the Ontario Trucking Association relaunched its illegal trucking campaign, calling on this government to restore law and order to Ontario's highways.

Let me share what Ontario's trucking industry is asking this government to do:

—keep all 34 truck inspection stations across Ontario open 24 hours a day, seven days a week;

—end the uninspected free pass;

—stop letting non-compliant operators win;

—protect small businesses by enforcing the rules;

—stop protecting high-risk carriers; and

—fix commercial driver training to improve safety in northern Ontario.

In May 2026—that's this year—Ontario's Auditor General released a special report exposing serious failures in commercial truck driver training and licensing, including falsified training records, inadequate instruction, unregistered schools operating illegally, and a lack of government oversight.

We're back on the large trucks, commercial trucks. They actually represent 3% of vehicles on the road. And I know this sounds small—we're talking about truck inspections on the highway. But when there are fatal accidents—the trucks made up 20% of fatal collisions. These figures demonstrate the importance of effective commercial driver training, oversight and vehicle inspection centre programs.

1710

Speaker, right now, only three out of Ontario's 34 truck inspection stations are operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week—three. So what happens when the remaining inspection stations are closed? These commercial truck drivers know the closures, know the times, know the routes, and they will continue to drive through and pass these traffic inspection programs. Families do not stop travelling on these highways. So if the inspection stations are closed, families are still driving beside these unsafe trucks. We are losing opportunities to identify potentially unsafe commercial vehicles travelling on our highways.

And because I know so much about what happens with truck safety on our roads, I am so cautious when I'm driving beside a truck right now, because I don't know if they've completed all their training hours.

Speaker, northern Ontarians need a comprehensive enforcement strategy across Highways 11 and 17. They need inspection stations that are consistently operational. They need sufficient enforcement personnel. They need accessible vehicle inspection centres and properly trained, compliant inspection technicians.

My personal experience driving on Highways 11 and 17, I could tell you, and I always share this—and the families who are driving in the north on Highways 11 and 17 and are still living today, God bless their heart, because in seven minutes, 12 trucks passed the vehicle that I was driving in. Do you know what was separating those trucks from my vehicle? A yellow line. You go left, you're going into the truck. If you're driving in the opposite direction and you go right, you go right into the truck.

Now, imagine travelling on those highways during a northern Ontario winter—snow-covered pavement, icy road conditions, reduced visibility, large commercial vehicles travelling just metres away from you and your family. There is little room for error.

We cannot afford to have wrongfully certified or improperly inspected commercial vehicles travelling too close to families, given the current state of Highways 11 and 17.

Speaker, we must also remember that commercial truck drivers themselves are at risk too. These are hard-working individuals—they want jobs; they want to be paid—who spend countless hours on our highways transporting the goods that sustain our economy and help us to get food on our tables as well. They deserve safe working conditions, properly maintained vehicles and safe highway infrastructure.

Commercial vehicle safety does not begin and end at an inspection centre. It begins with proper commercial driver training. It requires thorough vehicle inspections. It requires consistent roadside enforcement. And it requires safe, properly maintained highway infrastructure.

And, most importantly, when families are travelling on Highways 11 and 17—we are still not looking at Highways 11 and 17. To the people in the north, it matters. They drive on 11 and 17. They've got to get to their doctor's appointments. Children have got to get to their schools. That's their breadth and depth of their economy—going in and out of the north—so it should be treated the same way we treat the 400-series highways. They're no different from us.

I introduced two bills focusing on the north and they were around, when there is snow, how much faster we can clear the ice, the snow, so that the economy can pick up and run again. And I just want to mention that both of my bills were called the SMART Ontario Act, and they were voted down, which I'm not surprised by. I'm not expecting them to be passed, because for the bills that I've seen voted down on the opposite side since I've been here in 2023—I think the government's job is to vote our bills down.

I want to move on to vehicle noise and smoke enforcement, which is the second component of schedule 3. Currently, these offences fall under the general penalty provisions of the Highway Traffic Act, with minimum fines increasing from $60 to $200, with a maximum of $1,000. A $60 minimum fine is hardly a meaningful deterrent for someone who has spent hundreds or even thousands of dollars modifying their vehicle's exhaust system.

As the MPP for Scarborough–Guildwood, I recognize the impact excessive vehicle noise has on our communities, because I hear about it directly from my constituents.

While this government has made an amendment to deter the street car racers—because it's really the street car racers that you are looking at. So this just touches the surface and makes me wonder which donor complained to you that they can't sleep at night—because increasing from $60 to $200 is still not enough to deter these racers.

Every family deserves to sleep at night—even the ones who are not donating. Seniors deserve to enjoy their homes. Residents should not have to repeatedly complain about the excessive vehicle noise without seeing meaningful enforcement.

There are also environmental and public health concerns associated with excessive vehicle smoke.

But a fine only works if it is enforced. Who is pulling over these excessively loud vehicles? Ding, ding, ding, ding! That's why we never solve the issue.

Who is pulling over these excessively loud vehicles? Who is assessing excessive vehicle smoke? Who is responsible for enforcing these provisions? Is it our local police services, ministry enforcement officers, or both? Will additional enforcement resources be provided? I want to know about that.

I want to ask the Minister of Transportation: How many excessive vehicle noise offences were laid across Ontario last year? How many excessive vehicle smoke offences were laid? How many resulted in convictions? We didn't hear any of that. And how many additional violations does the government anticipate identifying as a result of this legislation change, which really means nothing? Has the government even established a measurable target? Increasing the minimum fine does not increase the likelihood of an offender being caught.

Speaker, what is missing from this schedule is a meaningful commitment to strengthening enforcement capacity. What we need are more enforcement personnel, accessible vehicle inspection centres in northern Ontario, consistently operational roadside inspection stations, stronger oversight of commercial vehicle safety, and measurable outcomes that demonstrate that these legislative changes are actually protecting Ontarians—not just their friends.

Legislation is only as effective as the government's ability and willingness to enforce it.

Northern Ontarians do not need stronger enforcement powers sitting on paper. They need stronger enforcement happening on their highways.

Speaker, I now want to turn to schedule 6 of this legislation, which enacts the Ontario Northland Transportation Corporation Act, 2026, and repeals the existing Ontario Northland Transportation Commission Act. Under this legislation, the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission will continue as the Ontario Northland Transportation Corp. and remain a crown agency. There are several objectives outlined under this provision. I'm not going to go through them.

But what I want to say is that I welcome the bringing back of the Northlander. It's going to be coming back on December 10. That is an important part of the bill.

1720

I want to go into repealing section 28—fair wages for railway workers. Speaker, under section 59 of schedule 6, this government is repealing the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission Act in its entirety. Section 28, which establishes fair-wage requirements for workers involved in the construction and operation of the railway—I want to put section 28 directly on the record. Workers involved in constructing and operating our railways are required to receive wages comparable to those of workers performing similar jobs in their respective communities. The previous act establishes a statutory protection against undercutting prevailing local wages. And this government is removing that protection.

We are in the middle of a trade war with the United States. Ontario workers are facing economic uncertainty. Families are concerned about their job security. Manufacturers are concerned about their future. Small businesses are struggling with rising operating costs. And at a time when this government should be doing everything in its power to protect Ontario workers and create good-paying Canadian jobs, it is repealing a provision that protects local wage standards.

Speaker, we are talking about the workers who construct our railways, the workers who maintain our tracks, the skilled tradespeople, technicians and railway workers who keep our transportation infrastructure operational. These are individuals who will be responsible for delivering the very transportation projects this government will stand in front of cameras and celebrate. They deserve to be compensated fairly for their work.

As the small business critic, I also recognize that when workers earn fair wages, that money circulates throughout their local economy. They support local restaurants. They support local grocery stores. They support local retailers. They support the small businesses that sustain northern and rural communities.

So why is this government removing a provision that supports prevailing local wage standards?

How can this government claim to be protecting Ontario's workers while removing a legislative provision designed to protect their wages?

Section 26 of the existing Ontario Northland Transportation Commission Act, entitled "Supplies and rolling stock to be purchased in Canada," states: "The railway shall as far as practicable be constructed, equipped and operated with railway supplies and rolling stock made, purchased or procured in Canada, if they can be obtained as cheaply and upon as good terms in Canada as elsewhere, having regard to quality."

Speaker, this provision already provides flexibility. It considers the cost of materials. It considers the quality of materials. It considers the terms under which those materials can be purchased. But where Canadian materials and equipment are competitively available, it also establishes a legislative preference for procuring them in Canada. And this government is removing that provision as well.

Speaker, let me get this straight. The trade war with the United States—when Ontario's steel industry, manufac-

turing sector and small businesses are facing significant economic uncertainty, I don't understand why that provision is being repealed. Where does this government expect the steel for our railway infrastructure to come from? Where will the equipment come from? Where will the railway components and construction materials come from? What assurances do Canadian manufacturers have that they will continue to receive appropriate consideration when competing for these contracts?

When we invest hundreds of millions of our taxpayer dollars into transportation infrastructure, those investments should generate economic opportunities here in Ontario and also across Canada. They should support Canadian steelworkers. They should support Canadian manufacturers. They should support Canadian suppliers. They should support Canadian small businesses. We should be strengthening our domestic supply chains, not removing legislative provisions that encourage their use.

Speaker, repealing section 26 does not automatically mean Ontario Northland will purchase all its supplies internationally. But it removes an existing statutory obligation to favour Canadian procurement where Canadian goods are competitively available.

With the time I have left, I want to say that I enjoyed presenting my debate on this bill. As I said before, when I saw the word "protect," I got happy because, as I said, on my right, from 2023, I heard my colleagues just debating and debating about the northern Highways 11 and 17—I travelled there on my own. I compare the struggles of the people in Ontario's north with the people in Scarborough and in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood.

I want to conclude my debate and return again to the full title of this bill: Protect Ontario's Northern and Rural Communities Act. I do not see what it is protecting. I know it's a bill that was fleshed out last night and gives us a couple of hours to review and debate—talk about democracy here. Where is the respect for all of us MPPs on this side of the House? It's not even acceptable. I did not even have time to take this dog's breakfast bill to my constituents, take it to my stakeholders and ask them for their opinion. That hurts me. What is there to hide? Why aren't they being transparent with all the bills and giving us the right process to come back and do a proper debate speech?

Interjections.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I had to catch my breath.

Speaker, the true measure of this legislation will not be the number of announcements this government makes, the number of press conferences it holds, or the number of ribbons it cuts; it will be whether workers are protected, whether communities are connected, whether our highways are safe, and whether families make it home and they don't have to go to a dining room where a chair is empty. I hear it all the time.

If this government wants to call this legislation the Protect Ontario's Northern and Rural Communities Act, then I challenge this government to live up to its name. Protect our workers, protect our businesses, and protect our communities.

1730

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): Questions?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Good evening. For those people who might be watching or listening in, we're debating Bill 155, the Protect Ontario's Northern and Rural Communities Act, 2026, at second reading. One of the parts has to do with rural development programs. The legislation, if passed, is going to provide the Minister of Rural Affairs with the authority to help ensure, as it should, that rural economic development programs and advisory bodies operate with clear accountability, strong coordination and alignment with provincial priorities.

Do the members opposite agree that the Minister of Rural Affairs should have the ability to support responsive and effective program delivery? Rural Ontario is listening.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I thank the member from Whitby for this question. I'm trying hard to see what you were just asking me, that's in this bill—I'm not seeing anything.

What I care about that I wanted to see in this bill is the fixing of Highways 11 and 17; fixing of health care in the rural areas; supporting the families, showing them that you care—not just your friends, your insiders and your donors. The families in northern Ontario do not receive that.

So unless you give me a program that I could really digest and be proud of and say, "Hey, we are finally fixing northern Ontario, and we respect them"—then, I will support that. But they are fixing a part of northern Ontario when it benefits them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): The member from Humber River–Black Creek.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: This bill got me thinking, and the muffler section got me thinking. It got me thinking about how tremulous a moment it is for Ontario drivers on the highways whenever some of these ministers put on the leather gloves, put on the shades and get behind the wheel. We learned that 12 times, ministers of this government got caught for stunt-driving speeds on some of the highways. Knowing what I know about cars—when you rev the engine up to 162, you hear it coming; it's pretty loud. You actually, when caught—because some of them did get caught—spent hundreds of dollars in fines; in fact, more than the $200 that they're suggesting for mufflers.

So the question is, why all of a sudden the interest in loud car noise, when so many of the perpetrators of it happen to come from some of the ministers here in this government? In fact, some of them may be sitting here today; you never know.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much to the member from Humber-Black Creek—

Mr. Will Bouma: Humber River–Black Creek.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Humber River–Black Creek.

Mr. Will Bouma: A great member.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Yes, a great member whom I was at city hall with.

Yes, we could talk about the cars in the parking lot, because when I'm pulling up on my bike, there's certainly a fancy—I don't know—Maserati or Porsche outside,

parked near me by one of these ministers. So it's funny, the obsession with the cars.

I can only think that maybe one of their donors is being woken up at night by a loud muffler sound. They certainly don't care about safety on the road when they're removing the speed cameras and they're removing bike lanes. "It must be a donor," is all I can think.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): Questions?

Mme Lucille Collard: Here we have it: Yet another bill that has been dropped on our laps yesterday afternoon, that we are required to debate the day after. It seems like the government moved from time allocation motions on bills to just fast-tracking the bills by just not giving us any time to consult anyone.

The other thing that the government has gotten really good at is having titles of bills that make them appear like they're doing something, or having provisions like they appear to do something—but in reality, it's not happening.

I want to talk about the increased fine for that—we were just talking about noisy vehicles there. I think the member from Scarborough–Guildwood alluded to that. What do you think should be coming with that bill to make sure that these increased fines will actually make a difference on the road and allow people to sleep?

MPP Andrea Hazell: In my remarks, I talked about how moving from $60 to $200 would not deter these race car drivers. I talked about who complained—because this is like a slap on the wrist.

As the member across from me said, some of our colleagues on the other side were caught speeding. What I think happened—why this was introduced in the bill is to cover how many of them were speeding on that highway. So that's one.

Number two: We need proper legislation that is going to protect every Ontarian on the road. We need to talk to our constituency. We need to talk to our stakeholders. We need proper consultation[—not just coming with these omnibus bills and throwing everything that you just thought up maybe overnight into the bill and trying to ram it down our throat. But as you can see, it's not happening, and we're fighting back.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): Questions?

Mr. Will Bouma: I listened with interest to both members' speeches from the third party, and I have to ask the question—we heard from the members from Thunder Bay–Superior North and Mushkegowuk–James Bay earlier this evening. And I asked the question pointedly of those members, about how they felt about this bill and that, while you don't get everything that you want in a government bill—and maybe we don't get everything that we want in a government bill—there's a lot of really good forward momentum in this bill in order to preserve our rural communities, in order to preserve our northern communities.

I don't know about the other members in this House, but the reality is—and I know that the minister would agree with me on this—the future prosperity of our province is entirely dependent on the north and what happens there.

So while we may not get everything that we want in every piece of legislation that we see, there are no poison pills in this bill. There's no reason to vote against this bill.

Will the third party be supporting this piece of legislation when it comes to a vote?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: We just got this bill, so give us a hot minute to look at it and to consult—truly consult—with our stakeholders.

What I would say is, if I were truly going to protect the north—and I don't live in the north; I take heed of the advice of my colleagues who do. But from what I've seen, we can do more. We can invest in those highways, make them safer—the health care.

How about the airports? You've heard from the member from Kiiwetinoong—the 27 fly-in communities and all the airports up there that need heavy investment. Instead, you're preoccupied with your fetish of downtown Toronto and the Premier's jet.

Also, your addressing of the wildfires was a horrific fail. You need to invest, hire more wildland firefighters, pay them properly and make them year-round, not seasonal.

And I'll tell you, I don't think your base agrees with schedule 7—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): Questions?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I just have to put it out there that a government member referred to "poison pills." I'm sure that's not a normal practice that occurs in their bills and this was just a gaffe that was mentioned.

A lot of times you have to deal with legislation here that cleans up a mess that the government made.

With regard to these mufflers and what's coming out of it, this is the government that got rid of Drive Clean and is now worried about what's coming out of exhaust pipes of vehicles.

Furthermore, this is a government that got rid of EV grants to purchase electric vehicles in the province of Ontario. I hear that these electric vehicles neither have an exhaust nor make noise—in fact, you've got to add noise-making stuff to it just to hear them coming.

So can you explain why this government is—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): The member for Beaches–East York.

1740

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Well, this government cares about the environment and air quality so much. You see it in all their bills. Let's just see—gutting of the conservation authorities, the Environmental Bill of Rights, environmental assessments, the greenbelt debacle. Nowhere in their vernacular is climate action—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): Further debate?

Mr. Will Bouma: Speaker, I have to tell you that it is a privilege and an absolute pleasure to rise today in support of our government's proposed Protect Ontario's Northern and Rural Communities Act, 2026.

As the member for Brantford–Brant, and as someone who proudly represents many rural communities, I always welcome the opportunity to stand in this House and speak

about the contributions that rural Ontario makes to our province.

Too often, under the previous government, discussions about economic growth focused on only our largest urban centres. But rural and northern Ontario are not on the sidelines of Ontario's success story; they are central to it.

And I will say here in this House, having spent a lot of time in the north because of my responsibilities in the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation and the Ministry of Northern Economic Development and Growth, that there's a good chunk of my heart that remains in northern Ontario, and everything that we look forward to for building in this province is focused on what's going to happen in northern Ontario over the next couple of decades.

From Oakville to Cainsville in my riding and throughout the county of Brant, our rural communities power Ontario every single day. These communities are the backbone of the province's economy.

Rural Ontario is where entrepreneurs take risks. Rural Ontario is where families build businesses that span generations—and time would fail for me to be able to tell you all about the number of farms in my riding that are older than our country. These businesses span generations.

Rural Ontario is where communities come together to solve challenges with determination, with resilience and with ingenuity. It is where manufacturers produce the goods that the people of Ontario and, indeed, people of the world rely on. It is where small businesses create local jobs and contribute to global markets. It's where resource industries provide essential materials that support economic growth across the province of Ontario. It's where innovation happens in workshops, in fields, in processing facilities and industrial parks. And perhaps most importantly, it is where the food that sustains our province and contributes to global food security is grown, raised and processed.

Indeed, Ontario's farmers feed our families. They support our economy. They create jobs across the supply chain, from equipment manufacturing and transportation to food processing and retail. And their work strengthens our food sovereignty and ensures that Ontario remains a leader in agri-food production.

Speaker, as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Northern Economic Development and Growth, I have also had the opportunity to gain a much deeper appreciation for northern Ontario and the remarkable role that it plays in our province. Northern Ontario is truly extraordinary. The region spans over 800,000 square kilometres and accounts for nearly 88% of Ontario's land mass. Its geography is vast. Its communities are diverse. Its opportunities are substantial.

But at the same time, northern Ontario faces unique realities when it comes to infrastructure, service delivery and economic development. We've heard about all those things here in the House this afternoon. Distance matters. Reliable public services matter. Access to global markets matters.

Northern Ontario possesses a combination of strengths and assets that few places anywhere in the entire globe can match. It is home to some of the world's most significant deposits of critical minerals and precious metals. And that is why government decisions often have a particularly significant impact in northern communities. As countries around the world compete for secure and reliable supply chains, the minerals found in northern Ontario will play an increasingly important role in advanced manufacturing, in electric vehicles, in batteries, in clean technologies, and national economic security.

Northern Ontario already plays a vital role in supporting Ontario's manufacturing, construction and technology sectors. It is recognized globally for its mining expertise, its innovation and its workforce. Ontario's mining sector has built a reputation for excellence, and northern communities are at the absolute centre of that success.

The region's freshwater resources support communities, tourism operators, industries and clean energy generation. Its thousands of lakes and rivers are not only natural treasures; they are also economic assets that support local livelihoods and attract visitors from around the world. Northern Ontario's strategic location provides access to markets through extensive road, through extensive rail, through extensive air and through extensive marine transportation networks.

Just as important, northern Ontario is home to a growing and increasingly diverse agricultural sector. As the Minister of Northern Economic Development and Growth is fond of saying, millions of acres of arable land support crop production, livestock farming and agri-food opportunities that continue to expand across the entire region. In short, northern Ontario is not merely participating in Ontario's economic future; northern Ontario is helping define our economic future.

Speaker, all of this makes one thing clear: At a time of global uncertainty, we must take action to protect Ontario's northern and rural communities. The global economic landscape is changing. Supply chains are changing. Trade relationships are changing. Unjustified tariffs and economic uncertainty continue to create uncertainty for businesses across North America and the world. In fact, this summer, when I had the opportunity to travel with the Premier in my role with the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, there was one thing that became abundantly clear in our meetings with governors across the United States of America, Republican or Democrat: The uncertainty that they were experiencing was just as damaging to their economies as it was to ours.

As a province, we cannot simply wait for these challenges to pass. We must respond. We must attract investment. We must diversify our markets. We must strengthen our domestic supply chains. We must reduce unnecessary barriers to economic growth. And we as a government must work together to create conditions that allow businesses to invest and expand here in Ontario and around the entire world.

That is why, so precisely, I am proud to support the Protect Ontario's Northern and Rural Communities Act,

2026. At its core, Speaker, this legislation is about three important objectives: recognizing rural Ontario and supporting it with responsive programs; attracting investment; and cutting red tape, making it easier to do business.

One area where I have had the opportunity to see these objectives come to life up close is through the incredible work of the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. The NOHFC remains one of the most important economic development tools available to support the people, the businesses and the communities of northern Ontario.

Speaker, since our government took office, the NOHFC has invested more than $1 billion in over 9,000 projects across northern Ontario. These investments have leveraged more than $3.5 billion in additional investment and helped to create and sustain more than 14,000 jobs. Those are not just numbers. Behind every one of those projects are the workers, the families, the municipalities and the businesses that are helping to build a stronger northern economy.

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to attend an announcement supporting ModBox Modular through a $1-million investment from the NOHFC. This investment will help the company expand its operations and increase production capacity. It will support the development of innovative modular housing solutions, including modular wood homes. It will help address growing demand for housing and infrastructure. And it will allow the company to better serve the unique needs of Ontario's northern communities. Speaker, that's exactly the type of project that our government wants to support.

1750

Projects like this support innovation. They encourage innovation. They create jobs. They respond to local needs, and these opportunities strengthen Ontario's economy. This investment was made possible because our government has sharpened the focus of the NOHFC. When confronted with uncertainty and when confronted with tariffs from our southern neighbours, our government has directed the corporation to prioritize investments that protect northern jobs and industry to mitigate the impacts of tariffs and trade disruptions and create new opportunities for long-term prosperity across all of northern Ontario.

This renewed focus is delivering results. For example, Jennmar Canada Ltd. is receiving $400,000 to expand its facility in Sudbury. The project will increase production capacity, improve efficiency and create good-paying jobs. It will allow more steel products to be manufactured in-house, strengthening local supply chains and increasing competitiveness. These projects demonstrate exactly the kind of strategic thinking that we need at this moment. At a time when pivoting from our reliance on US markets is more important than ever, projects such as this help position northern Ontario for long-term growth.

Similarly, our government is investing $2 million to support Waste Energy Solutions and Technologies Inc. in developing technology that converts waste into clean energy used for electricity generation, heating and cooling.

Each of these investments reflects our government's broader plan: to attract investment, to create jobs, to strengthen communities and to protect Ontario.

Speaker, another important component of this legislation is reducing unnecessary red tape. Businesses, municipalities, landowners and resource developers have repeatedly told the government that routine administrative processes often take far too long. In many cases, projects can face delays despite posing little risk, which costs both time and money.

It was just last week the minister and I heard from a brass manufacturer up in North Bay that just a routine piece of red tape that they had to do, which made their entire business possible or not possible, took four years to get through the provincial government for their approval. We're going to be introducing red tape measures to eliminate those pieces, Speaker.

In many cases, projects can face delays despite posing little risk, as I said. Speaker, that costs time, that costs money and it can discourage investment.

The proposed legislation, if passed, would continue our government's efforts to streamline the natural resource permitting process and improve service delivery. For too long, individuals and businesses have spent excessive time navigating routine approvals and permit renewals. This is time and money that instead could be invested into growing businesses, hiring workers and advancing projects.

The legislation proposes practical reforms. One example involves trees reserved to the crown on private land. Many landowners may be surprised to learn that while they own the property itself, outdated rules may mean the crown owns some or even all of the trees on their land. As a result, they have to navigate unnecessary approval processes to remove those trees, which costs time and money. These kinds of outdated requirements just no longer make sense in 2026. They impose costs, they create delays and they reduce certainty.

At a time when Ontario faces growing global competition for investment, every unnecessary delay matters. Removing unnecessary administrative burdens allows people to focus on productive economic activity rather than paperwork. Capital can move faster. Projects can move faster. Investment decisions can move faster. And Ontarians must be able to move faster. That is why our government continues to modernize permitting systems while maintaining strong environmental protections, public safety standards and regulatory oversight.

Speaker, the objective is not to lower standards. Rather, the objective is to improve service delivery. The objective is to focus government resources where they can have the greatest impact. These changes would help businesses. They would help municipalities. And they would help landowners move forward more efficiently on routine, low-risk projects while continuing to protect Ontario's natural resources and environment. That balance is critical. It allows us to build the most competitive economy in the G7 while maintaining responsible stewardship of our environment.

Speaker, I would now like to move on and speak about another important component of this legislation, one that is very close to the heart of many Ontarians: the recognition of Rural Ontario Week in legislation.

Since taking office, our government has consistently recognized the importance of rural communities. We understand that rural Ontario contributes enormously to our economy, our culture and our identity as a province. My own riding provides countless examples. We are blessed with vibrant agricultural communities, thriving small businesses and unique agri-tourism experiences.

One example is the county of Brant Farm Crawl. This event allows visitors to experience life on local farms firsthand. They can learn about crop production. They can see innovative farming operations. They can sample locally produced food and beverages, and, most importantly, they can connect directly with the people who work every day to feed our province. Events like these strengthen local economies while fostering greater understanding of agricultural and rural life.

And that is why recognizing Rural Ontario Week is much more than a symbolic gesture. The purpose of this measure goes beyond recognition alone. By highlighting the contributions of rural communities, it helps build a greater awareness and appreciation of the people, of the businesses, of the organizations and of the local leaders who help these communities thrive.

Speaker, across this great province, communities come together year after year to celebrate their achievements, traditions and way of life. Establishing Rural Ontario Week is about shining a spotlight on those contributions and acknowledging the vital role that rural communities play in Ontario's success. Recognition leads to understanding, and understanding leads to stronger support for the people and industries that sustain our province.

Speaker, this legislation demonstrates our government's long-term commitment to rural Ontario through the creation of a stand-alone legislative framework supporting the Minister of Rural Affairs. Our government has already demonstrated its commitment by establishing the Ministry of Rural Affairs. That decision reflected a simple reality: Rural communities deserve focused attention, they deserve dedicated advocacy, and they deserve government programs tailored to their unique circumstances.

The legislation, if passed, would provide authority for the Minister of Rural Affairs to establish and maintain programs that support rural economic development. This will help support programs to be administered effectively and efficiently. It recognizes rural Ontario as a key driver of growth, job creation and investment. Most importantly, it provides flexibility to respond quickly to emerging challenges and opportunities. At a time of economic uncertainty, that flexibility matters.

Another important measure in this legislation relates to vehicle inspection services. If we want to protect Ontario's economy, we must ensure people and goods can move safely and efficiently. That requires a strong vehicle inspection system. It also requires effective enforcement tools.

Currently, when a technician fails to comply with DriveON requirements, available enforcement options are limited. The ministry can revoke the technician's registration, or it can suspend the entire vehicle inspection centre. However, there is currently no way to suspend an individual technician without fully revoking registration. That creates a gap, and in some situations, revocation may be too severe, so we make this work in different circumstances.

Speaker, I could go on. I've got many more pages to my speech that I'm not going to be able to get to. But I want to sum up by simply saying that in order to build Ontario, in order to protect us from tariffs, we need all parties in this House to support this piece of legislation for the good of all of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Jordan): It now being 6 o'clock, it is time for private members' public business.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

Report continues in volume B.

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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	