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Mercredi
25 novembre 2026

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 25 November 2026

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 25 novembre 2026

The House met at 0900.

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

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

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 Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I think I'm going to address my question to the speaker who spoke last. The bill before us today makes certain amendments and changes to pieces of legislation, and part of that has to do with rural Ontario.

I understand the member represents a very rural riding. He probably has something to say about rural ridings and how this government has benefited rural ridings, particularly with respect to one or more of the provisions that are in this act. I would invite him to select one of the provisions that he believes will be useful to his riding and tell us how he thinks that provision will be of benefit to his riding or to rural ridings across Ontario, such as even my riding, which is a rural riding. So I'll invite the member to take a look at the bill and tell us what provision he thinks is useful for rural ridings in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member from Brantford–Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: I thought I had you there, Speaker. Thank you.

I appreciate the question. I hope everyone got to make it down to the Egg Farmers of Ontario breakfast this morning and see the incredible food that comes from rural Ontario.

Farmers do indeed feed cities; they feed our entire province, and we export so much. If there's one thing I know coming from rural Ontario, representing rural Ontario, it's that there's no shortage of incredible ideas or determination in our communities. There are business owners that are ready to expand, communities working to bring new life to their main streets and local leaders determined to create opportunities for the next generation of people in rural Ontario.

Our government believes in rural communities, and we are backing rural communities. If passed, this legislation would bring authority for the ROD program and its advisory panel under the Ministry of Rural Affairs' own legislation. It will also continue the existing panel as the—

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I have raised this issue in this House so many times. I have written both—different—environmental ministers. This concerns a dump in Hamilton: the GFL Stoney Creek dump. This is a landfill that has caused all kinds of problems for the residents.

I can't begin to describe the stench that comes from this dump. It's described as—it's unbelievable. The stench comes up through people's pipes. It's so bad they can't live there. It got to the point where the municipality, the city of Hamilton, sought a veto over expanding this dump, but this government gave them an expansion dump. In an unprecedented act, the city applied—they had a court application—to close this landfill. So when you have people in Hamilton East–Stoney Creek suffering, when you have Dresden who doesn't want a dump, why are you ramming—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member for Brantford–Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: Speaker, I appreciate that, and in response to that I'll say that, yes, none of us wants to deal with our garbage, unfortunately. Unfortunately, we're also faced with the fact that with an uncertain trade relationship with the United States—I forget the number exactly, but tariffs on trash are expected to go to 50%?

Mr. Steve Pinsonneault: It's 50%.

Mr. Will Bouma: To 50%—that's something that we simply can't afford. So I don't think it's a problem that the province of Ontario is going to be figuring out how to deal with their own garbage. There are opportunities that we have, and that we've heard about from colleagues and other people in this House: that we have to actually generate electricity from our waste, to use it more efficiently and to deal with the products that we all enjoy and the waste products that ensue from that. I think we're making good moves in order to move forward on those things.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I'll turn to the member for Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I appreciate the comments from the member for Brantford–Brant. There is no dignity in sending 40% of our ICI waste to the United States.

My question, Speaker, through you to the member, is about excessive vehicle noise. The member was formerly a municipal councillor, and I know when I was a councillor I had significant calls for action on excessive vehicle noise in my community. It includes loud engine revving, illegal muffler modifications and people just going in the middle of the night, and it wakes you up. There are so many disruptions to neighbourhoods that are caused by the illegal modification of vehicles, and it really impacts their quality of life. Our government has heard those concerns, and the bill does include changes to strengthen the penalties for those who ignore the current rules.

Through you, Speaker, I'm hoping the member can explain how this legislation, if passed, would help address that excessive vehicle noise that we're hearing in our communities.

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate that question, and he's absolutely right. When we first opened our optometry clinic, we lived upstairs, and we were right on Main Street in St. George, Ontario. It was amazing how many very, very loud motorcycles would be starting up when the bars closed down that would wake us up out of a dead sleep. Now, I will say I've replaced the windows in the building and it's not our home anymore, but I know from the renters that are there that they appreciate some of the sound dampening of the new windows that we put in there. But he speaks to a real problem.

You can also make the argument that our police have a lot to do, so I think what we're envisioning here is that by increasing the fines for excessive noise, it's just a deterrence factor to try to control some of these issues, so that we see less complaints both at a municipal level and at a provincial level, so that people would be good neighbours with response to their vehicle noise.

Thank you for the question.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further question?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My community of London is very much an agri-food hub. The food processing industry is critically important to our local economy, so we are very interested in ensuring the protection of rural Ontario, and especially the agricultural producers.

We had a round table organized by the London Chamber of Commerce recently. We had reps from the OFA around the region, and they talked about the pressures that farm families are facing. They're seeing rising insolvencies; they're crushed by costs of fuel and fertilizer. They want to see expanded food processing capacity here in this province. When is the government going to ensure that?

Mr. Will Bouma: I completely hear that. Meeting with the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance last evening, with the egg farmers this morning, with the pork producers before and the beef farmers earlier in the fall, you're absolutely correct, and I think we are making moves to do that.

However, with regard to this bill, recognizing the importance of rural Ontario and the food that we produce there, supporting the changes to the ROD through the Minister of Rural Affairs is very, very important.

So again, I guess my question to the members is, since I heard in debate yesterday that they have no real problems with this bill—and I know it's not my turn to ask to ask you questions, but will you be supporting this piece of legislation that's very, very important to the province of Ontario and moves northern and rural concerns further forward?

0910

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

MPP Billy Denault: Well, thank you, Speaker. It's a privilege to be able to ask a question to my colleague from Brantford–Brant on this important piece of legislation, especially that in schedule 8, which is the Respecting Rural Ontario Act, 2026. It enshrines Rural Ontario Week, which was, of course, a motion passed unanimously in this House, brought forward by myself and endorsed by the Ministry of Rural Affairs and is now being put into legislation.

I was just wondering if the member from Brantford–Brant could speak on that initiative, what it means to him in the rural parts of his riding and how he'll be celebrating Rural Ontario Week next year.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you for the question from my colleague. There's the old poem, "And on the eighth day ... God made a farmer." If you read through the rest of that, everything that we enjoy in this province is somehow connected to agriculture one way or the other, so to enshrine Rural Ontario Week in legislation is very, very important and I celebrate that.

I think one of the best programs in the county of Brant is Bite of Brant, where they bring in schoolchildren to actually experience what agriculture is like, because there's so much misunderstanding and just general lack of knowledge.

I've had a colleague from here in the House before say, "I don't know why anyone would want to go to the plowing match; agriculture has nothing to do in my riding." I changed the subject and asked him what he had for breakfast that morning, and when he responded, I said, "Oh, sounds to me like agriculture is stunningly important in your riding."

We need to make people aware; I'm glad we're doing that in legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): No further time for questions. I'll move to further debate.

I recognize the member from Niagara Centre.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you, Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 155, Protect Ontario's Northern and Rural Communities Act. It's an ambitious title for a bill that's not very ambitious.

We've heard from ROMA, we just came back from AMO in the summer and we've heard from many northern and rural municipalities with a long list of things that they're asking the government to do, so while I understand the government is fitting the names of their bills in with

their "Protect Ontario" theme, there's nothing really in this bill that protects Ontario.

Although my riding of Niagara Centre includes larger communities like St. Catharines, Welland, Thorold and Port Colborne, geographically it's also home to significant rural communities, agricultural lands, farms and rural businesses.

This bill only makes modest changes to existing legislation and will do little to provide the sort of protection and respect that people in rural Ontario have long demanded, and they have told us that in delegations at AMO, ROMA and the other associations we've met with. It won't stop the government from treating rural and northern Ontario as empty space to be paved over, dug up or filled with garbage, all of which is being accelerated with Bill 140.

I'm going to speak a lot about what this bill does not do: This bill does not stop the closures of rural ERs or make it easier for people in rural and northern Ontario to access primary care or other essential services without being forced to travel long distances.

It won't reverse the unfair downloads of provincial responsibilities like housing and homelessness services to cash-strapped rural and northern municipalities, as the Ontario NDP has repeatedly called for. It won't provide adequate, predictable and consistent funding to rural and northern municipalities struggling to maintain local infrastructure.

It won't stop the delays to the long-promised expansion of Highways 11 and 17 or ensure that northern highways are cleared of snow to an adequate standard, as our northern members in our caucus have done such a great job highlighting in this Legislature.

It won't give rural and northern Ontarians quicker access to broadband Internet, which this government promised but failed to deliver last year.

It does not require the government to apply a northern or rural lens to its decisions, instead of applying one-size-fits-all solutions that assume that what works for southern or urban Ontario will work everywhere.

Northern and rural Ontarians have asked for real help, but the best the government could do was deliver a housekeeping bill. We know that rural homelessness is up nearly 150% and northerners pay the highest hydro bills in the province, but there are no solutions to that in this bill.

This government will fine you $1,000 for a loud muffler. We're not against the improvement, which will have to do with enforcement, not simply moving the amount of the fine around.

The Conservatives have voted down NDP bills to fix northern highways three times. Northern families deserve highways cleared as fast as the 401. Real respect for northern Ontario demands more than a week on a calendar. Fair funding for rural towns, a family doctor close to home and homes people can afford are all part of the new deal for rural Ontario that we on this side of the House have been fighting for.

Big decisions about the north should be made in the open, not in backrooms. This bill lets cabinet decide later, by regulation, which protected species can be hunted or trapped and who gets into closed roads on crown land. Northern development only works when First Nations are at the table. Fast-tracking roads toward the Ring of Fire without free, prior and informed consent means more conflict, more court fights and more delays. New Democrats have consistently backed Ring of Fire development done right. That means a formal consultation table with Matawa First Nations, a commitment to share 100% of mining tax revenue with First Nations and support for the 2024 moratorium on online mining claims staking that the Chiefs of Ontario and Anishinabek Nation called for.

As I'll discuss later, the Ontario NDP has been calling for a new deal with northern municipalities and rural Ontario that will help lower costs and wait times and build homes people can afford, all things this government could have addressed in this bill. We know, Speaker, with respect—I deal with municipalities, and funding is a huge issue that we hear about at conferences and conventions. In 2024, municipalities funded provincial responsibilities by almost $5.4 billion, an amount that's 1.5 times greater than in 2019, when funding was at $3.5 billion—a huge increase.

And municipalities continue to subsidize provincial responsibilities. Municipalities subsidize the province for health and social services that are provincial responsibilities in the rest of Canada. Investments in infrastructure and housing lead to downward pressure on health and social services spending, because there's a direct correlation between access to affordable and secure housing and utilization of health and social services. As needs grow, driven by a host of factors including cost-of-living challenges and access to affordable housing, so too do municipal subsidies. That places pressure on all communities, including northern and rural communities.

Municipalities are doing their part to support the government's housing and infrastructure goals. In 2023, the sector invested $11 billion in infrastructure. Municipalities have continued to fund a greater share of municipal infrastructure costs, driven by unchanged federal and provincial funding levels and rising construction costs. The federal and provincial governments' combined contribution of 28% of municipal infrastructure costs has stayed the same in the past six years, in spite of construction costs increasing by 86% over the same period.

Municipalities have told us the short- and long-term economic benefits of infrastructure spending are well documented, but we don't see the government investing in that at the present time. Every dollar in infrastructure spending creates an additional $6 in economic activity. More than $1.7 trillion in economic activity could be created were the province to cost-share the municipal sectors' required infrastructure spending over the next decade. We've heard loud and clear from small urban and northern municipalities that they need help when it comes to leveraging money for infrastructure.

Local hospitals are required to fund 10% of eligible hospital capital costs through community contributions, plus 100% of other health equipment and furniture costs,

known as local share. This is a tremendous burden for northern and small communities. In many communities, municipal contributions from the property tax base are required for hospitals to meet their local share requirements. Ontario municipalities have spent $255 million on hospital capital since 2019 and have more than $500 million already committed in future contributions. As hospital costs escalate, the demands on municipalities to fund increasing local share contributions from within municipal budgets will only grow.

0920

In addition, municipalities have increasingly stepped in to invest in health care areas where they have no defined responsibility, and this is a tremendous pressure on rural and small communities in the north. These include contributions to recruiting health care workers, mental health and addiction supports, health supports within shelters and housing services, and other contributions to support the health of our communities.

In 2024, an estimated 2.5 million Ontarians were without a family doctor, and that's especially prominent in the north. As a result of these challenges in accessing health services, many municipalities have stepped in by recruiting health care workers themselves or providing in-kind contributions, most often by providing space for clinics. A survey by the Ontario Physician Recruitment Alliance found that municipalities are now funding one third of physician recruiters across the province. In 2025, municipalities reported contributing at least $6.3 million toward the recruitment of health human services. These are tremendous pressures for northern communities.

Every year, we hear the same thing from municipal leaders at AMO and ROMA: They've told us they need the province to be a partner, not an obstacle. Across rural Ontario, municipalities are left holding the bag for provincial failures, with no funding or support. We need a new deal for municipalities, including those in rural and northern Ontario, to strengthen communities, protect public services, improve health care and make life more affordable. This session was an opportunity for the government to respond to what they have heard from ROMA and delegations at AMO and implement real changes with legislation, not tinker around the edges.

We need to upload the cost of housing, emergency shelters and homelessness prevention programs back to the province while maintaining locally focused delivery through municipal service managers. The NDP's Homes Ontario plan, if passed, would have boosted public, non-profit and co-op housing development. In addition, we called for the province to work with municipalities to create incentives for affordable housing in the marketplace, including development charge easements.

With respect to health care, we've called for the province to restore cost-sharing for ambulance services back to 90-10 and local public health units to 75-25. In my riding, communities such as Port Colborne, and Fort Erie in my neighbouring riding, have experienced significant reductions in access to urgent care services. Both communities have lost their after-hours urgent care coverage, with services now limited to 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily. This is playing itself out in northern communities across Ontario and rural communities.

On top of these reduced hours, we continue to face closures and service disruptions due to physician staffing shortages. We just received one in Niagara last week, Speaker, closing the urgent care in Port Colborne for much of the weekend. On top of that, Niagara Health has indicated that it plans to close both urgent care centres in these rural communities, and rural communities across Ontario have faced closures.

I should mention paramedics and the 50-50 provincial-municipal funding model. Last week, the member from St. Catharines and I asked a question about paramedics and what's happening across Ontario. We've seen paramedics on strike in Peterborough. Those are municipal employees funded 50% by the province and 50% by the municipality. Last week, I raised a question on the issue of paramedics in Niagara and across Ontario dealing with the staffing crisis. Niagara has hired 230 paramedics, but only seen a net increase of 80 because they're leaving faster than they can be replaced.

What I'm really concerned about, Speaker, is paramedics across Ontario in small communities, as well, who respond to the worst moments in our lives, many suffering from PTSD. They deserve proper mental health benefits and supports, job security and fair pay. To address the staffing and retention crisis, the province should implement minimum standards for paramedics across Ontario. That's something that could be addressed in a bill that speaks to small and northern communities. Benefits are treated, often, as an afterthought. A full-time paramedic gets $3,000 in mental health benefits; police get $20,000; and I pointed out that a barista working part-time at Starbucks gets $5,000. In Niagara and in many communities across Ontario, part-time paramedics who work full-time hours get no mental health supports at all.

With respect to education, our plan for rural Ontario called for a review of funding for rural Ontario education and to ensure that all students have access to necessary supports, including mental health services and education resources.

With respect to transit, this was an opportunity to restore 50% provincial funding for municipal transit to improve reliability, affordability and accessibility. We've heard from our municipal partners at AMO—especially in places like Collingwood, for example—how public transit would assist businesses with tourism, because employees have a really hard time getting to work and finding affordable places to live near the places that they work.

Our new deal would establish predictable and permanent infrastructure funding for rural and northern communities. That's something we hear at every single AMO, at every single ROMA, from every single delegation. We've called for formula-based provincial funding to support municipal infrastructure—including roads, bridges, sewers, water treatment—with added support for rural and northern communities managing large areas with a shrinking tax base. Importantly, we would be allocating

funding based on need, not politics. We heard over and over from delegation after delegation that these municipalities feel bullied by the provincial government and feel that there would be retribution if they don't do what they're asked by the government, despite what they're being asked for by their constituents.

We want and need a buy-Ontario, build-Ontario policy. We've pushed this government to prioritize Ontario-made goods and materials in infrastructure projects, create good local jobs and support communities impacted by US tariffs. In committee, I asked the government what specific measures it would take to support municipalities in implementing its buy-Ontario, build-Ontario directive—which applies to northern and rural communities as well—beyond simply warning municipalities that their funding would be cut if they didn't adopt the government's version of buy Ontario. No support was offered to municipalities.

We've called for a social and economic prosperity review to modernize Ontario's fiscal framework, to ensure municipalities have the tools, resources and respect they need to serve their communities. And we've been calling for the province to upload highways and reverse the downloading of highway costs by previous Conservative governments that left municipalities with unfair costs. An Ontario NDP government will upload the full cost of maintaining connecting links and provincial highways, ease pressure on local budgets and restore fairness, as rural communities have asked for.

We fought for a northern command centre to fix the health crisis, which would involve hiring 350 doctors, including 200 family doctors, in northern Ontario, and double residency positions at university; our critic from Nickel Belt has been great in pushing for that.

We have a record we're very proud of on highway safety. Since 2019, our member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay has tabled four bills to make Highways 11 and 17 safer; this government has voted down three of them. Bill 125, the Making Northern Ontario Highways Safer Act, would have required winter maintenance on Highways 11 and 17 to meet the same standard as the 400 series and the QEW; that means bare pavement within eight hours of snowfall. This government voted it down, and three northern PC ministers skipped the vote. Bill 59 was the same bill again; it passed second reading, but the government let it die on the order paper. Bill 43 in 2022 was the bill a third time and again, the government voted it down on December 8, 2022.

0930

Bill 49, the Northern Highway 11 and 17 Safety Act, from the members from Mushkegowuk–James Bay, Timiskaming–Cochrane and Thunder Bay–Superior North, would have staffed weight scales and inspection sites at least 12 hours a day and properly resourced OPP traffic enforcement. It would also have required truck drivers to be tested by ministry-certified examiners and put winter maintenance back under direct provincial management. This government voted it down on November 3, 2025.

And finally, the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane's Bill 27, Protecting Agricultural Land Act, would have protected prime farmland from sprawl. Again, this government voted it down.

Speaker, this is an established pattern of fantastic members in our caucus putting forward really good legislation that would have made a difference in northern and rural communities, but this government is continually voting those things down.

Here we have an opportunity in this session for the government to come forward with a bill that actually accomplished something for communities in the north and in rural Ontario. Instead, we have a bill that basically tinkers around the edges. There's nothing offensive in it. There's nothing that we would necessarily vote against, but there's also nothing that really meets the moment and does anything that northern communities have asked us for time and time again, whether it's at AMO or at ROMA conferences. We'll hear it again coming up in January at the next ROMA conference. We will do delegations as we always do. We will hear the same things from municipalities that they've been asking for a decade now and this government has not moved on.

I would encourage the government to go back to the drawing table and do some things that will actually help northern and rural communities.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: I listened to the member's speech with interest. It's interesting; yesterday, I listened to the member from Thunder Bay–Superior North and the member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay, who actually had quite a few good things to say about the bill. Now, they would add that it didn't do enough, but I think they would take issue with some of the comments from the member from Niagara Centre saying that there's nothing good in the bill at all, because they were actually quite complimentary to the efforts that we're making; they just want more.

The member did say there's nothing inoffensive in the bill, and so I suppose my question to him would be: Will he and his caucus be voting in favour of the bill?

Mr. Jeff Burch: I guess we'll see. I gave you a bit of a hint when I said there's nothing to vote against in it. But look, as I said through my speech—my speech was about all the things that weren't in the bill. That's a legitimate thing to raise because we've been asked by rural and northern municipalities to get things done for them for many years now. Here we have an opportunity to accomplish some things in rural Ontario, and we have a bill that really just tinkers around the edges.

I guess the most notable thing in the bill is that it raises a fine for loud mufflers. It's not very ambitious for a bill when rural and northern communities are asking us to get things done for them.

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

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Speaker, in Parkdale–High Park, we are very proud to be a place of welcome, a place of empathy. We have one neighbour who lives in our local bus shelter, the little roof hanging over near the bus stop. Residents stop by and they share food and they share

conversation, but winter is coming and the shelters are a place of trauma for this resident, so they will not go.

We deeply need the affordable housing, and we needed a bill that spoke to that need for affordable housing—and that's across Ontario, rural and urban, with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario saying we're going to get to 300,000 homeless by 2035. We really need something like Homes Ontario, the NDP plan.

I wondered if my colleague could speak to how a program like that might help people both in Parkdale–High Park, my riding, and in rural municipalities across Ontario.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to my friend for the question. Yes, certainly, what I like about our plan that we've come up with is that we talk about how whether you're in urban or rural settings, affordable housing is so important. Homelessness is not a problem that is just in the large cities anymore; we constantly hear from small communities across Ontario that they're struggling to deal with it as well. It may look different in one community to the other, but it's no less serious a problem in northern Ontario than it is in Parkdale–High Park.

The main way that we're going to combat that is through giving people places to live, and that's not going to happen when we have a government that refuses to address the affordable housing challenges and homelessness challenges that we're seeing across Ontario.

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

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Moments ago, I was very disappointed to hear the member opposite say that the only substantial thing in this particular Bill 155 is the reducing of noise. So in other words, he's on record as saying celebrating Rural Ontario Week is insignificant. He's saying that setting up programs to support rural Ontario is insignificant.

My question to him is: How on earth can you stand in this House and say rural Ontario does not matter?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Of course, I didn't say any of those things. I think I actually spoke for 20 minutes about all the great things we could do for rural Ontario that weren't in this bill. Increasing fines for loud mufflers, compared to all of the things we should be doing in a bill for rural and northern Ontario—the difference is pretty stark.

The government has come forward with a bill that is not ambitious at a time we should be ambitious, especially when we're addressing things like infrastructure deficits that rural municipalities have been asking for years for the government to deal with. We're arguing that we should be much more significantly addressing problems in the north, not that the north is less significant.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member from London North Centre.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Niagara Centre for highlighting so many proactive and cost-effective solutions that have been brought forward by the Ontario NDP.

In particular, I wanted to centre on the member's comments about the new deal for municipalities, something the Ontario NDP has been advocating for, as well as the Association of Municipalities for Ontario.

My question, though, is: What are municipalities forced to do when the government skips out on their responsibilities and the bill for provincial responsibilities remains unpaid?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to my friend for the question. That's the number one challenge facing municipalities today: the growing deficit, the infrastructure deficit, the downloading from the province. And it's getting worse, not better. Municipalities pay for over $5 billion in provincial responsibilities. As I mentioned, things like health care—the amount that municipalities pay for health care is constantly increasing and they don't have the revenue tools to deal with it.

A new deal involves both making sure that municipalities have the revenue tools to address their own budgets, but it also means the province taking back responsibility for things that the province should be responsible for.

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm worried about the provision about people not being permitted on public land. The Supreme Court has decided that an encampment in my riding can't be dismantled because people haven't been given a legal location to exist if they are evicted, so they're essentially illegal by being homeless, and now we're making it illegal to be anywhere on public land.

How do you think that's going to roll out across Ontario as we make it illegal for people to be homeless anywhere in Ontario?

Mr. Jeff Burch: That's a good question. I haven't thought much about it.

I think that the legislation really addresses people who are setting up camping areas and things like that on crown land in the north, but it wouldn't be the first time that legislation that was poorly thought out had unintended consequences for people in other communities in Ontario, so I think that's a really good point that the government should look at.

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: My riding is, as you know, Mississauga, not northern Ontario, but I always love northern and rural communities. I always say farmers feed the cities. It's like a heaven, but heaven comes with a challenge.

This legislation proposes to add guidance to the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund which would formalize the mandate as prioritizing economic initiatives that would promote economic development, innovation, job growth and strategic community enhancement. It's kind of saying, Speaker, that often parents want—especially mothers want—their children next to home, and if there aren't opportunities, they won't stay there. So having this guidance will help create more jobs; in other words, keeping the communities together, the families together.

My question to the member from Niagara Centre is simple: What would the member propose as guidance for

the NOHFC, the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund? What should be included in it?

Mr. Jeff Burch: I'm not really sure I can directly answer that question, to be honest, to the member, but I think that we need to always listen to municipalities. One of the things I tried to bring out in my speaking was that we've met with dozens of delegations at AMO every year. We've got ROMA coming up. We need to really listen to northern communities in terms what they see as solutions to their problems, and I see that as being the prime example of something where we need to sit down and do what northern municipalities are asking us to do.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): A very quick question if anyone wants one.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Really quickly, on the impact of municipalities: What is the worst impact for people because of this downloading of $5 billion of government bills?

Mr. Jeff Burch: I think that it's the inability of municipalities to deal with homelessness and mental health and addictions issues in communities across Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): We move to further debate.

Mr. Ted Hsu: I want to start out by saying that I pity the opposition members who had to analyze and prepare their second reading speeches in only 24 hours yesterday after the tabling of this bill. I believe that we are sent here to represent people, but also to be thoughtful about legislation, to hold this government to account—not only in a sort of fluffy way, but in detail. I just want to decry the manner in which omnibus bills are tabled, and then the opposition is given a very, very short time to prepare their second-reading speeches.

I'm going to go through this bill schedule by schedule, and I'll be focusing on areas that fall under my critic responsibilities for the Ontario Liberal caucus.

I'll start with schedule 1, which references the Crown Forest Sustainability Act. I think that this bill, which makes it easier for forestry businesses to renew licences—not just any licences, but licences that comply with approved forestry management plans—I think that's sensible.

So I'm not going to criticize what's in the bill, but I'll criticize what's not in the bill, because we should also be asking: What is the government doing to address the larger economic challenges facing forestry? That includes tariffs; it includes competitiveness of mills, especially pulp mills, whose profitability affects lumber mills. We should be thinking about how we can develop new products; how we can be more competitive and access new markets as a result. All of these things are not addressed by this bill.

Now, the Ontario government has a road map for the forestry industry, but I find it's just a very aspirational document. It doesn't do much more than aspire to the things that I just mentioned. I think that this bill misses a chance. I mean, the government had five months of recess of this Legislature, five months to put together some more concrete measures. I know that the government of Canada has what they call an action plan with the same general ideas, and I hope that this Ford PC government is not just waiting for the federal government to take the lead again.

Schedule 2 refers to the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, and in August there was a wildlife policy modernization proposal posted to the Environmental Registry of Ontario. It's a good thing we have that registry. It identifies certain types of activities that the ministry wants to streamline. For example, it proposes registration for certain low-risk, non-lethal activities involving reptiles and amphibians. Sometimes you just want to move them out of the way to do something. That's non-lethal, low risk.

It refers to beaver dams. Sometimes you have beaver dams that you need to move because the dams were built and you need to fix a piece of infrastructure. Those kinds of low-risk activities might just—now you would just have to register.

And then there are other measures. There's a proposal about scientific fish collection, which was interesting to me when I read it. But there are certain things—if you're going to collect some fish, look at them and release them later, maybe you don't need to go through so much of a bureaucratic process. So this is good.

But the key here is low-risk and non-lethal, and what that exactly means, because the final details are going to be specified in regulation. And after this bill has passed, the regulation will just be set by the minister and there won't be any more scrutiny by elected MPPs, at least formally, in the procedures of this Legislature, and at least as long as this government is in power. For that reason, I can only give my conditional support to that, because we've got to see how this government is actually going to implement these regulations.

When it comes to schedule 3, our transportation critic spoke already, so I won't address that.

Schedule 4 concerns the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Act. The ministerial speeches from the government yesterday gave us a little more information. I'll say that the speech with regard to the Minister of Rural Affairs focused on good things: rural economic development programs and the importance of flexible program delivery. But I would say to the government that they have not provided an explanation of why agricultural programs should no longer require a formal establishment by ministerial order. Maybe there's a good reason for that, but it wasn't explained in the minister's speech.

The essence of schedule 4, I would say, was not explained. The rationale was not explained in the minister's speech. Maybe the minister will take that opportunity later, maybe at third reading or maybe at the committee stage, to explain what is wrong with the government's current system—what is wrong for farmers, for example. The government should explain, "Here is the case where there were some delays, and this is why we need to change how these programs are established."

If there are unnecessary steps, we should, of course, remove them, because sometimes you set up something and then, through years of practice, you realize that some of the steps could be streamlined. But we don't want to

make it harder for the public to hold this government to account. We don't want to make it harder to find out how public agricultural programs are established and funded and what the rules are.

What's missing in this bill with regard to schedule 4, I would say, is that residents in rural Ontario often face significant hurdles when it comes to infrastructure. There are long distances, but there are hurdles when it comes to health and social services because of the long distances to hospitals, because of the long distances to hospitals, because of the lack of reliable public transit and the persistent shortage of, say, doctors and nurses and other professionals in rural areas.

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These important things aren't really touched on by this bill. So I think my main criticism of this bill is it does this little thing, and it doesn't touch on, really, the big problems. It doesn't mean we shouldn't try to fix these little things, but the government had five months to work on this bill. They kept the Legislature away, ostensibly because they wanted to work in peace and quiet. But then they came up with something that was not very ambitious.

Schedule 5 will be addressed by the Ontario Liberal caucus's northern affairs critic.

Schedule 6 concerns the Ontario Northland Transportation Corporation Act. Here, Speaker, I want to talk about something that's related to the Northlander, but it's something that hasn't received attention. It came to my attention because of a constituent, and in particular, the father of this constituent, who is a retiree from the previous Northlander service.

I want to speak about a small group of retirees who have spent years trying to get answers about their pensions, which came from the years that they were working on the previous Northlander. I want to make sure that they get heard. These are legacy pensioners of the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission, which is now going to be turned into this new corporation. Their pension plan was merged into the Public Service Pension Plan, and I'll be referring to that as the PSPP. That merger occurred in 2018, and since the merger, they have been told that there's no pension increase anymore, because the PSPP is underfunded. And so, because they are now merged into the PSPP, they've been told, "Well, you used to be outside the PSPP, but sorry, you're not going to get any inflation adjustments to your pension or any kind of ad hoc increase."

On the surface, it sounds reasonable because the PSPP is in deficit, so you've got to be cautious. But when you look at just the pension plan—the pensions of the legacy pensioners of the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission—their pension plan is not indexed to inflation, but they have had, in the past, increases in their pension which roughly matched inflation. We need to look at it more closely. So the issue here is not whether these pensioners are entitled to any guaranteed inflation increases; they're not even claiming that. The central issue is what happened to the assets they transferred into the PSPP; and if those assets have been treated fairly when it comes to their pensions; and whether the investment income generated by their assets, which were transferred into the PSPP, has been properly evaluated for their own benefit—because they spent years contributing to those pension funds. In the past, they have been granted pension increases when investment returns, surpluses and a careful actuarial calculation have justified increases. They used to get increases in the past.

So I want to look at some numbers, Speaker. Northland pensioners have effectively gone without any of those ad hoc pension increases since 2008. The Public Service Pension Plan is not fully funded, and it's not expected to be fully funded for several more years.

The next fact is that the PSPP funding deficit is not the fault of the legacy pensioners of the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission. The PSPP has been underfunded long before the merger. The argument that the retirees are making is when their funds were transferred into the PSPP, they were fully funded. Now, they've had to share in that funding deficit even though they have no responsibility.

Next—a bit of numbers here—is the question of investment return. The pensioners have done some estimates from pension data, and they say that their assets—the transferred legacy pensioner assets—would earn roughly 5.5% annually since the merger, if we pretended that their assets were segregated and not considered to contribute to closing the PSPP funding gap.

The PSPP investment returns were roughly 7% in 2020 and 9.4% in 2021. If you use those figures, the estimate from these pensioners—and they agree that it has to all be verified—but by the end of 2021, there may have been approximately $28 million in excess investment earnings attributable to the transferred Northland assets, which, of course, are now mixed in with the rest of the PSPP. And they have calculated that $28 million of surplus is in the range of funding a 7% to 8% increase. That's only a fraction of the inflation that's occurred since 2018. This is not an unreasonable increase. And remember, they have had no increase in their pension since 2008, so the purchasing power of their pensions has decreased by a lot, I'm going to guess about 40%, since 2008.

Now I will say that these figures—and the pensioners will concede; they agree with this—require independent actuarial verification. They are not contesting that. What they are contesting is that—they want to know if they are being treated fairly. Many of these retirees are in their seventies and eighties now, and they have been spending years writing letters, trying to contact government officials, filing complaints, doing FOI requests and they have been asking for meetings. And what I want to take the opportunity in the debate for this bill just to say is, let's show them some respect. They're asking for a clear explanation of what happened to their assets that they spent decades building up through their contributions.

One pensioner put it bluntly in an email to me. He said, "If the current path continues, many members of this group may never live to see the day the" PSPP "plan

becomes sufficiently funded for an ad hoc increase to be considered."

Remember, they don't get any automatic increases. They only get an increase when there's a surplus in the fund that they're in. So I'm calling on the government to at least have an honest conversation with these pensioners, with the evidence on the table, independent actuarial analysis and, if the evidence supports it—and only if the evidence supports it; the pensioners are willing to grant that—find a fair way, a fair mechanism to provide relief to this aging group of retirees.

Next, I want to consider schedule 7, which concerns the Public Lands Act. It's reasonable to give the ministry some tools to deal with illegal occupation and people blocking access to crown land. But when I look at this bill, the powers in this schedule include things like going onto private property, going into buildings and then you could look at electronic records and you could seize things. So we want to make sure that the powers in schedule 7 are no broader than necessary, because when it comes to the government having the ability to intrude onto private property and to go into your private places, we have to be really careful that we're properly balancing the need to do that, to enforce the law, with privacy.

The other thing that concerns me about schedule 7 as it stands now, and hopefully it will go to committee and people will look at amendments, is that property owners can't do anything even if this PC government causes damage through negligence. I'm not even going to accuse them of improper motives, but even if there's negligence by the government, there's no recourse. I can't help wondering whether the government is laying some kind of groundwork for prosecuting any public opposition to Premier Ford and Alberta Premier Danielle Smith's northern oil pipeline.

Finally, schedule 8: Schedule 8 refers to the Respecting Rural Ontario Act. I fully support the recognition of rural Ontario and its distinct needs, and I think it's important to do that. It's important, especially for urban Ontario, to understand the needs of rural Ontario.

But I think the bill missed the opportunity to put in some stronger accountability requirements for this advisory panel and for programs, and so I'm wondering if there can be some annual reporting on the Rural Ontario Development Program: you know, look at employment outcomes, where the money goes regionally, what projects have been completed.

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When I looked at the minister's speech, I appreciated what the minister said: that it's important, for example, to look at rural development in rural areas that happen to fall within the municipal boundaries of large urban municipalities, and not just municipalities that are exclusively rural. And so, it's a precedent. I'm really happy with the minister's speech and that she understands the importance of rural economic development in areas right beside cities, when it comes to something which I think will be very important for decades—and dare I say, centuries—to come, which is to preserve our prime agricultural land. Given the development pressures, it's really important to prevent urban sprawl, to protect prime agricultural land, to make sure that farming and other economic activity in rural Ontario can withstand that pressure, and the pressure is greatest closest to the urban areas. So I'm really happy that the minister has touched on that.

And I certainly agree with what the Rural Ontario Development Program is doing and with the funding increases. But I would just add one thing: This government, I think, is a little bit allergic to being held accountable, so I would just ask that there be some kind of required reporting to tell us how much funding reaches communities and what exactly are the economic benefits, because here in the opposition, one of our jobs is to help the government do a better job, and so we need that information to hold them accountable.

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member from Kingston and the Islands for not only having a great constituency, but for his remarks today. One of the best parts, I think, is the waterfront of Kingston and all the great opportunities that it brings. I know you've got the 401 in Kingston that travels through lots of noise, and really, part of this bill does include excessive vehicle noise.

The proposed amendments here to the Highway Traffic Act would triple the minimum fine for excessive vehicle noise offences from $60 to $200. I remember well the resident complaints that I received as a councillor on this issue; "Do something about it" is what the call to action for the municipal officials was. So I'm checking to see if the member opposite agrees with this component.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Yes, if somebody is newly entering politics at the provincial or federal level, one of the things I would tell them is that you're going to go to doors and people are going to complain about traffic, even though that's mostly a municipal responsibility. But this is what is on the minds of a lot of people.

In Kingston, we have a lot of issues with people in the middle of the night racing up and down the one-way streets; I'm talking about Johnson Street and Brock Street, for example. So I think it's fine to increase the fines and penalties.

The real question, though, is: What are we going to do to improve enforcement? Because that's the issue, is enforcement. People can speed and they can make a lot of noise, but if they don't get caught, it kind of doesn't matter if the penalty is large or small. The people who are violating the law, disturbing everybody else, don't really care. They're not really thinking about the size of the penalty; they're wondering about whether they're going to get caught.

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

MPP Fatima Shaban: Thank you to the member from Kingston and the Islands. I was listening intently while he was sharing his thoughts on this bill.

Speaker, while I welcome investments in transportation infrastructure in northern Ontario, residents in my riding of Scarborough Southwest continue to experience inadequate transit service, overcrowded buses and lengthy commutes. I've had constituents reach out to my office

about the lack of reliable service on several routes, but especially on the 20 Cliffside bus along Birchmount Road, with students arriving late to school.

Could the member speak to the importance of ensuring equitable transportation investments across Ontario, including historically underserved urban communities like Scarborough, where even getting to school on time has become a challenge?

Mr. Ted Hsu: I want to thank my honourable colleague for listening intently, because a lot of times we don't do that, even in this chamber, not to mention the rest of the province, so I greatly appreciate that.

I think transportation is just really important. First of all, I mentioned in my speech the availability of public transit in rural areas. It makes a big difference to the accessibility to important services. In rural Frontenac county, for example, we rely a lot on volunteer drivers.

But the member comes from an urban riding, and I want to say that it is very important to have the best public transport that we can in urban ridings. I would recommend that she look at what happened in Kingston—before the pandemic; things really got disrupted during the pandemic. But look at what happened in Kingston, where we had these express routes and we gave free passes to students. Ridership went up exponentially—like, mathematically exponentially—every year. Look at that as an example of how to improve things.

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: When you see the words "conservation" and "sustainability" in this bill and then it's left to the details, given the history of this government of not really doing things that are sustainable or respecting conservation, what will you say to compel them to actually make sure that the details match the true meaning of those words?

Mr. Ted Hsu: My honourable colleague from Kitchener Centre asks a very interesting question. What can I say to compel them? There's almost nothing I can say to compel them to do things.

I will first of all start off by saying it's a good thing that there's the Environmental Registry of Ontario, because if you just look at this bill and you're hurried, you say, "Oh, I don't know what the details are." And then you realize that, in August, there was an entry in the Environmental Registry of Ontario that really gives more details about this bill.

I think the important thing for this government is votes and whether they're going to get support for the next election. So I think the thing to do is—there's not much I can say, but what I can do is rally people to keep an eye on this government and to tell politicians that preserving the environment for generations to come is important.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further question?

Mr. John Jordan: One of the things that is exciting right now is the Northlander starting up. I used to work up in Timmins, so I hope to have a ride on it someday. Within this bill, we're modernizing Ontario Northland's legislative framework, and it hasn't been looked at in decades.

Do you feel that modernizing this framework to help the connection and the whole network of transportation in the north is an important thing to have in this bill?

Mr. Ted Hsu: I have a great colleague, Speaker, in the member of Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston. I just want to say that.

It's great what we're doing with Northlander. I'm looking forward to taking the train myself. I will note, however, that in this bill, the government is giving a lot of control to itself over the Northlander, except if there's a schedule change or cancellation or something like that. Then it's not their fault; that's the responsibility of the people who run the train.

So it's strange that the government is just trying to avoid any time people get upset with how the train is operated, and yet, they want to have control over everything else.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Later this afternoon, we're going to be debating our bill about establishing safe nurse-to-patient ratios. My question to you is: Why, if this government is so concerned about protecting rural Ontario, would they now have almost half a million rural Ontarians who lack a family doctor?

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We have emergency rooms and urgent cares closing, like Port Colborne and Fort Erie. In Hamilton, we're not rural, but we see the impact of it, having wait times of 24 hours. I can't imagine how difficult it is in some of these rural communities to access a family doctor or go to an emergency room when you desperately need help.

My question to you is: Why would the government put forward a bill talking about protecting rural Ontario, when it completely ignores the disaster that is our health care sector in Ontario?

Mr. Ted Hsu: My colleague has a fair point, that this bill tries to talk about rural Ontario without talking about one of the biggest problems in Ontario, which is access to health care. What I would say is that there's some funding that's needed.

I was a little bit concerned; the NDP's way of looking at, for example, nurse-to-patient ratios is that we should just have a certain nurse-to-patient ratio. To not think about—well, actually, you need the resources in order to provide those nurses to get to the ratios. That's a harder problem.

What I would call on the government to do is provide the resources so that there is proper access to health care in northern Ontario, and not just talk about what the goals are.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Question?

Hon. Steve Clark: I have a very easy question for the member. The member and I are both interested in the LaSalle Causeway. I'm glad the federal government has announced they're going to move forward with that project. I just want to know whether the member will agree to 24-hour, seven-day-a-week construction to get that infrastructure piece built faster?

Mr. Ted Hsu: Well, first of all, I want to appreciate the government House leader there. He has presented petitions in this House trying to get the federal government to do something, which is a very strange place to present petitions.

I asked the Ministry of Transportation the same question about the Wolfe Island ferry dock in Kingston, which is four years behind schedule now. I asked, "Is there any way that you can speed up the construction?" Maybe we could go 24/7 on that ferry dock, because it's causing a lot of disruption.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I think there are many parts of this bill that make a lot of sense. It does come from listening to folks in the north and folks who work in these spaces.

I will, however, say when you use the words "sustainability" and "conservation," we need to have a sit-down chat about what those words actually mean, so we can translate that into long-term sustainability and make sure that, yes, businesses can survive. We saw what happened in the cod sector when we overfished. We have to make sure that we maintain the natural resources in perpetuity so that those businesses can thrive in perpetuity.

I'm going to focus on the public lands piece. I want to know what consultations have happened with First Nations communities. Their right to protest the effects on nature, on the land, is essential. They have been advocates since time immemorial to make sure that whatever we do to nature is thoughtful and caring, to make sure that harm is minimal, so that we can regenerate and we live within our means.

I'm particularly concerned about this clause. I worry it will be used to evict people in encampments who are already homeless and have nowhere to go. In my region, we have an encampment that has been challenging the region in court because folks have nowhere to go. The judge said, "You can evict people from encampments if you give them somewhere legal to go." It is essential in this place that if we want folks to be illegal somewhere, we have to make it legal for them to exist somewhere else.

In my faith community, we believe that love leads and that everybody deserves a roof and food. But at minimum, we should make it legal for people to exist whether or not they have housing. In my region and the region for—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I'm sorry to interrupt the member, but it is now time for members' statements.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

REPORT, FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Before I get to member's statements, I beg to inform the House that the following document was tabled: a report entitled Long-Term Budget Outlook, from the office of the Financial Accountability Officer of Ontario.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PA DAY TOUR OF LEGISLATIVE BUILDING

Mr. Billy Pang: Last Friday, I had the pleasure of welcoming residents and families from Markham–Unionville to Queen's Park for a special PA day tour of Ontario's Legislative Building.

Our visitors not only enjoyed the beautiful holiday decorations, but also explored the historic building, learned more about the history and traditions of Ontario's Parliament, and gained a better understanding of how our provincial government and Legislature operate.

For young people especially, seeing our Legislature first-hand can make civic engagement more meaningful and help them better understand how decisions made here affect their families and their communities. I was so pleased to share with our visitors the important work that takes place here every day.

Speaker, these tours bring me closer to my constituents and likewise bring them closer to their government. They certainly sparked a greater interest in learning more about Ontario's parliamentary process. It is always a privilege to welcome residents of Markham–Unionville to the Legislature, and I look forward to creating more opportunities for the community to stay informed, engaged and connected with Queen's Park.

HOLIDAY MESSAGES

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch. The holiday season is here again. It is a special time. It's an opportunity to gather with family and friends, to share food together and enjoy each other's company.

For many of us, it is a heavy time of the year. We remember and continue to grieve our loved ones who are no longer with us. It is normal to feel sad and lonely at these times. But my message to you is: You are not alone. There are people that love you and your life is meaningful. If you are struggling, it is okay to ask for help.

I'm sending strength and goodness to all of you, and I wish to say merry Christmas and happy holidays to everyone in Kiiwetinoong.

Remarks in Anishininiimowin. This report will be republished to add the transcribed remarks once available.

LIBERAL LEADERSHIP

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: This past weekend, Navdeep Bains was elected as leader of the Ontario Liberal Party. I want to congratulate, once again, Nav and his team. As a candidate in that race, I also want to say what a privilege

it was to travel our beautiful province and speak to people about the issues that are important to them.

I want to thank all of the people who contributed, my campaign team who worked so hard with me and the people who supported me throughout, especially my husband, kids, parents, in-laws and colleagues.

What I heard as I travelled the province is that Ontarians are worried about their jobs, the high cost of living and their futures. Young people struggle to find work, housing prices are out of reach and too many are leaving Ontario. Businesses feel abandoned to deal with uncertainty on their own. People are nervous about AI and how schools will teach students to use it as a tool and not a crutch.

Speaker, there is a lot of work to do to build a stronger foundation for Ontario, to deal with the economic uncertainty we face. As the MPP in Don Valley West, I remain committed to doing my part, so that Ontario is ready for what's next, ready to build an economy with heart that works for the people we are all elected to serve.

ARGUS RESIDENCE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Mr. Brian Riddell: I rise today to recognize an incredible community organization and an incredible person in Cambridge. Argus Residence for Young People has just celebrated 40 years of supporting vulnerable youth and individuals experiencing homelessness.

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For over 40 years, Argus has provided young people with stability, shelter, guidance and the opportunity to build a brighter future. Their impact on our community cannot be overstated.

I would also like to recognize someone who has been at the heart of this work for 34 years, Eva Vlasov. Eva's dedication to Argus and the people it serves is truly remarkable. For over three decades, she has helped guide organizational support for vulnerable individuals, making a lasting difference in countless lives. Eva is a shining example of what it means to be a really great person for your community.

Recently, Argus received funding through the Ontario Trillium Foundation, including a Grow grant and a capital grant. These investments will help expand transitional housing and outreach services while creating an outdoor community space that encourages connection, healing and belonging.

These investments are very important, but it's the important people behind the organization who make this work possible. I would just like to thank Eva again for everything she does.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

MPP Catherine McKenney: Speaker, the Canadian Mental Health Association of Ottawa has spent decades supporting people in our city who live with mental illness and substance use disorders. Many of the people CMHA Ottawa serves are chronically homeless or precariously housed, and sometimes only one crisis away from losing their home.

The approach they use to house people in our city is highly successful. It is called Housing First. With Housing First, people are not expected to earn their housing by getting well first. They do not spend time in transitional housing, waiting to graduate into housing. Instead, they are provided with a permanent home and the supports they need, because with the right supports, anyone is prepared to be housed. On the contrary, no one is ever prepared to become homeless.

The evidence is proven. Canada's own At Home/Chez Soi study found that people given housing first saw far greater gains in housing stability than those who got the usual treatment. Unfortunately, our federal and provincial governments did not stick to this proven approach, and we continue to see an increase in the number of people who are unhoused. Finland, on the other hand, adopted the Housing First model, making it the centre of its national strategy, and reduced homelessness by 78%.

Speaker, Housing First is often used as a slogan, but it is a proven policy; a made-in-Canada approach to homelessness. I want to thank everyone at CMHA Ottawa for showing us what's possible.

ARMSTRONG FLUID TECHNOLOGY

Mr. David Smith: I rise today to recognize the work being done right here in Scarborough Centre to create opportunity, support local businesses and invest in our next generation.

Armstrong Fluid Technology has been a part of Scarborough Centre for 92 years. Founded by Samuel Allan Armstrong, this family-grown Ontario company has become a global leader in intelligent fluid flow and energy-efficient technologies.

Recently, I visited Armstrong Fluid Technology with Minister Lecce and caucus members. Armstrong employs more than 1,200 employees worldwide and operates 13 manufacturing facilities across four continents. What makes this especially meaningful to our community is that its Scarborough workforce brings together people representing more than 40 nationalities.

Armstrong is one of 14 Ontario companies contributing their expertise to a major nuclear project. This is what Ontario-made innovation looks like. I would like to recognize the CEO, Danilo Elez, and the entire Armstrong team for their continued investment in Scarborough Centre and contribution to Ontario's economy.

FOOD INSECURITY

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Yesterday, the Ottawa Food Bank's annual hunger report was released, and the picture it paints is grim. The number of food bank visits has increased again this year. Since 2019, it has more than doubled. This year, there have been 591,686 food bank visits, and 2.4 million meals and snacks were served.

As a result of this growing need, 30% of Ottawa food banks have had to limit the number of times people can visit, while one in four have closed early because they ran out of food or had to turn people away.

Employment is no protection. More than one in five food bank users is employed, but minimum wage in Ontario is more than $6 below a living wage for Ottawa.

Perhaps most disturbingly, Speaker, one in three food bank visitors is a child. That is a lot of hungry children in Ottawa.

However, the report also reminds us that we are not powerless to fix this hunger crisis. We can take action by increasing Ontario Works and ODSP, which are so far below the cost of living that recipients can't even afford rent, let alone food. We can strengthen income security and employment standards for workers, so that a job is a pathway out of poverty. And we can invest in building deeply affordable housing, so that people can afford to pay rent and buy groceries.

No one in a province as wealthy as Ontario should be going hungry. This report is a call to action, and I urge this government to listen.

CANADIAN VETERAN FREEDOM RIDERS

MPP Paul Vickers: I rise today and I want to recognize the Canadian Veteran Freedom Riders, including the Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound unit, and the incredible work that they have done supporting our veterans and our local communities.

The Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound unit, founded locally in 2012 by retired Canadian Forces Warrant Officer Rene Boudrias, was established by veterans with something that is just as important as a formal support program: camaraderie, friendship and a sense of belonging after military service. What began as a small riding club has grown into a group of 32 members across our region. The veteran freedom riders have units all across Canada and even as far as Germany.

Over the years, the BGOS unit has donated more than $50,000 to local organizations, supported veterans and military families facing hardships, contributed to food banks and homeless shelters, and organized countless community initiatives.

They have also played an important role in preserving the memory of Corporal Robert Thomas James Mitchell, including the establishment of the park in his honour in Owen Sound and the recent 20th anniversary memorial marking his sacrifice.

I would also like to recognize the contributions of Roger Weron and Don Young, whose dedication and countless volunteer hours have helped make the work of veteran freedom riders possible. Their work is a reminder that supporting our veterans does not end the day they come home—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Thank you.

GRAPE AND WINE INDUSTRY

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Essex county produces some of the best wine in Canada, and we proved it again because Essex county took two prizes at the 47th annual wine tasting held here in the Legislative Assembly.

In the red wine category, Colchester Ridge Estate Winery won with their 2021 Cabernet Sauvignon. You can visit the Gorski family at Colchester Ridge Estate Winery in Colchester South, Ontario, where they will be happy to show you their marvellous collection of wine and artwork.

In the sparkling wine category, the winner was the 2025 sparkling by Cooper's Hawk Vineyards, also located in Colchester South, on 70 acres overlooking the beautiful land of Colchester South, with a stunning wedding facility at the same time.

I want to say thank you to the Grape Growers of Ontario, Ontario Craft Wineries and Wine Growers Ontario for helping to host the 47th annual wine tasting.

Congratulations to Colchester Ridge Estate Winery and congratulations to Cooper's Hawk Vineyards on your fantastic production of fantastic wine here in the province of Ontario.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Members, we have with us in the Speaker's gallery today Aleksandra Pisarek. She is the legal counsel with the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel at the House of Commons.

Aleksandra is joining the assembly as part of an inaugural exchange program between the two legal offices designed to further strengthen collaboration between our parliamentary institutions.

Welcome to Queen's Park.

Applause.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Colleagues, I will be on my best behaviour today because my parents are here: Janine and David Allsopp. Thank you. I love you. Welcome to your House.

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The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): So that's the key: You have to bring your parents to work. Okay, everybody, bring your parents all next week, okay? And then we'll be well behaved.

Speaking of parents, your parents were here this week: I recognize the member for Parkdale–High Park.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I'd like to welcome the Canadian Mental Health Association, including the Toronto president, Michael Anhorn; the Women's Health Coalition of Ontario; and the family of Amira Broderick, our page captain from my riding of Parkdale–High Park. Today, we have her mom, her grandmother and her aunt. Leyla, Janet, Jennifer, welcome to your House.

Hon. Michelle Cooper: I want to welcome Camille Quenneville from the Canadian Mental Health Association and all of the people that encompass this space. They do such great work for Ontario for mental health and

addictions. I really want to welcome them to Queen's Park today.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I want to welcome to the House a former member of Parliament from the Conservative caucus in the previous Parliament federally, Tracy Gray, and also her son Daniel Gray, who has just recently moved to Ontario. Welcome to your House.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: I too want to welcome CEO Camille Quenneville and all the members of CMHA Ontario that are here today. It was great to start the morning talking about such an important subject.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It gives me great pleasure to welcome Pam Tobin, CEO of CMHA Thames Valley Addiction and Mental Health Services. Welcome to your House.

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: It's my pleasure to welcome former member of Parliament Tracy Gray and her son Daniel Gray. Welcome.

Mr. Billy Pang: It's Lupus Ontario advocacy day. With us here now and later during lunch in room 230 is their advocacy committee chair, June Alikhan, and their team of 20 people. Welcome, everyone from Lupus Ontario.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'd like to welcome Ontario Parents for Education Support, and particularly co-founder Julia Evangelisto.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I'd like to welcome the members of the Canadian Mental Health Association to the chamber today along with the members of the Women's Health Coalition, including one outstanding champion for women's health, Abidah Shamji.

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: We have a number of amazing egg farmers from across Ontario who are here today. I want to thank them for their amazing omelettes this morning at the breakfast and, of course, my great constituent, Chris Mullet Koop. Welcome to Queen's Park. Great to have you here.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I'd like to acknowledge the most powerful page captain ever, dynamite Daniel Lowas, here with his family: Kristine, Peter, Thomas, James Lowas and his grandparents Thomas and Kari Beese.

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to welcome grade 12 politics students from John Fraser Secondary School in Mississauga; they're filtering their way in here right now.

M^me^ France Gélinas: I would like to welcome Jamie-Lynne Hunt, an RPN and lead steward for CUPE Local 1502; Karen McKay-Eden, a registered nurse with ONA, vice-president of region 3; Alanna Coleman, a registered nurse extended class, director of nursing and health policy for RNAO; and Roslynn Blodgett, who is an RPN with OPSEU/SEFPO, RPN division chair. Welcome to Queen's Park, ladies.

MPP George Darouze: I'd like to welcome our members from the Ottawa professional firefighters to the House: Evan Carter, André Delorme, Genna McMillan and Tim Bernardi. Thank you for your advocacy for the men and women of our fire services. Welcome to your House.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to wish a warm welcome to the outgoing mayor of Windsor. Drew Dilkens is at Queen's Park today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

MPP Wayne Gates: I'd like to welcome Cadet Flight Sergeant Lucas Beagle, recipient of the Silver Duke of Edinburgh Award; his mother, Lisa Amato; Captain Harold Sully, commanding officer of 337 "Allan Troup" Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron; and Tanner Robertson and his mother, Susan Taylor. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): If the member would like to just expand—you've 16 seconds left on the clock if you wanted to expand a little bit about that award.

MPP Wayne Gates: I'll just hold it up. It's pretty special: "The Silver Standard of the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award, June 2026."

Congratulations. Maybe stand up so people can see you. There you go.

Applause.

REMARKABLE WOMEN AT QUEEN'S PARK

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Colleagues, in 2025, I launched the Remarkable Women in the Workplace initiative to recognize outstanding women who contribute to the work of the Office of the Assembly. Throughout this monthly initiative, we celebrate the dedication, professionalism and contributions of women across our organization whose work supports the operations of the Legislature.

Today, I am extremely pleased to draw your attention to the Speaker' s gallery to recognize our honouree for the month of November, Camille Pilon, senior broadcast operator in the broadcast and recording service branch.

Camille's exceptional leadership, technical expertise and dedication to excellence make her highly deserving of this recognition. She has directed many of the assembly' s most significant proceedings and special events, consistently delivering high-quality production with professionalism and precision. Respected for her deep institutional knowledge, collaborative spirit and commitment to mentoring colleagues, Camille's contributions have strengthened both her team and the assembly as a whole.

Joining Camille in the Speaker's gallery today is her family, including her mom, who's celebrating her birthday.

On behalf of all members and staff, I extend our heartfelt congratulations and gratitude to Camille. Thank you for your remarkable service to Ontario's Parliament.

Applause.

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): On a point of order, I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, it's my pleasure to announce that today is the birthday of the member from Sudbury. He is five times 11 today—five times 11.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I think "Happy Birthday" is in order.

Singing of Happy Birthday.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Congratulations.

QUESTION PERIOD

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

FINANCEMENT DES SOINS DE SANTÉ

Ms. Marit Stiles: To the Premier: Good patient care means good staffing levels; a bed is just a bed without a nurse to staff it. Across this province, however, health care workers are being pushed to the limits, and rather than hiring, the government is actually firing them.

On this side of the House, we are proud as always to stand with nurses and health care workers on the front line, so I would ask the Premier to stand with us and with front-line health care workers across this province and support our bill.

Will the Premier support our bill for safe nurse-to-patient ratios, or will he continue to fire health care workers?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you, Speaker. It is absolutely my pleasure to stand with the RNAO and the ONA representatives who are here today and thank them for their work that they do every single day in our hospitals, in our communities, in our long-term-care facilities and in our primary care clinics. It is why we have invested, under the leadership of the Minister of Colleges and Universities, in a Learn and Stay program where, currently, we have 30,000 young people who are training to become nurses in the province of Ontario.

This is a highly sought-after career. We are investing, and we are ensuring that those opportunities are available for people across Ontario to train and stay in the province of Ontario.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, if the government wanted to stand with nurses and other health care workers, they wouldn't be firing them, and they would in fact be listening to them. They are begging for these measures; they are begging for the government to bring in nurse-patient ratios.

We know that things are moving in the wrong direction and that this government has refused to accept responsibility. If you implemented safe nurse-patient ratios, you would get better care faster for patients, and you would get shorter ER waiting times. Median wait times have gone up 26% in just five years. Nurses are facing the moral distress of having to care for people in hallways, in broom closets and, we've heard lately, chairs in waiting rooms.

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The government could do something today, like other provinces in Canada under NDP leadership, and actually for once pass a motion that will change things for the people of Ontario and deliver better care. Will the government listen to front-line workers and nurses and bring in safe nurse-to-patient ratios?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: The action that our government has taken is—since 2020, we have seen 16,000 net new nurses hired in the province of Ontario; we now see a 17% increase in nurses hired and working within our hospital sector.

We know that nurses work collaboratively with physiotherapists, with occupational therapists, with speech and language therapists to make sure that the appropriate intervention is happening in a patient's treatment pathway. That is the multidisciplinary team, the multidisciplinary approach that we know works in the province of Ontario and has worked to ensure that not only individuals want to train as nurses, but are staying in the province of Ontario to continue that important work.

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

M^me^ Marit Stiles: Mettre en oeuvre des ratios patients-infirmières fournira des soins de meilleure qualité, améliorera les conditions de travail et diminuera les attentes dans nos hôpitaux.

Les travailleuses et travailleurs de première ligne sont épuisés. Ils sont forcés de soigner les patients dans les couloirs et les salles d'attente pendant que ce gouvernement refuse d'assumer ses responsabilités.

Alors, madame la Présidente, encore au premier ministre, ma question est : va-t-il finalement voter en faveur des ratios d'infirmières-patients sécuritaires?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, I have to ask the member opposite: If she is so determined to make sure that we have improvements in our health care system, why does she continue to vote against investments? Why does she continue to vote against investments that include 3,500 hospital beds that have already been added to our system in the province of Ontario? Why does she continue to vote against 3,000 net new beds that are being built in the province of Ontario?

New hospital builds, renovations, expansions that mean individuals, regardless of where they live in the province of Ontario, are getting that world-class care in a world-class facility provided by world-class clinicians: That is the focus that we are doing as a province, and we'll continue to do that work regardless of whether they vote against those investments or not.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: Back to the Premier of this province: The government is failing the people of Ontario at every single turn. Their OSAP mess is robbing the next generation of Ontarians of their future.

This week, we learned that a career college's OSAP usage skyrocketed by 3,000%. You don't have to be an expert to know that that should have been a red flag. Yet what did this government do? They didn't label this as high-risk; they didn't add it to the high-risk list of

institutions that were becoming ineligible for OSAP. They just let it fly on through.

Can the Premier tell us why the Canadian College of Business, Science and Technology, whose OSAP use grew by 3,000%, was not flagged by this minister?

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

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Speaker, that is exactly why we put a pause on OSAP across private institutions. After two years of individual investigations and inspections into those institutes, we realized that it was more widespread than initially thought and that it was used for fraudulent purposes. We had to bring back confidence into the system. We needed to ensure that OSAP was being utilized for its intended purpose: to be able to help upskill and up-train students for their future careers.

Until I have the confidence in the system that bad actors are not utilizing the system for criminal, fraudulent activities, I cannot release another taxpayer dollar towards students. But soon enough, we'll be able to release those dollars. That is why we brought forward legislation this session to add the appropriate guardrails, to add the confidence that we need to be able to re-release OSAP dollars in the new year.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the opposition leader.

Ms. Marit Stiles: So it was okay at 2,099%, but when it hit 3,000%, man, did the alarm bells go off. Wow. This is incompetence, and it is costing us and it is costing people in this province.

At one of their campuses, that company's OSAP use went up nearly 6,000%. Those are staggering numbers. And here is the kicker: Their founder has made donations to members of this government. Coincidence?

The minister loves to talk about all the reports and the inspections that his ministry is doing, and yet either he failed to catch this institution, or he simply didn't care to weed out the fraud.

Can the Premier tell us why his minister ignored clear signs of OSAP fraud?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: As I've said repeatedly in this House, we've done over 3,200 individual investigations into OSAP—3,200, Speaker. That is not ignoring the challenges that we face; we're hitting them dead on. That is why six of those institutions removed their eligibility this year.

But once we realized how widespread the problem was, we put a pause across OSAP at all private post-secondary institutions. We brought in the Ontario Provincial Police, as well as third-party auditors, KPMG—forensic auditors—so that we can bring back confidence before we re-release taxpayer dollars, because these are serious criminal allegations, Speaker, and we take them very seriously. We've done over 1,700 inspections into career colleges, with a further 700 investigations into those specific career colleges.

We will not rest until we have confidence back in the OSAP system. That is why I know that member is going to support the legislation that's before this House: because she understands the urgency to be able to re-release OSAP back to the students in the new year, Speaker.

Ms. Marit Stiles: You mean the legislation that indemnifies you? Oh, I don't think so, my friends. I don't think so. We won't be helping you with that.

Either this minister is so bad at his job that he couldn't see clear signs of fraud happening in his ministry, or he didn't want to.

So look, we know what happened next. The Premier forced students into mountains of debt. He blamed them for buying expensive cologne. Students have dropped out of programs all across this province. Meanwhile, this minister was hiding fraud in the system. He and the previous minister opened the floodgates for bad-actor private career colleges, for strip-mall diploma mills, and they are taking advantage of hard-working students.

They rolled out the gravy train and didn't spare a thought for the single mom who is just trying to get a stable job or the young person who's just trying to succeed.

I'd like the Premier to turn around and answer the question for the people of this province. You are failing the people of Ontario. Will you finally hold someone accountable and fire this minister?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I am going to caution the member on some of the language in the question that was just asked.

Back to the minister for a response.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I think it's very rich that that member, who was part of the Rae government, worries about affordability. During their time in government—a very short time in government—they increased tuition to some of the highest rates in Canada, three times the rate of inflation under five years of that government.

And then they propped up the Liberals for another 15 years that had, again, the rate of tuition go up three times the rate of inflation. It went up over 83% while she was propping up the Liberals, Speaker.

I will not apologize for bringing in the Ontario Provincial Police and bringing back confidence into the OSAP system, Speaker.

As I've said to this House repeatedly, we've done over 3,200 individual inspections into the OSAP system, as well as 1,700 inspections of our career colleges, with a further 700 investigations into the career colleges. We've been taking this very seriously. Once we realized how widespread it was, we brought forward the Ontario Provincial Police and suspended eligibility from those specific career colleges.

GAMING CONTROL

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Yesterday we may have gotten a hint that the Premier has woken up to the public health crisis on online gambling created by this government; a crisis that has exploded. The online ads are relentless. You cannot watch a game with your kids without being bombarded by ads, a crisis made worse when this government threw open the private market in 2022.

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And here are the facts: Wagers are up 500%, $83 billion last year. One third of young people are online gambling. Suicide rates have tripled. And the Premier wants a report. The facts are the report.

Seriously, Premier, where have you been? The government knew this crisis existed in 2022 from their own report, and they hid it.

Speaker, to the Premier: Will you have the courage to act today and stop these reckless, relentless online gambling ads?

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

Hon. Zee Hamid: Let's acknowledge that the member does raise an important point that concerns every family in this province, including my family. I have young boys, and it's a discussion at the kitchen table, not just as a member of the House, but as a parent.

To everyone struggling with gambling addiction: We hear you. That's exactly why our government has treated responsible gambling as the top priority from day one. When we opened the regulated market, Ontarians who played online went to unregulated offshore sites with no protection, no safeguards and no standards. Today, more than nine in 10 players are using regulated sites with guardrails and protection.

What we're doing is working. We've put some of the strictest advertising guidelines in North America. We've done a lot, but we're not finished. Just last year alone, we invested $85 million through our partners, online gaming providers, to provide addiction treatment and other programs regarding responsible gaming, using partners like CAMH and Responsible Gaming. Just this earlier this year, we launched BetGuard, which 8,000 players have used—

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

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Recently, I've travelled to 124 ridings in this province. At every stop, I would raise the issue of stopping advertising for online gambling. In every room, it would get thunderous applause. They were begging me to do something about it.

I heard so many stories: a son, a friend that had been financially devastated by online gambling, hundreds of thousands of dollars lost, loved ones who had died by suicide. I've even heard stories from people in this room of lives ruined, not being able to escape the ads, constantly being pulled in.

An easy first step is to ban advertising for online gambling. In May, the only members that didn't support my private member's bill to do just that were every Conservative caucus member in this Legislature—no courage to act.

Speaker, to the Premier: It is completely in your power to stop advertising for online gambling today. Will you?

Hon. Zee Hamid: As I was saying, we are not finished, because this work never stops. Just earlier this year, we launched BetGuard, which allows players to self-exclude themselves through all online gaming, including OLG.ca, using one simple step. And since May, only in a few short months, 8,000 players have used it to step away from online gaming.

Our focus has always been on things that keep people safe. Speaker, I'm not going to sugarcoat this: Gambling addiction destroys families, and I want you to know that our government hears you. That's why it's important to take a thoughtful approach, understand all trade-offs and make good decisions, because we've made real progress and we don't want to go back to the unregulated market with no protection, no safety and no safeguards.

Last week, I was in New Brunswick for a federal-provincial-territorial conference, and several provincial leaders came up to understand Ontario's approach, because they want to copy what we've achieved here in their province. Speaker, every family wants their loved ones to be safe, and we will continue working with our agencies, with health professionals—

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

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Speaker, I have to tell you: Earlier this month, there was a report leaked that showed that the government knew in 2022 about the harm online gambling was having, especially for young men. I was pretty angry because, knowing the harm, this Conservative government made the decision to throw the market open to companies outside of Canada anyway. The result was $83 billion wagered last year, and it didn't even stay in this country. They ignored the report. They buried it. The briefing said it was because there was an election coming.

Now look where we are. Look at the damage that has been done to people's lives, especially young men. Just like the OSAP scandal, they ignored the warning signs, they hid the report and they made it worse. The result has been devastating.

Speaker, to the Premier: When will you take the first step and stop advertising for online gambling?

Hon. Zee Hamid: It matters that we get this right and we protect what's working and we innovate and iterate. We know that good intentions aren't enough, Speaker; what counts is whether people are actually protected. In Ontario, they increasingly are.

But our work is not done. As the market evolves and patterns change, we're ready to change our approach. That's why we launched BetGuard, which allowed 8,000 players and more every day to self-exclude themselves and step away from online gaming.

And just look at what we've achieved so far: We set the strictest advertising standard in North America. We invested $85 million last year alone to provide help, education and addiction support through Responsible Gaming and CAMH. That's over $470 million since 2018, Speaker.

Every family deserves to know that help is there, and we will continue to make sure that it is. Our commitment is simple: Protect players, support families and keep building on what works.

GAMING CONTROL

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier. When it comes to online gambling, this Premier set the fire. In 2023, we introduced a motion that highlighted how Ontarians just can't escape the onslaught of online sports betting and gaming. The government voted it down. In May of this year, my colleague from Etobicoke–Lakeshore's private member's bill banning advertising of online gambling was voted down by every member of this government.

The risks are as plain as the nose on the Premier's face. Look where we are. Look where we are.

Speaker, through you: Will the Premier commit to passing a bill banning advertising of online gambling before the end of this year?

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

Hon. Zee Hamid: Speaker, let's acknowledge that gambling addiction doesn't just hurt people gambling. It hurts families. It hurts kids and parents, and I know that. I won't stand here and pretend that it's not real. It does hurt people. That's exactly why our government has put some of the strictest advertising guidelines in North America.

When we opened the regulated market, most Ontarians who played online were on unregulated offshore sites with no rules, no safeguards, no protection. Today, more than nine in 10 players are using legal, regulated sites with guardrails and safeguards.

We've done a lot, but we're not finished because the work doesn't stop. I already talked about BetGuard, which 8,000 players have used to self-exclude themselves. We've invested more than $470 million in addiction treatment and responsible gaming support and help. Last year alone, there was $85 million.

Speaker, our approach is simple: We want to protect players. We want to make sure everyone who needs help gets help, and we'll continue working with agencies to make sure that happens.

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

Mr. John Fraser: We all know the toll addictions take. We all know somebody who is affected by this—all of us. So it's hard for me to understand why the Premier's government suppressed, in 2022, their own study that told them this was going to happen. There was no suppressing any political donations to the PC Party from the iGaming people.

A gambling addiction is like a heroin addiction. It gets its hooks in and it takes everything—everything. It destroys people's lives—death, debt and despair.

We can't wait any longer. Speaker, will the Premier commit today to passing a bill before the end of this year to ban online gambling ads in this province?

Hon. Zee Hamid: As I keep saying, this isn't a one-and-done deal; we're always studying the evolving and changing market, and we're always responding to it. We understand the harms of online gambling, and that's why we've invested almost half a billion dollars since we came to power.

Speaker, we're not finished, because the work isn't done. I'm not going to sugarcoat this; I get it. And that's exactly why our focus is to keep people safe in this province. It's important to take a thoughtful approach and understand trade-offs, so we don't send people back to the unregulated offshore market with no protection, no safety, no safeguards.

Nine in 10 players in Ontario are now in a regulated market where they have guardrails, where they have protections—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore will come to order.

Hon. Zee Hamid: —help is available when they need it.

1100

Speaker, we know that every family wants their loved ones to be safe, and so do we. That's why we keep working with our partners to make sure help is available for every family that needs it.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Don Valley North will come to order.

Back to the leader of the third party.

Mr. John Fraser: Open your eyes. There are no guardrails. People's lives, families' lives are at stake. Over 130,000 Ontarians show signs of problem gambling. Gambling suicides have tripled—tripled, Premier—since 2022. So much death, debt and despair, and the Premier's solution? Let's build some more casinos. What's wrong with this picture, Speaker? How can this be? How is it that we're at this point where it doesn't matter?

This government thinks they can take more time. So, Speaker, next year is too late. Next week is too late. Will the Premier commit today to passing a bill banning advertising for online gambling in this province?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Associate Minister of Addictions.

Hon. Michelle Cooper: Ontario has some of the strictest guidelines for online gaming operators and advertising within this province, and that is why we are making sure everyone can get the support they need and their loved ones need related to problem gambling.

We are investing approximately $37.2 million in funding for programs and services focused on problem gambling and addiction and treatment supports, as well as problem gambling education and outreach. Programming such as ConnexOntario: They serve more than 90,000 Ontarians each year through their 24/7 information, navigation and referral services for mental health, addictions and problem gambling supports in 130 languages. Through ConnexOntario, 66 different service providers are receiving $15.4 million to deliver problem gambling treatments and services.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Every child in Ontario has the right to an education, and yet one in five children with special needs is not attending school full-time due to the

lack of support in our schools. But the Ministry of Education won't even give a timeline for when they will start properly tracking exclusions, and they won't commit to a single action to make sure kids can actually go to school.

Ontario Parents for Education Support is here today to call for change. Can the Premier please tell them what his plan is to ensure all children in Ontario can go to school?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the question from the member opposite, but the member will know that it started, really, back in 2018 when we assumed government. We noticed an historic underfunding of the special education system which was left behind by the previous government.

We increased that funding to almost 40%—40% in additional funding. We've hired thousands of additional educators. But at the same time, we have been talking about looking at the inclusion model. Is it working? Is it working on behalf of teachers? Is it working, more importantly, on behalf of students in our system? Are they getting the right resources? Are our educators getting the right resources? And are our boards able to deliver what we expect on special education?

So that is work that is being undertaken right now, Madam Speaker, and we'll make sure that not only do our educators have the resources that they need, but more importantly, that students have the opportunity to succeed.

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Well, the minister would know, Speaker, that inclusion without supports is actually exclusion, and that's what's happening under this government. While their kids are being excluded from school, parents and supervised boards are being excluded from decisions affecting their kids.

The Minister of Education banned livestreams of special education advisory committee meetings. His handpicked supervisors are deciding budgets behind closed doors, and student and family support offices have turned out to be just another layer of bureaucracy, passing parents on to the very system they are asking for help to navigate.

Will the Premier respect the right of parents to participate in decisions about our kids' education and restore democratically elected trustees?

Hon. Paul Calandra: No, Madam Speaker, we will not restore democratically elected trustees in the supervised boards. Part of the reason we won't do that is because we're seeing the results. In fact, in the TDSB, they announced recently that they had the highest increases in EQAO scores over the last 25 years. Supervisors across these boards have found over $150 million worth of savings that they're able to plow back into the classroom, and that is what we expect not only in the supervised boards but across the education system.

It is okay. It's like a gotcha moment: "Oh, I gotcha." The reality is, when the previous Liberal government brings in ideological policies that are not backed by resources, that are not backed by a clear understanding of what the deliverable is, this is what you get. You get a system that is fragmented across the province of Ontario.

What we're saying is, we want a system that works for students. We want a system that works for parents, and that educators have the resources that they need to deliver on the curriculum that we have put in front of them, so that every student has the opportunity for a successful future.

PUBLIC SAFETY

MPP Andrea Hazell: My question is to the Solicitor General.

Speaker, Scarborough is bleeding. In 2025, Scarborough recorded 8,826 major crimes. Robbery was 22% above Toronto's average; auto theft 25% higher.

On Sunday, three 16-year-old boys were shot in Scarborough. Two lost their lives: Ezekiel Tarrance Joseph-Jeffrey and Jakson Robin Clifford Persaud. One of their mothers is from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, my country, close to home. I will be attending two separate funerals for two boys who should have had their entire lives ahead of them.

This government talks tough on crime, yet parents are burying their children. Scarborough families do not feel safe.

Speaker, through you: Will the Solicitor General come to Scarborough, face these grieving families and tell this House what his plans are to end the gun violence that is claiming the lives of our children?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I appreciate the question from the member from Scarborough. Madam Speaker, I worked in Scarborough for 30 years. I know Scarborough. Scarborough has always been a priority for our government, led by the Premier.

When it comes to our record on public safety, we stand with our police services across Ontario. We talk up people that want to become police officers, and that's why we invested $34 million a year to send 2,000 people to the Ontario Police College—where we just badged, by the way, 88 new Toronto police officers this week. Madam Speaker, we're not accepting the status quo.

The member opposite can do something. She can call her friends in Ottawa and do what we're doing: fight for bail reform; fight to keep criminals behind bars, where they belong.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Member for Scarborough–Guildwood.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Very, very shameful—without a heart. Speaker, you heard the names in my first question.

Scarborough is home to over 630,000 people. More than three in four are visible minorities. Our community is constantly overlooked, underfunded and underserved by this government.

Our young people cannot find jobs. Youth unemployment in Toronto has reached 19.7%—even higher for Black youth. But while our young people wait for work, the guns are taking their lives. The guns keep coming, the shootings keep happening and the children keep dying.

Speaker, gun violence is the Solicitor General's file. That is what underinvestment looks like. It looks like funerals for 16-year-old boys. Where are our tax dollars going? Who is benefiting?

Speaker, through you, I ask the Solicitor General one last time: How many more of our children will be gunned down in Scarborough before this government wakes up?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Madam Speaker, our government is very sensitive when families confront an evil in their lives, like what happened earlier this morning when another home was broken into just around the corner and a life cut short.

That's why our government will do what it takes to call for bail reform—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Don Valley North will come to order.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: —to make sure we have more police officers on the ground, to fight dramatically to get the illegal guns off our street and to make sure that Ontarians know there's a government that has prioritized their public safety not by words, but by actions. My heart goes out to families that are victimized, and that's why we will not take our eyes off the ball.

One more thing, Madam Speaker: Who was responsible when the laws got weaker in Ottawa? It was the new leader of the Ontario Liberal Party. He's weak on crime, and Ontarians will find out why.

1110

Interjections.

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

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

MPP George Darouze: Ontario farmers, food processors and agri-food workers play a critical role in feeding families across our province, especially in Carleton. They support our local economies.

In today's uncertain world, we have seen how global instability, supply chain disruptions and trade disputes can threaten access to affordable food and create uncertainty for food producers. That's why it is more important than ever that Ontario strengthen its ability to produce, process and distribute food here at home.

To support a stronger and more resilient food system, the House recently voted to pass the Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act. Could the minister please tell the House how this legislation will help strengthen Ontario's food independence and support the long-term success of our agriculture sector?

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: I want to thank the outstanding member for Carleton for his advocacy, his fierce work on behalf of farmers and agri-food workers in your community, sir. I'm thankful for the work that he does.

Speaker, the member asks about the Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act, and I have to tell you, the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development led the charge on bringing forward this important legislation. I want to thank him and acknowledge his leadership for this file, because it really is building out a sovereign, secure and self-reliant agri-food sector here in the province of Ontario.

We know how important it is: $53 billion; one in nine jobs in this province in the agri-food sector; 850,000 people employed in this crucial sector. And as part of this legislation, we're enhancing our opportunities in northern Ontario, expanding the Clay Belt; enhancing opportunities in southern Ontario by protecting and securing our farmland, to ensure that Ontarians have access to that farmland first. And we're protecting this sovereign, secure and self-reliant food sector through more actions that I'll be pleased to articulate in the supplementary.

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

MPP George Darouze: Thank you to the minister for the great answer.

Ontario's agriculture and food sector is one of the strongest economic drivers in our province, supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs and feeding families across the province and around the world.

Farmers continue to face a variety of challenges, including rising costs, market volatility, labour pressures and ongoing global economic uncertainty. Despite these challenges, our government has remained committed to making meaningful investments that help producers remain competitive and position the sector for long-term growth.

I know our government had announced significant support for farmers and agri-food businesses this year. Could the minister update the House on the investments our government has made to protect Ontario agriculture and help ensure this sector remains strong for future generations?

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: I shared a little bit with this House on the importance of the Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act and that foundational security it provides for our food system here in Ontario. But I also want to speak about where our government, under the leadership of this Premier, has put money where its mouth is.

You look at the investments: $22 million to the Market Diversification and Trade Resiliency Initiative, $12 million to the Agricultural Stewardship Initiative, $1 million into Ontario agri-food research and $2 million into food safety and growth. That's $40 million in new supports just this year alone.

Speaker, these are meaningful investments. They are supporting our agri-food workers. They're supporting the hundreds of thousands of jobs in this sector in Carleton and across this great province. We're proud to continue to support those who invest in our communities, who grow the food that we love.

And of course, as we said last night at the Ontario Federation of Agriculture: Farms and food forever. I know we all support that, and we'll continue these investments.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Minister of the Environment.

GE Vernova plans to demolish 27 dangerously contaminated factory buildings in the heart of Peterborough. The demolition is literally right beside an elementary school.

Over a year ago, the minister promised to ensure that GE's plan meets provincial standards and will cause no further harm to people or the environment. Will the minister tell us what he is doing to fulfill his promise to the people of Peterborough?

Hon. Todd McCarthy: Well, I'm proud to report to this House that we have strong environmental oversight and dedicated government officials with a regional office located directly in Peterborough. I'm in regular contact with those dedicated individuals. I can assure you that my team is dedicated to strong environmental oversight and strong enforcement and, if necessary, prosecution when any environmental laws are broken. We are dedicated to the protection of our children in particular.

We continue to monitor this situation, and we'll report back to the House accordingly.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: That certainly didn't answer the question. I'll try another angle.

The minister assured Peterborough that transparency is a key priority for him, and that the ministry was open to collaborating with community members and leaders of Peterborough in the review of GE's plans. Last month, a large group of concerned citizens, including Peterborough council members, gathered at a Good Neighbours Deserve Answers event, complaining that there had been no transparency or public involvement.

What will the minister do to open the review of GE's plans to community members and leaders of Peterborough?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: We always work in partnership on matters such as this. We are concerned on a non-partisan basis, and I don't appreciate the member making this some kind of a partisan attack. I work closely with the local member.

We have in place timely services for assessing and responding to reports of any emergencies, pollution spills or any adverse drinking-water-quality events. Urgent matters can be reported by phone to the 1-866 number—that's 1-866-MOE-TIPS—24 hours a day, seven days a week. We've also introduced a user-friendly online reporting tool that allows the public to report potential pollution incidents and receive real-time status updates.

We stand with the local community of Peterborough, and we will be ready to address any situation as it arises, but I'm very proud of my dedicated team at the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: My question to the Minister of Colleges and Universities: When you ran for office, was it your intention to come down—

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: —to Queen's Park from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry to become embroiled in an OSAP scandal where you had to stand up every single day and defend yourself, knowing full well this government messed up the file seven years ago—

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: —and turned a blind eye?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: They can continue to trivialize this and make this about me, Speaker, but this is about the bad actors that have fraudulently taken advantage of Ontario taxpayers.

We're going to ensure that we bring confidence back to the system. That is why we've notified the Ontario Provincial Police; why we're working with KPMG forensic experts to be able to understand what has happened and to ensure that it doesn't happen again.

But I know that party will support the legislation that's before this Legislature to ensure that we add those appropriate guardrails, including identity verification and OSAP cap limits, as well as eliminating predominantly online programming. I know the Liberal Party will support that legislation, because they understand the urgency of re-releasing these funds back to the students that deserve them.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Beaches–East York. And please address your question through the Speaker.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: My question to the Minister of Colleges and Universities: Does the minister think it is fair that he was forced to solely shoulder the load for this out-of-control OSAP scandal, when so many of his other government colleagues had their hands in this mess and are getting off scot-free?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I wonder, Madam Speaker, if it was the intention of the member from Beaches–East York to come here to Queen's Park every day and defend the indefensible record of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. I have a lot of time for the member opposite, but I just can't imagine that her mission in life was to defend the tax-hiking agenda of the Trudeau Liberals—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Scarborough–Guildwood will come to order.

I apologize. The Minister of Energy may continue.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The member for Beaches–East York, in her wisdom, knew to support anyone but Navdeep Bains, because, like the people of Ontario, they don't want to go back to the future. They don't want higher taxes and

weaker laws. They want a government focused on affordability. That's what you're getting from Premier Doug Ford.

1120

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Small businesses power Ontario's economy, keep local communities, like my riding of Windsor–Tecumseh, strong and add to their local character. From family-owned farms putting food on the table for people across Ontario to a corner store supplying their community with day-to-day essentials, small businesses are truly the backbone of our province.

Despite ongoing uncertainty and global economic challenges, these local businesses continue to demonstrate resilience for jobs and give back to their neighbourhoods. At the same time, we know they need timely and practical support to navigate the real pressures caused by US tariffs and plan for long-term growth.

Speaker, can the Associate Minister of Small Business share how our government is helping small businesses weather economic uncertainty while protecting jobs and Ontario's economy?

Hon. Nina Tangri: I really want to thank the member from Windsor–Tecumseh for the question, but also his unwavering commitment to small businesses in his riding.

Amid ongoing trade and economic uncertainty, our government is making record investments to support Ontario small businesses. This fall, I was pleased to join the member in his riding to announce an investment of $49 million in the Ontario small business advisory network. This investment means more businesses than ever before can access funding, advice and support programs to help them start, grow and thrive. Last year alone, the OSBAC network started and expanded 16,000 businesses, creating over 16,600 jobs.

Through this record investment, we're making sure every entrepreneur can turn their ideas into successful businesses, create good-paying jobs and keep Ontario competitive.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thanks to the associate minister for that response. I know local businesses and entrepreneurs have successfully launched and grown their businesses with the support of my local OSBAC, the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Centre. For example, through the Summer Company program, young people in my riding of Windsor–Tecumseh have gained access to foundational training and access to capital to transform their bright ideas into strong ventures. Many of them have continued to grow their companies well after the summer is done and are building a strong future for Ontario.

Can the associate minister expand on how these supports and services are making a difference in the communities across the province and building a more competitive economy?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you again to the member for the question. Since taking office, we've helped well over 10,000 entrepreneurs, including young founders, start and grow their businesses with Ontario's Starter Company Plus and Summer Company programs, and we're not stopping there.

Our government is delivering more supports to entrepreneurs in every corner of our province. Our historic investment is backed by a record cut to the small business corporate income tax rate, all the way down to 2.2%, putting $5,000 back into the pockets of small businesses every year.

Unlike the parties opposite, who voted against our tax cuts and practical solutions that keep costs down, the government and this Premier will always stand up and protect Ontario's hard-working small businesses.

GAMING CONTROL

MPP Wayne Gates: My question to the Premier: In June 2023, my NDP colleagues and I raised red flags about ads on online gaming, which included tabling the Ban iGaming Advertising Act, 2023. In August 2023, the AGCO followed our call and moved to ban celebrities and athletes from being featured in iGaming ads. In May this year, former Minister Stan Cho said that it was time to make changes and "days matter." Yesterday, the Premier said that ads are "out of control," but he'll do a study and think about it.

Why won't the Premier release iGaming Ontario's publicly funded study on problem gambling and take action today to ban these ads?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Again, just a reminder: We do not refer to members by name, just by riding.

I recognize the Minister of Tourism.

Hon. Zee Hamid: Before our government, players were using dangerous, unregulated offshore sites with no protection and no rules. They had no safeguards and no help available, and Ontario has led the country in fixing that. In fact, other provinces are now studying our approach, because our approach has allowed us to invest nearly half a billion dollars for education, for outreach and for gambling addiction to make sure people get the help they need.

When you turn on the TV in Ontario, a betting company cannot offer you free bets to sign up; we're one of the very few places in the world with that has that rule. Kids cannot see their favourite hockey player telling them to download the app. These protections were not available before our government launched a regulated market, and it would be very dangerous for us to go back to the unregulated market, where players received no protection.

Speaker, we will continue working with our health partners, with agencies and with the Attorney General to make sure the people of Ontario have all the tools they need to game safely.

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

MPP Wayne Gates: Back to the Premier: For over three years, we've been raising the harms of online gam-

bling. The number of young people developing addictions is alarming. Public data shows that underage sports betting is up tenfold since 2019. That's our kids and grandkids. Gambling-related ER visits are nearly twice expected levels, gambling helpline calls have doubled and—this one here, we should all be concerned about—suicides have tripled from gambling. Four warnings, all public, yet the Premier is hiding iGaming Ontario's study on problem gambling. There's a funding shortfall for prevention and treatment services for gambling addiction and thousands of jobs are lost at brick-and-mortar casinos.

Why is the Premier taking a wait-and-see approach, when the evidence is clear that this government needs to take action today? Not one more person should die from suicide because of gaming.

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

Hon. Doug Ford: I acknowledge the member from Niagara Falls. I did go out there yesterday acknowledging that there is an issue, and we are going to deal with it. We are going to deal with it, and it's amazing how I hit a beehive and all of a sudden they all jump up and start speaking about it today.

But isn't this ironic coming from the MPP from Niagara Falls, who has been taking donations from the owners of the casinos since 2014? He stands up there and he pretends on gambling, but, "I'll take your cheque." Look at all those donations coming from the Niagara casinos.

You can't suck and blow at the same time, my friend. Either you're against the casinos, you're against gambling, or you're not. But you'll take their money. You'll take every single penny they have and get up here like a hero and say, "Oh, no more gambling." Keep taking those cheques off the casino owners—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

I recognize the member for Don Valley North.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: For 132 years, Tyndale University, located in my riding of Don Valley North, has been training young men and women of faith to serve their communities and those in need. Tyndale is a provincially legislated, not-for-profit university and seminary, yet the minister has subjected its students to the same OSAP funding freeze as the private career colleges in the middle of this government's OSAP investigation. Students at Tyndale are now struggling to pay their rent, buy groceries and provide for their families.

Has the minister discovered any evidence of OSAP fraud at Tyndale? And if not, on what basis is he withholding financial assistance from its students?

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

Hon. Nolan Quinn: Speaker, as that member knows, we put a pause across OSAP across the whole of private post-secondary institutions. Our investigations have uncovered serious, systematic concerns at these private post-secondary institutions, but the bad actors that have taken advantage of Ontario taxpayers will be held accountable.

That is why we've referred it to the Ontario Provincial Police. That is why we're bringing forward legislation this session to add the appropriate guardrails: so that we can re-release OSAP to the students who deserve it, with confidence. We will not do that until we have confidence that it's not going for fraudulent uses.

Ultimately, we're going to add more guardrails, whether that's identity verification procedures or more KPIs for graduation rates and employment rates, as well as banning predominantly online programming. We're also going to ensure that career colleges and immigration firms and recruitment firms are not in representation together. But ultimately, they know the seriousness of the allegations before the House here today, and that's why they're going to support the legislation we're bringing forward.

1130

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

Mr. Jonathan Tsao: Speaker, the minister, in his response, has not identified a single instance of OSAP fraud at Tyndale, yet its students continue to suffer.

The president of Tyndale University, Dr. Marjory Kerr, issued a public letter in which she states: "Students at Tyndale University are facing significant financial hardship....

"These students should be able to concentrate on learning, preparing for their vocations and contributing to their churches and communities. Instead, some are now withdrawing from their studies...."

Dr. Kerr goes on to say, "Please pray for students experiencing hardship and uncertainty...."

Students need more than hopes and prayers; they need actions from this government. So will the minister commit today to providing help for Tyndale students now?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: That member is well aware that Career Colleges Ontario just sent us a letter sharing further concerns that are still evolving in the sector right now. Until we have confidence from KPMG and our internal auditors that we're able to re-release those dollars, we have to hold them back because, ultimately, these are taxpayer dollars.

Just last month, Career Colleges Ontario suspended another 24 campuses, as well as another 33 campuses that they've highlighted for concerns of backdating of OSAP applications prior to August 1. Ultimately, these are very serious allegations, and that's why we've brought it forward to KPMG forensic experts to be able to get to the bottom of it, as well as the Ontario Provincial Police.

We're going to ensure that those bad actors are held accountable, and we're going to recover taxpayer dollars where they're needed.

HOUSING

Ms. Natalie Pierre: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Across Ontario, we continue to hear about the rising cost of building new homes. While everyone recognizes the need for infrastructure to support growing communities, we also know that development charges can add tens of thousands of dollars to the cost of a new home, making it harder for families to achieve the dream of home ownership. That's why our government has been taking action to reduce red tape, speed up approvals and lower the barriers that stand in the way of new housing construction.

Speaker, can the minister explain what our government has done and continues to do to reduce development-related costs and help build more homes across Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

MPP Billy Denault: Thank you to the great member from Burlington for that question. She's absolutely correct: Our government understands that if we want to build more homes, we need to make it easier and less expensive to build them. Development charges help municipalities pay for growth-related infrastructure, but they should not become a barrier to building the homes Ontarians need.

That is why our government has taken action. We have deferred development charge payments until occupancy, helping reduce upfront costs and improve project viability. We have also provided development charge exemptions for long-term-care homes, retirement homes and qualifying affordable housing projects.

We are taking action against runaway development charges. These measures are helping lower costs, support investment and create the conditions needed to build more homes faster.

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

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you to the parliamentary assistant for his response. It's encouraging to hear that this government is taking action to support not only housing construction, but also projects such as long-term-care and retirement homes that are essential to meeting the needs of Ontario's growing population. Building more options for seniors helps people remain in their communities, while also creating additional housing opportunities for families and first-time buyers.

At the same time, municipalities need support to build the roads, the water systems and other infrastructure necessary to accommodate growth.

Can the parliamentary assistant explain how our government is helping to build the critical infrastructure to support growth, while also reducing development-related costs and encouraging more housing construction across Ontario?

MPP Billy Denault: Thank you to the member for that supplementary.

Our government recognizes that municipalities are essential partners in getting more homes built. That is why, in partnership with the federal government, we introduced the $8.8 billion Development Charge Reduction Program, helping municipalities lower development charges while ensuring they have the resources needed to support housing-enabling infrastructure in growing communities.

This builds on the actions we've already taken to defer development charges, provide exemptions for the homes our communities need and reduce red tape through legislation. Our approach is simple: lower costs, remove municipal barriers, support critical infrastructure and create the conditions needed to get more homes built.

Speaker, we will continue working with municipalities, builders and communities across Ontario to get more shovels in the ground, increase housing supply and help more families achieve the dream of home ownership across our great province.

PARAMEDIC SERVICES

MPP Jamie West: My question is for the Premier. Paramedic services across Ontario are in crisis. Peterborough is losing paramedics as quickly as they hire them. They lost 54 in the last three years. And why would anyone stay? Low wages, trauma, PTSD, mental health benefits that are 10 times less than a part-time barista at Starbucks, workplace injuries that climbed 50% in one year? Last week, paramedics with CUPE 4911 in Peterborough had to strike, because they know this isn't sustainable.

It doesn't have to be this way. The province has the power to set minimum provincial standards; they simply choose not to. Paramedics across Ontario are all suffering. When will the Conservative government start treating paramedics like the essential services that they are?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I know the member opposite understands and appreciates that the negotiations through a union association and their employer are not to be debated and discussed here. That is something that happens between the union association and their employer, so I'm going to set that aside.

What I will say is our paramedics play an incredibly important role in our health care system. We have seen what an impact it makes when we make expansions in community paramedicine, when we make enhancements and empower paramedics with patients' consent to have 911 models of care, so that those paramedics can work with individual patients to make sure that they are taking patients to the most appropriate level of care. That's the investment that we are making.

We've obviously also ensured that more paramedics get hired in the province of Ontario. We know how important our paramedic services are to the province of Ontario, and we'll keep funding them by 50%.

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

MPP Jamie West: The Conservative government knows that the reason municipalities are struggling to pay paramedics is because this government keeps downloading provincial costs to the municipalities. AMO, the Association of Municipalities, they said, "We need a provincial government that will partner with municipal-

ities to strengthen our quality of life" and end the use of billions in municipal funds "to do the province's job."

Speaker, when cities and towns are forced to pay billions for provincial responsibilities, they then don't have the money to pay for municipal costs like paramedics. Ontario can't afford to lose more paramedics. The question: When will the Premier stop making our cities and towns do the province's job?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Respectfully, I don't know what the member's math is, but 50% is a partnership that we have within municipalities. When municipalities make a decision to expand their paramedic services, we as the province of Ontario, under the leadership of Premier Ford, are right there with a 50% commitment. With land ambulance, particularly as it relates to First Nations communities, we fund at 100%. We are absolutely partnering with our municipalities to ensure when they expand their paramedic services, we are there as a government to be a 50-50 partner.

HOUSE SITTINGS

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Members, I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 9(h), the Clerk has received written notice from the government House leader indicating that a temporary change in the weekly meeting schedule of the House is required, and therefore, the House shall commence at 9 a.m. on Monday, November 30, 2026, for the proceeding orders of the day.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Niagara Falls has given a notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to the question given by the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Gaming regarding gaming ads. This matter will be debated today following private members' public business.

This House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1140 to 1300.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Hon. Ernie Hardeman: Speaker, I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Wai Lam (William) Wong): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

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

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Therefore, the bill is ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PHOENIX EXCAVATING & GRADING LTD. ACT, 2026

MPP Firin moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr56, An Act to revive Phoenix Excavating & Grading Ltd.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

M^me^ France Gélinas: I want to thank the thousands and thousands of nurses that have signed this petition called "Support Nurse-to-Patient Ratios." In particular, I would like to thank Donna MacWilliam from Val Caron in my riding.

The petition is quite straightforward. Understaffing is negatively impacting the quality of public health care, causing long wait times, unreliable access to care and unmanageable workloads. Understaffing causes burnout for nurses, which is driving them out of the profession.

A nurse staffing ratio helps restore our public health care system and ensures quality care for the patients. Nurse vacancies and burnout decreased in other jurisdictions following the implementation of ratios, and nurse retention improved greatly.

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

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

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Mr. Ted Hsu: I have a petition entitled "Stop Privatization and Support Staffing Ratios." It comes from the Ontario Nurses' Association.

They're asking the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to mandate staffing ratios for nurses and health care professionals across Ontario's health care system. They want staffing ratios to be developed in consultation with nurses. But also, importantly, they realize that this requires a funding commitment, to be able to support those staff ratios, so they are calling for that.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Billy Pang: This petition is calling on the government of Ontario to strengthen electricity sector governance. We know that Ontario's electricity distribution system is critical to delivering safe, reliable and affordable power to more than five million customers across the province and must be prepared to support significant economic growth and electrification in the decades ahead. Strengthening the governance, planning, procurement, innovation and consumer protection will help ensure Ontario continues to provide reliable and affordable electricity while supporting economic competitiveness and long-term electricity security.

I support this petition. I will affix my name to it and will pass my petition to Reese.

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I have a petition here, "Stop Privatization and Support Staffing Ratios." This petition is signed by thousands and thousands of nurses. We are standing here in support of our Ontario nurses. Right now, nurses are facing burnout, unmanageable workloads. In Hamilton, we have, in our health care system, a 24-hour wait time to be seen in health care. We have job cuts; 413 job cuts have been announced. It is an unmanageable and unsafe situation.

Later on this afternoon, we're going to be debating the patient-to-nurse ratio bill put forward by MPP Gélinas. I hope that everyone in the House will support that bill because not only is it important for our nurses and our staff in health care; it provides the kind of health care and the kind of good patient outcomes that we all expect in Ontario.

I am more than pleased to add my name to this petition, and I will give it to Max to take to the table.

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Mr. John Fraser: I too have a petition from the Ontario Nurses' Association to stop privatization and to support staffing ratios. I'm the son of a nurse. My daughter-in-law is a nurse. And what we know right now is we've got burnout. We've got unsafe situations. We've got ratios from nurse-to-patient that aren't right. That needs to change, and that needs to be done in consultation with nurses.

I approve this petition, and I will put my signature on it and give it to Arthur.

HIGHWAY 69

MPP Paul Vickers: I have a petition here that has to do with Highway 69. It's very important to the people of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. This Highway 69 is a primary transportation corridor connecting northeastern Ontario and southern Ontario, and it serves as a critical route for residents, businesses, tourists, emergency services and the movement of goods across this province.

For decades, Ontario has been working towards completing this four-laning of Highway 69 between Parry Sound and Sudbury. Yet approximately 68 kilometres of that corridor remain unfinished, creating a significant bottleneck in northern Ontario's transportation network. The remaining two-lane section of Highway 69 experiences heavy commercial, industrial and recreational traffic and continues to present safety concerns due to limited passing opportunities, highway closures and collisions that can disrupt travel and the movement of goods throughout northern Ontario.

Northern Ontario is home to globally significant mining, forestry, manufacturing, agriculture, tourism and critical mineral sectors that depend on reliable transportation infrastructure to attract investment, support economic growth and move products to domestic and international markets. By completing the extension of Highway 69, it would improve road safety, strengthen supply chains, support northern resource development, expand tourism opportunities, improve access to services, enhance emergency response capabilities and support long-term economic growth across northern Ontario. Residents and businesses in northern Ontario deserve a transportation infrastructure that reflects the strategic importance of the region to Ontario's economy and future prosperity.

Therefore, we understand the petition: that the government of Ontario prioritize and accelerate completion of the remaining 68 kilometres of four-laning on Highway 69 between Parry Sound and Sudbury, including advancing approvals, procurement, design, construction and Indigenous consultation processes so that this vital transportation corridor can be completed as quickly and safely as possible for the benefit of northern Ontario residents, communities and businesses.

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I will affix my name to this petition and give it to Nathan, who has been an excellent page over the—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Thank you.

Before I go to further petitions, I will remind all members that petitions are to be presented with brief descriptions.

I turn to the member for Humber River–Black Creek.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I'm proud to stand and rise to present a petition from the Canadian Federation of Students. It's entitled "No to OSAP Cuts! No to Tuition Hikes!"

Their requests are very sensible ones, and they're great ones for the post-secondary students in Ontario. OSAP should be grants, not loans. Remove the interest from OSAP loans. They're calling for stopping the tuition hikes. And, of course, all the unnecessary interference that this government is doing in post-secondary institutions has to stop.

They've aptly pointed out that in 2019, this government had cut $670 million from OSAP. Year after year, the

tuition continues to be the highest in the entire country. This is something that the government has the power to stop.

Education should be the ability for students and young people to open doors for their futures. They shouldn't have the doors closed. Finances should never be a barrier to education. That should never happen, and they have the power to change this—this government does.

So of course I'm going to be signing this petition. Once again, I'm presenting it, and I want to thank the York University students who signed it.

RED TAPE REDUCTION

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I have a petition here about archaeological assessments, which are absolutely necessary in the province of Ontario.

Also important, this petition speaks to the fact that some of these archaeological assessments are lengthy and, at the end of the day, 98% of them eventually approve the project that's being discussed anyway. So the petition actually asks for us to improve the system of conducting archaeological assessments.

This is also referring to the fact that in New Zealand and Europe, they have a more effective and scoped process of doing archaeological assessments, which would protect archaeological assets in the province of Ontario but at the same time would allow projects to go on to a more, let's say, expeditious schedule.

This is a petition that calls on the Legislative Assembly to modernize our system of archaeological assessments while protecting our heritage and also protecting our culture. I think we can all agree with that.

So I'll sign the petition. I'll give it to this fine page, Léa, to bring to the Clerks' table.

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm rising to present a petition in support of safe staffing ratios signed by residents across Ottawa West–Nepean.

We know our hospital system is understaffed, and now it's even worse because of cuts to nurses and health care workers. That's eroding the quality of patient care not because nurses and health care workers don't want to do their best but because there's only so much time in a shift and there's only one place a nurse or health care worker can be at a time. So that is increasing mortality rates and decreasing care outcomes for patients, but it's also burning out our nurses and health care workers and driving them out of the system.

We've seen from other jurisdictions that staffing ratios can improve care, and it can improve retention of health care workers in our system. So the petitioners are calling on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to mandate staffing ratios for nurses and health care workers and to properly fund our system so that we can meet those ratios. We have the opportunity to do that today with Bill 19, and I urge all members here to vote in favour of that.

I fully support this petition, will add my name to it and send it to the table with page Ryan.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Ms. Jessica Bell: This petition is entitled "Save OSAP, Fund Education Now!" It is signed by students, many of them from the University of Toronto, who want the OSAP program returned to a grants program, away from the loans program it currently is.

I fully support this petition. I'll be affixing my name to it and giving it to page Yuvki.

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I have a petition here entitled "Stop Privatization and Support Staffing Ratios."

This particular petition has been signed by thousands of residents in Windsor and Essex county calling on this government to stop the privatization of our health care system and to ensure we have safe staffing ratios within the entire health care sector. We know that when we have proper nurse-to-patient ratios we have a healthier workforce, we don't see the burnout and the number of nurses leaving and, ultimately, staffing shortages, and it leads to better outcomes for patients.

I fully support this petition and I will sign my name to it.

I call on everyone in this government, this afternoon, when we have hundreds of nurses here, to do the right thing and support my colleague from Nickel Belt's bill for safe staffing ratios.

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

MPP Catherine McKenney: Speaker, I have a petition here titled "Stop Privatization and Support Staffing Ratios."

Recently, in Ottawa, we held a town hall on health care, and nurses told us horror stories. Really, nobody should be working under these types of circumstances. It is burning out our nurses, and it means that our health care that we all count on is jeopardized.

So this petition is calling for the mandating of proper staffing ratios for nurses.

We have a bill coming up later this afternoon, and I hope that everyone in this Legislature will support that.

I am going to gladly affix my name to this and send it down with page Jate.

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'm very proud to rise in this House and to speak on behalf of the Ontario Nurses' Association. They have brought forward a petition signed by hundreds of advocates who are calling on this government to do the following—and I should say that the petition is entitled "Stop Privatization and Support Staffing Ratios." It's entitled "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario"—understanding that understaffing is negatively

impacting the quality of our health care system, causing much longer wait times, unreliable access to care, unmanageable workloads, the deskilling of health care workers, and many more detrimental issues.

They want this House to recognize that burnout for nurses and health care professionals is literally driving them out of the profession, and that having the right staffing ratios for nurses and health care professionals will restore the integrity and the quality to our public health care system, ensuring that these systems are working properly—including home care, long-term care, public health, and hospitals.

They want the government to recognize that by defunding the public health care system and driving it into for-profit private corporations, they are taking away health care for Ontarians.

They're calling on this House to mandate staffing ratios for nurses and health care professionals and to ensure that the system works for everybody.

I want to thank the member from Nickel Belt for her advocacy and for bringing this issue to our attention.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. Steve Clark: I move that, pursuant to standing order 50 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House related to Bill 105, An Act to enact the Strengthening Talent Agency Regulation Act, 2026 and to amend various Acts; Bill 140, An Act to enact two Acts and to amend various Acts; and Bill 148, An Act to enact the Intimate Images Protection Act, 2026 and to amend various Acts;

That the order for third reading of Bill 105 be discharged and that the bill be recommitted to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs; and

That the deadline for filing amendments to Bill 105 with the Clerk of the Committee shall be 12 noon on Friday, November 27, 2026; and

That the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs be authorized to meet on Tuesday, December 1, 2026, from 9 a.m. to 10:15 a.m., 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. and 7 p.m. to midnight for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 105; and

That on Tuesday, December 1, 2026, at 5 p.m., those amendments to Bill 105 which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto; and

That at this time, the Chair shall allow one waiting period, if requested by a member of the committee, pursuant to standing order 131(a); and

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That the committee shall report Bill 105 to the House no later than Wednesday, December 2, 2026, and if the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed passed by the committee and shall be deemed reported to and received by the House; and

That upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs on Bill 105, the Speaker shall put the question for the adoption of the report forthwith; and

That upon adoption of the report, Bill 105 shall be ordered for third reading, which order may be called the same day; and

That the deadline for filing amendments to Bill 140 with the Clerk of the Standing Committee on the Interior shall be 4 p.m. on Thursday, November 26, 2026; and

That on Wednesday, December 2, 2026, at 5 p.m., those amendments to Bill 140 which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto; and

At this time, the Chair shall allow one waiting period, if requested by a member of the committee, pursuant to standing order 131(a); and

That the committee shall report Bill 140 to the House no later than Thursday, December 3, 2026, and if the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed passed by the committee and shall be deemed reported to and received by the House; and

That upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on the Interior on Bill 140, the Speaker shall put the question for the adoption of the report forthwith; and

That upon adoption of the report, the bill shall be ordered for third reading, which order may be called the same day; and

That the deadline for filing amendments to Bill 148 with the Clerk of the Standing Committee on Social Policy shall be 4 p.m. on Wednesday, December 2, 2026; and

That on Monday, December 7, 2026, at 5 p.m., those amendments to Bill 148 which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto; and

At this time, the Chair shall allow one waiting period, if requested by a member of the committee, pursuant to standing order 131(a); and

That the committee shall report Bill 148 to the House no later than Tuesday, December 8, 2026, and if the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed passed by the committee and shall be deemed reported to and received by the House; and

That upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on Social Policy on Bill 148, the Speaker shall put the question for the adoption of the report forthwith; and

That upon adoption of the report, the bill shall be ordered for third reading, which order may be called the same day.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): The government House leader has moved government notice of motion number 21.

I return to the member to start debate.

Hon. Steve Clark: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I want to start my remarks by indicating that the government doesn't get things right 100% of the time. When we do that, we pledge to fix it, and that's exactly what we're doing with Bill 105.

Just for members' own knowledge, Bill 105—we have to go back to April 20, 2026, when we first received first reading on this bill. This bill received second reading on May 4 and was reported to the Legislative Assembly after the committee process on May 25, 2026.

So what's happened since Bill 105 was introduced in April? Well, Speaker, US tariffs have been broader, higher, more disruptive, some of them reaching as high as 50% on Canadian exports. This trade war with the United States has really fundamentally changed the economic landscape facing Ontario's unions, on workers and on businesses.

Speaker, there are things that I can't control, and there are things I can control. What I can't control—and I don't even intend to even think that I could ever control—is what comes out of Donald Trump's mouth. There's just no way to predict what Donald Trump is going to do as part of this trade war.

But, as I said, there are things I can control, and what I can control is when this bill is reported back to the House, whether it's discharged and how it's dealt with. The motion that I've tabled discharges Bill 105—that I just said was reported back to the House in May—from third reading. It refers it back to the committee so that members can continue to do their work.

While the bill was going through second reading, public debate, public hearings, clause-by-clause—while this was all happening, we heard from workers, unions and businesses that they wanted some changes. We also broke from the Legislative Assembly, and there was a bit of a to-do about how long we were away. At the time, I stood right out there, right outside the chamber, and talked to the media and said what I hoped would happen was that members would go back to their ridings and that they would talk to their constituents.

Well, Speaker, we heard a lot from our constituents about Bill 105, so discharging the bill from third reading to clause-by-clause will ensure that those workers, those unions and businesses are being heard and the feedback that we've heard from them will be considered in this bill.

With all the continued threats, all the increased tariffs that we're going to face on January 1, we feel, as a government, that we need to act decisively to review this pending legislation, at the end of the day, to protect Ontario workers and to protect Ontario businesses.

We're listening; we've heard loud and clear that we need to react to the rapidly evolving relationship with the United States. And this motion in regard to Bill 105 ensures that changes can be made to the bill, that it can be reported back to the House and will continue for third reading debate.

Again, we made no changes to debate. We didn't close off any debate. We didn't choke off any debate, to use a word that I might have used when I was in opposition. We allowed the bill to be debated at second reading, just like we're going to allow it to be debated at third reading.

We didn't call the bill since it was reported back to the House in May, and now the government feels very strongly that, given the evolving relationship with the US, we need to make some changes, that we need to stand up for Ontario workers and listen to what they've told us and listen to what businesses have told us over the summer.

In regard to Bill 140 and Bill 148, we're not using what I would call traditional time allocation to close off debate, but we do want to make sure that both bills, Bill 140 and Bill 148, come back to the House for debate. We just want to make sure that the committee is not focused on procedural tricks by the opposition parties, that there's some certainty on when the bill comes back.

The procedural tool we're using with standing order 50 allows us to establish that clear framework for consideration of legislation. Members are still going to have all the rights and privileges that they have at committee to move motions and amendments, but what it does prevent is those committee hearings for those two very important bills to be derailed by the opposition.

The motion establishes clear deadlines and clear procedures for clause-by-clause consideration so that it can be received in an organized fashion, which is what standing order 50 is really meant to—I've said this before; it's meant to help schedule the House without interfering into second reading debate or third reading debate. It also decides that decisions will be made on those very important amendments and that there's a clear path back to the House.

We want to make sure that we use it in a respectful way. As I've said, I made the commitment to the opposition parties when we came back to this House after our break that we would allow full second reading and full third reading debate, we would allow committee hearings and clause-by-clause, and this scheduling motion today allows that for Bill 140 and Bill 148.

I know the ministers are here, and they'll speak in a little more detail about those bills, but—just to set the table for the afternoon debate.

I turn it back to you, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I wish I could say it's a pleasure to be joining this debate, but this is more than a scheduling motion, and I think all of us in the House know this.

The PC government has a really important fundraiser for later on today, beginning at 5:30. The government has decided that they're going to input Bill 105, Bill 140 and Bill 148 into a scheduling motion that now is, all of a sudden, very urgent. I have to say, I appreciate the House leader actually being so forthright. He says it's more than

a scheduling motion; we know it's more than a scheduling motion. But he's a much-improved House leader than the last House leader, I think we can all agree.

1330

He did so in a very straightforward, honest manner, one would say, right? But the fact of the matter is that this government has a steady, consistent pattern of reducing the democratic rights of MPPs in this House. The backsliding of democracy in Ontario—if the House leader had been an opposition member, he would have been outraged by what is happening with Bill 140 and Bill 148.

He mentioned that Bill 105, which was just introduced in May—and then, of course, we did do a five-month break from this House. Our members, of course, voiced their concern over the stifling of democracy and our rights as MPPs in this place, because when you stifle our voices, you stifle the voices of Ontarians across the province and the people that we're elected to serve. We take an oath in this place to serve those people. You cannot serve those people if you're not in the House. You cannot change the law if you're not in the House.

Of course, we hold out hope for this collaboration talk that we sometimes hear, not only from the House leader, but from the government. We've proposed really good solutions in this place. We're very forward-thinking under our leader, Marit Stiles. We want to make this province a better place, a stronger place.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I will remind the member not to use the names of individuals in this place.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Speaker.

To that end though, when we are proposing solutions, as we are today with the member from Nickel Belt, who's proposing really—nurse-to-patient ratios should be standardized. This is common sense. Do you remember that Common Sense Revolution? Does anybody else remember the Common Sense Revolution? It was antithetical at the time because it was exactly the opposite, but let's think about solutions, because sometimes we do come to this place as opposition MPPs and we say we want to help you be better because, at the end, that helps the people of this province.

When the House leader is talking about the urgency now of tariffs—we missed five months of an opportunity to propose solutions through our tariff council, which was really just amplifying the voices of businesses and industry that want to be part of the solution as well in an aggressive tariff war. By shutting us out, the government showed us who they really are.

Then they continue with the backsliding of democratic rights right here in the Legislature, Speaker. And it continues even to the Premier speculating about getting judges that agree with the government. This is not just a slippery slope; this is exactly the dangerous territory that we see happening in authoritarian countries across the world.

I will add my context because I chair the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians. When we go to other countries and we hear about what's happening—it's happening here in Ontario. It's happening right here in this Legislature. It's continuing with the Liberal tradition of huge omnibus pieces of legislation, rushing them through at breakneck speed, banning public participation in committee hearings, setting up special economic zones exempt from democratically decided local rules and regulations.

We have an appointed chair in the region of Waterloo. Citizens are outraged about this, and, to boot, this guy will have super-veto powers. So if he only gets a third of the council to decide that they want to increase taxes or redirect taxes or fire this person or change that environmental policy—minority rule is alive and well in Ontario. I never thought I would bear witness to this in a Westminster Parliament. It is shocking, the backsliding of democracy under this Premier and in this government.

The strong-mayor powers were an affront to democracy, but you've doubled down now and introduced one-third rules where people can undo the policies of democratically elected regional councillors. I mean, it's right here in your face. The House leader talked about the threat of Donald Trump. We've got our own version right now in Canada, in Ontario, in this Legislature. He is following a pattern of populism, which undermines the very tenets and principles of a strong democracy, and that starts by fast-tracking legislation through this place, as he has done with Bill 105, Bill 140 and Bill 148.

I'm the critic for seniors and long-term care. Bill 148 moved so quickly through this House that I didn't even get a chance to speak to it—six and a half hours of debate. But I will give the House leader credit. He stood up and said, "When we make mistakes, we make mistakes." Get back to the table and actually develop legislation that will help the people of this province.

Specifically, as the new critic for seniors and long-term care, when I looked at Bill 148, I sent three pages of questions to the minister asking what this language is where you're going to be designating provincial offences officers? What qualifications do these people have? What training will they have in the long-term-care situation? What specific offences under the Fixing Long-Term Care Act will they be authorized to enforce?

People in this province woke up during the pandemic to the disaster of the long-term-care system. When the Canadian army went into five homes in this province and saw seniors dying in the hallway from thirst, from sepsis, from lack of nutrition, from neglect—and those same soldiers had to declare PTSD for what they saw in our long-term-home-care system in this province.

We should be collectively non-partisan looking for solutions as to how to strengthen the system to ensure that seniors actually get the dignity they deserve after being members of our province, of our communities. After donating their time, after paying their taxes, this is what they get at the end of that?

If you think that's not happening anymore in the province of Ontario, then you definitely have your head in the sand because your own ministry numbers showed that this highlighted four hours of hands-on care every single day for seniors in long-term care, your own ministry stats

came out where 300 homes missed those marks. One of those homes said they only provided one hour and 18 minutes of hands-on care for a senior. Can you imagine, Speaker? That's barely getting fed. That's certainly not getting a shower or getting bathed. That's certainly not having some quality time and a conversation. Is that not something we can agree on, that seniors deserve in long-term care?

Schedule 6, Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021, in Bill 148: outstanding questions—huge red flags—around designated provincial offences officers. Who are these officers? Why do you think you need officers? Who's watching the officers? These are good questions around transparency.

In Bill 148, there was a section on organized dementia care programs. Given the tsunami of dementia and Alzheimer's as a disease that is so prevalent in the province of Ontario, I think most of us thought that dementia care programs were already part of the structure of long-term care.

I've been on the finance committee now for 13 years. We heard 13 years ago that every hospital down here on University Avenue was going to be filled with dementia patients or Alzheimer patients. This is the Alzheimer Society of Ontario that had presented this data. They said, "The tsunami is coming. You need to be prepared." What is this government doing? This government is out consulting on a dementia strategy in 2026, almost 2027, Speaker. The crisis is here. We need an emergency response to dementia in the province of Ontario. Many of you, I'm sure, have a family member or a good friend going through this horrendous and unsupported journey. Bill 148, all bundled up, all fast-tracked, all ready to go, this is not good enough for the seniors of Ontario.

1340

One of the other sections in Bill 148 as it pertains to seniors talks about having clinical directors. We have 2.5 million Ontarians that do not have a doctor. We have a doctor shortage in the province of Ontario. Doctors are not coming to Ontario because of the conditions that they have to work through: the administrative burden, which definitely has solutions, which our critic has also suggested to the government, whereby doctors actually get to spend time with patients—I mean, what a concept that would be—and not doing more red tape, more paperwork. Yet for some reason, now we're going to have clinical directors on these tables? Well, good luck finding them. Maybe they can also do double duty as these officers, Speaker.

Schedule 12 is the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care appeal and review boards. What is the rationale of this part of Bill 148, behind removing the requirement that physicians and lawyers serve on the boards? We have review boards to hold the government to account, to provide some oversight and, I would say, to also to build some trust. Schedule 12 of Bill 148 removes the requirement of physicians and lawyers to serve on the board.

What's the criteria for future appointments? We don't know. How will the government ensure the board remains independent and credible? We don't know, but they're not really in the business of being credible, so perhaps we can just ignore that part. Has the government assessed the potential impact of these changes on the quality and fairness of decisions? We don't know. I have no answer from the minister.

Here we are again, an important file, seniors and long-term care—I asked for it because I care about it, and I need to feel connected to an issue where I can try to get something done. How can you get something done as an opposition member when the government refuses to provide the briefing, to provide the answers, to give time for the public to consult, to give time for the sector to consult on legislation?

It's ironic that the House leader says, "We know when we've made mistakes." Well, you've made mistakes, yes. You are overachieving on the "we've made mistakes" side, but what you have not done is provided an opportunity to correct the mistakes. We in the official opposition are committed to helping you fix your mistakes, but you have to give us a chance to do so. This government is not really interested in really delivering better services, I would say.

The final piece from a seniors and long-term-care perspective is schedule 16 of Bill 148, which is now being fast-tracked, the Retirement Homes Act. There are so many issues going on right now in our retirement homes. They are de facto long-term-care homes. Someone needs to say it; I'm saying it. What's happening in our retirement homes is, people are barely getting by because there's not enough space in the long-term-care homes. Then you have a massive human resources failure in this province to support PSWs, to support RPNs, to support nurses in these settings. Retirement homes are also struggling.

This section is interesting. Who will qualify as a caregiver under these new regulations when the government formally releases this definition? Who writes legislation, puts it in a bill, but yet doesn't define what a caregiver is? We've seen many issues across the province in this regard, where family members are the de facto caregiver but then they've been excluded from the home. This is an ongoing issue that this piece of legislation does not correct.

These are pretty serious concerns that we have with Bill 148. I wish that I'd had an opportunity to consult with the sector fully, but you rushed this bill through. I think you dropped it last Wednesday. This is Wednesday, six and a half hours of debate, and now you're fast-tracking it again.

So the question remains, Speaker: When are you as a government going to course-correct, remember who you work for and remember what a democracy is in the province of Ontario? Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

M^me^ Lucille Collard: Again today, we are having to debate a last-minute government motion, one that is designed to restrict debate and reduce oversight. We've seen this before.

The motion before us today is intended to make you believe that the government is trying to bring efficiency in the legislative process. But in reality, what this motion is

doing is reducing the consideration of very important bills placed before this House, and especially reducing dramatically the capacity of people and stakeholders across the province to participate in the process and provide their views and their recommendations so that the government can produce the best legislation possible.

Unfortunately, the government doesn't seem to be interested in that. But the government House leader said that for Bill 105, though, maybe because they had that five-month break since it was tabled in May—there was a whole five months to get feedback that I'm assuming they got from the public or stakeholders, and that's a perfect example: They've decided now that this bill needs to go back to committee to bring some more amendments and to fix some mistakes. So, that five-month break just demonstrates that this is the right way to go. But that's not what the government wants to do. For all the other bills, the government prefers to plow ahead, rely on whatever advice they decide is worthwhile and fix any potential mistakes later. That's after the bill has been adopted and has created damage, before we can correct any legislation.

Democracy dies in darkness. We cannot afford to follow the path of those south of the border and continue to restrict debate. Under the Conservatives, sitting days in a non-election year have reached a 50-year low, and the decision-making process has only grown more confusing and much less transparent for all the people in Ontario.

Unfortunately, we know why the government is doing that: Because when bills are introduced and debated at the speed of a news cycle, Ontarians have less time to understand what's changing or have their say and their concerns addressed before the vote. I hardly have time to even tell people in my riding that this bill has been tabled and this is what it's intended to do and "Please, if you have something to say, come to committee and express your concern." There's just no time at all to do that.

The decisions are made to benefit those in the Premier's circles, and that is allowed to continue to grow. It's a reality we've all become too familiar with by now. From the OSAP, the greenbelt and the Skills Development Fund scandals, how many more times will the government continue to make backroom deals that benefit donors and friends? Given today's motion, it seems clear that the trend is far from over.

Look, if the government was bringing forward legislation that does something meaningful to help address the homelessness, mental health and addiction crisis the province is going through, I would be happy to support their efforts. I was hoping that during that five-month break we would get such good legislation brought forward, but we still have to see anything that is fixing the broken health care system or the education system that is failing kids and families. None of that has been brought forward so far.

Instead, we have an omnibus bill in which the government is shielding itself from all legal recourse related to the OSAP scandal. And the government dares to say it is fixing OSAP while students are seeing their future put in jeopardy and private colleges are laying off teachers because the students are just leaving. That's in Bill 148.

In Bill 105, the government is removing mandatory ministry review of environmental assessments and it's repealing the provision that lets anyone ask for an application to be referred to the Ontario Land Tribunal. Why is the government using a bill presented as protecting workers to take away a way for communities to seek a tribunal hearing on projects that could affect their land, water or health? I'm certain that's not what the government is going to fix when they bring it back to committee. I have no doubt about that.

1350

Bill 140 is also attacking environmental protections by repealing the tools people use to enforce environmental protections. Why does building faster require taking away the public's right to request an investigation into an alleged environment violation?

So you see, Speaker, all these bills are problematic, and all these bills do things that require full debate, full consideration, full committee review and listening to stakeholders who have an adequate opportunity to put their name forward and appear before committee. But this motion is removing all those opportunities. The government is asking us to cut off committee debate on bills that would take away ways for Ontarians to challenge government decisions. And before we vote, people deserve to hear why they should lose those rights and what recourse they'll have afterward.

I will stop my remarks here, just because I don't have anything good to say about this motion—except that Ontarians should be aware that the government is hurting democracy, and they should pay attention, because that shouldn't be allowed to continue.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: I just want to remind everyone as to why we're here. The House leader tabled standing order 50, which is based on a democratic system, which is based on parliamentary democracy, which is based off the origins that we got from the British Parliament. The standing orders that we're using today as part of our procedure was in fact a procedural tool that we got constitutionally by those who fought in two Great Wars, to found not only the freedoms in Britain but the freedoms in Canada—the foundation and the founding fathers of Confederation. And here we are, using the tools of democracy enshrined within the standing orders, which were an evolution of the Constitution. But that's neither here nor there.

Speaker, I did want to talk about some of the changes we are putting here. That is the focus of what this government has been focused on from day one—and that is making life easier for people, whether it's bringing in affordability measures or whether it's reducing red tape. This government not only values people's hard-earned tax dollars, but their hard-earned time. So we've done what we can in order to save them time, whether it's reducing red tape—or saving them money by reducing taxes, lowering fees and creating more productivity into this economy.

On this side of the House, we know that regulatory burdens slow down productivity. They discourage investment. And they hold back economic growth. What does that mean for the day-to-day people of our community? If there's no productivity in the community, it means someone is not waking up to go to work. If they can't go to work, they can't pay their mortgage. If they can't pay their mortgage, they can't go grocery shopping; they can't put their kids through school or take them to sports. Productivity is the very cornerstone—our economy is the very cornerstone that helps prop up everything else in our economy and make sure everything in our economy is successful.

You cannot have a vibrant, successful community without having a stable, strong economy, and that is something this government has always been focused on. We don't want to discourage investment. We want to attract investment. Those people who come to Ontario, who have great ambitions, who may have been here for generations or are coming here as new immigrants—we want to be able to reward that ambition and not punish it with regulatory reforms, government overreach and a government that just taxes them, over-regulates them and stymies ambition.

We have to turn the page. America is known to innovate, China is known to replicate, but far too often are Canada and other places in Europe known as the places that just regulate. We want to change that so that we can be competitive and Canada can once again stand on its own two shoulders, build things again in this country and innovate—and Ontario being the home to great innovations; for example, penicillin.

Speaker, you talk to remarkable businesses that want to expand—and now not only are we trying to reduce the red tape for them, but now they're also shackled by the fact that there are tariffs south of the border.

I recently met with a local company in Barrie, and they're directly affected by the section 338 tariffs. For them, a government that is there fighting to get out of the way and to be able to clear red tape is meaningful to them. It affects their daily business. It means that they can go to their employees at their factory and say, "Tomorrow, please come back. We have a job for you. Oh, and by the way, we have more orders coming. Why? Because we're able to diversify our supply chain. Why are we able to diversify our supply chain? Because the provincial government has their back. They're getting out of their way. Oh, and they're also supporting them with tariff relief so they can diversify their supply chain. That is what we're doing.

What we've heard from businesses and communities all around this province is that they need more certainty in an uncertain economy. They need confidence, not red tape, delays and bureaucracy. They need a government that moves faster. That is what protect Ontario means, and this is why the motion before members here today is so important. We've listened and we've taken action.

At their core, the Protecting Ontario's Workers and Economic Resilience Act and the Building Ontario Faster Act are about giving businesses the confidence and predictability that they need to invest and create jobs in Ontario. The chaos and disruptions fuelled by Washington's illegal tariffs are creating pressures around the globe, and we need to take action to fortify our supply chains, strengthen our protections for workers and businesses and accelerate our permit approval processes so that Ontario can build bigger and better than ever before.

Speaker, the economic climate is constantly changing, and we cannot afford to wait. That is why we've listened to Ontarians from every corner of this province. When we draft legislation like the ones that we're talking about today, a lot of people within Ontario can see themselves in it because they've had a pen in it, whether we're talking about the actors with Bill 150, or we're talking about the workers on construction sites, or we're talking about people who are helping our seniors, those who work in health care—from all walks of life and from all educational backgrounds. There is an idea that we've got—whether it's the seniors' home, from the shop floor to playgrounds, to local businesses and everything in between.

When we make decisions and when investment decisions are made every day, businesses are deciding where they're going to build, where they're going to expand and where they're going to create next jobs. Ontario needs to be the place they do it. This is the place where we want them to invest, expand and make sure that Ontario is ready to compete for those investments. We don't want to be in the way, holding them up with outdated processes and unnecessary delays. We need to make sure Ontario is ready to compete for those investments, and we need to be able to respond to the economic challenges in real time, not years down the road. That is what we're doing here. We need to be able to respond to the economic challenges in real time, and we need to be able to show that we are creating the most resilient and self-reliant economy in the G7.

These are not just words for this government; we're doing meaningful action. For example, since 2018, we already eliminated over 14,000 regulatory compliance requirements, lowering Ontario's red tape burden by almost 6%. And what does that mean? It means we're saving people and businesses $1.3 billion. And I'm happy to announce we've also been able to save those individuals not just 1.8 million, but now 1.9 million hours.

Not only that: Ontario also has the lowest regulatory burden per capita in the entire nation. Let me take you back for a moment, Speaker. When we first formed government in 2018, Ontario had a reputation of being the regulatory capital of Canada—no more. We've worked with our partners at the Canadian Federation of Independent Business; chambers and boards of trades across this province; and a lot of local business shops from rural Ontario to northern Ontario, from Bay Street to Main Street, to get ideas. This is where we've been able to meet them where they're at, reduce red tape, and we went from being the regulatory capital of Canada to having the lowest regulatory burden per capita in Canada.

In addition to that, because of our work with local and small businesses, the Canadian Federation of Independent

Business took Ontario from a C-minus grade that we inherited from the Liberal government to an A grade under this Premier, Premier Ford. That is a signal that what the government is doing is working and is bringing confidence back to this economy. When everything is standing up as an obstacle in front of us, we're not letting that get us down; we're moving forward. If there are tariffs, we're moving forward to support our businesses. If there's a global pandemic, we move forward to support our local businesses. If there's economic instability, this government keeps moving forward to support our economy.

Speaker, that is leadership. Real leadership is not defined by a single report card; it's defined by sustained progress. That is why we have brought forward the Protecting Ontario's Workers and Economic Resilience Act, which is a way for us to be competitive and gives workers opportunity. Together, that will give Ontario the power to grow.

The Protecting Ontario's Workers and Economic Resiliency Act would help improve important measures by ensuring projects move faster and regulations come down, all without weakening protections. This bill is focused squarely on improving outcomes for job creators, for businesses large and small and for workers who are the engine of Ontario's economic success. It's about ensuring regulations are focused, effective and easy to understand and navigate, making government work better for people and smarter for business.

1400

Research from Deloitte has highlighted how regulatory differences and administrative requirements can create barriers to labour mobility here and across Canada. The University of Calgary's research also talks about interprovincial trade barriers. They have examined the economic costs of restrictions that prevent workers, goods and services from moving freely. Speaker, these are things that we need to look at to ensure that we're making things easier for our skilled workers, not creating additional hurdles for them. When workers can move freely and businesses can access talent they need, our entire economy benefits.

This work supports a more agile economy that can respond quickly to the global challenges and emerging opportunities like our permit review and transformational work. The government's province-wide and government-wide permit review supports faster project starts, lowering administrative costs and greater predictability for businesses and investors in critical sectors like mining, transportation and energy.

But, Speaker, as I wrap up—because I know I have other colleagues who want to speak to this bill—we need to be reminded that capital will go where businesses have the confidence to invest and where projects can move forward and where government is focused on getting things done. We are making sure that place is Ontario. This is precisely the challenge and what the Building Ontario Faster Act fixes and why this motion is so needed: so we can remove unnecessary permit requirements and make those decisions faster, again, getting those investments back here.

We're reviewing a total of over 350 business-facing permits, identifying opportunities to eliminate unnecessary requirements and streamline them. As a result of this work, we estimate that we'll be able to reduce nearly 220,000 processing days. That's 220,000 processing days we're giving back into the hands of workers and small business owners so they can do what they do best: invest in their business, hire workers, build our economy, invest in our local service organizations and brighten our communities.

Speaker, this is the time to act now. In the face of a lot of global uncertainty, this government is acting with certainty. When we need to make changes, we make changes. We need to be responsible in how we respond to feedback we get in our local ridings. We make the changes. This motion and this bill will and do affect that. The actions of past and both these pieces of legislation will help businesses diversify into new markets, fortify critical supply chains and strengthen economic resilience.

This is exactly what the people of Ontario expect us to do. This is exactly why they gave us a majority mandate, and our focus to protect Ontario has never been stronger. We will not back down to ensure Ontario's place as an economic powerhouse in the G7 is the forefront of our vision and what we want to do.

I encourage all members of this House to support this motion so that we can make life easier, make life more affordable, keep people safe, keep our economy strong and protect Ontario. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to stand in the House, even when we're debating things that I totally disagree with.

Today, we're discussing a government notice of motion, and it's a time allocation motion. Basically, what time allocation does: It changes the way a bill—or in this case, bills—flow through the House or flow through the committee process. This one is different than many.

Usually, how this goes: I read a bunch of quotes from the government House leader on how this is an abdication of the democratic process. And I'm not going to do that today, because the first part of this time allocation motion, we actually don't disagree with. The second part, we do.

The first part, actually, it's basically bringing a bill back to committee so it can be amended before it goes to the House. They're going to attempt to fix a few things, because—and I actually agree that when you're dealing with the Trump administration, you might have to readjust. I don't disagree with that.

I can give you a case, actually, that I just learned of yesterday, and I hope this is one of the ones that they readjust.

I'm sure many of us met with the greenhouse association yesterday, right? And one specific case, the people who grow orchids—there are orchid growers in this province who face a 50% tariff, and when they approached

the government for help with that, they didn't qualify because they weren't seen as a crucial industry. Well, you can't retool—the Minister of Labour is here, you understand this better than I do, I hope—it takes a couple of years to get this done, and they will be gone and they are as crucial as any other industry. They are agricultural—we talk about how great agriculture is and how crucial it is, so I hope that one of the things that's fixed is that those growers actually qualify for funding under whatever fund you have to fight tariffs, because it's of no fault of their own.

When someone puts a 50% tariff on the product you produce and it's a product that can't be saved—it can't be shipped to some other country because it's too delicate. They have a market and that market collapsed because the price increases because of that tariff. That is not their own fault. That is as crucial, as important as steel or cars or anything else, yet today, they don't qualify for anything.

I haven't had a chance to talk to the Minister of Agriculture about this, and I'm sure he's working on it—he cares about this—but I'm putting it on the record here, because if there are things that need to be fixed, that is a good example. I'm sure there are all kinds of other examples, because you've allocated a big sum of money—billions—to fight the tariffs, but, actually, hardly any of it has flowed. So how many other sectors that aren't identified as crucial are suffering with no help at all?

The government House leader said that he's bringing this back to fix some problems and fix some changes—I respect that. I often disagree with the government House leader, but I respect that position, so I hope they actually are looking and have talked, and leave the door open, because many of theses people, like the orchid growers, don't have two years—they might not have two months. So let's look at those.

I welcome that the fall economic statement bill is going back to committee, I do. I welcome that part. It would have been much better if it had taken longer in committee in the first place, but I welcome that. I have a bit of an issue where the government House leader says, "We fix mistakes. We fix them when we identify them." That's a bit of a new reaction for this government because, usually, they don't identify them until they end up in court and they have to repeal the whole law, so they're trying to shorten the process.

So on Bill 140, they're not actually shortening the debate—the government is not shortening the debate in the House, but it was very clear with Bill 140 that many more people wanted to make deputations than were allowed time. We actually moved a motion for that, to allow more deputations. You would think in a bill that's that important and there are that many people who want to depute—I believe the Chiefs of Ontario actually stated that there were many more who wanted to depute and the members of that committee on the government side voted against that motion. So we get to talk the same amount of time, but the people who are actually the most impacted by the various schedules in the bills, their time was limited by the committee. So now it's going to be changed, but the government chose not to fix that mistake—because it is a mistake.

1410

With Bill 148—oh, there are a few big mistakes in Bill 148. I haven't spoken to Bill 148, and I might not get a chance to speak to Bill 148.

I'm going to take a few minutes and talk about Bill 140.

The OSAP issue has been discussed ad nauseam, but I think there's one question that hasn't been asked directly enough and has never been answered. The government says that they're going after the wrongdoers and they're putting up guardrails. I hope so. But why is the government indemnifying themselves from legal action retroactively? Are they also one of the wrongdoers, and they're protecting themselves? That's a question that needs to be asked. I do not see any reason at all, if there is nothing to see, for the government to indemnify themselves retroactively. That just does not make sense. You're hoping the general public is not going to see this or hear this, but you can't change the rules after and say, "Well, it wasn't us—but just in case it was us, you can't do anything." Those colleges that had nothing to do with this, the ones that actually were following all the rules and actually wanted to make the people who entrusted their money and their time to get educated to improve their lives, who had nothing to do with this, who are now being endangered—the students who did everything right, who did, actually, what the government told them to do. The government spent millions advertising, "Improve your career. Help the economy. Learn a trade"—all these things. They followed the government's advice, and then the government said, "There are some wrongdoers, but you can't sue us, even though"—wait a second.

Who would trust a government whose first actual action on this is to say, "We're going to call in the OPP. But you can't sue us. And we're not going to release the details of this investigation either, although we have investigated 3,200 times"—so many times; you've clicked the box 3,200 times. That's not as many times as that one address from the OSAP application—was it 8,000? So the longer you say "3,200 times," the more absurd it sounds. And your solution is to stop everything and indemnify yourselves. "There's nothing to see here—and if there is, you can't sue us anyway. It sucks to be you if you're a student. It sucks to be you if you're an honest college." That's what you're saying. Hopefully you all disagree with me, and hopefully you'll say, "Oh, it's not true. That's not why we're indemnifying ourselves." Tell me. The minister of colleges and training and universities, or whatever his title is, should be able to say, "We are indemnifying ourselves from legal action retroactively because"—why? That is a big problem.

I heard the government House leader talk about procedural tactics. He was hoping that the opposition wasn't going to use procedural tactics. I've been here a few years. When I first got here, the standing orders were much different. Actually, what procedural tactics are is when a government does something that people want me to try and stop, the only tools you have in the opposition are often

procedural tactics. If you have a majority government—it's almost impossible to stop a majority government from destroying themselves, and that's what's happening here.

Do you want to know a good procedural tactic that the former PC opposition did? When I first got elected here, the government House leader was here on the opposition bench. He's welcome to correct me because he had been here longer than I have, so he knows how to use procedural tactics. That's why the current House leader and the government House leader before him have done everything in their power to eliminate the power of the current opposition to use procedural tactics.

So, when I first got here—now, I can't remember if it was the Ornge Liberal scandal or the gas plant Liberal scandal—

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Both.

Mr. John Vanthof: They were both pretty big scandals. And the Conservatives, every rotation of speaking, rang bells.

Hon. Steve Clark: That was Ornge.

Mr. John Vanthof: The government House leader has confirmed for me that it was the Ornge Liberal scandal. They rang bells, and it was for weeks. I got elected here and all I heard was bells. I thought I had made the biggest mistake of my life. This place was nuts. It was nuts. There were two sets of 30-minute bells every rotation. It was crazy, but it was a procedural tactic that alerted the public to how terrible that scandal was. It was a procedural tactic.

Now, a little bit later, we had the gas plant scandal—the Liberal gas plant scandal—

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you. I'm glad you clarified that. I appreciate it. I'll return the favour.

Mr. John Vanthof: I told you, John, you weren't going to like the whole speech.

Again, the House was seized. The House stopped. They ended up proroguing because the opposition basically seized the House—like, it stopped—because it was that egregious. But the rules have changed.

Interjection: It's a lot better now.

Mr. John Vanthof: A Conservative member just said it's a lot better now. No, the scandals are no better. I think they're equally as bad. I think the OSAP scandal—you're affecting thousands of people who work hard, who have done everything right, and you're sweeping it under the table. You're saying, "Oh, nothing to see here. You can't sue us." Also, you've changed the rules here so we can't do anything about it except talk a little bit now, and then you stop it. You're sitting here so smug: "Oh, we have all the answers." And at some point—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I will remind the member to address his comments through the Chair.

Mr. John Vanthof: I apologize for that, Speaker. I will address you from now on.

At some point, when your government falls, those rules will all be used against you. You will rue the day. It will happen.

I went to the Ontario Federation of Agriculture banquet last night, and we were talking about history. The first time that I was involved in a provincial political debate, the minister was Carol Mitchell. She was the Liberal Minister of Agriculture. I respect Carol Mitchell. And the Conservative critic was the member from Oxford county—who happens to be my uncle, just to clarify—and I was debating on behalf of the NDP. Minister Mitchell, at that time—well, it was an election so she wasn't the minister, but she was the minister when the government dissolved—she out-debated us all. At that time, I had never sat in the House so I only saw ministers on TV. I went out and I shook her hand and said, "You did a great job." She goes, "It's too bad we're going to get wiped out." And they did. The Conservatives took rural Ontario even though the Liberals put in the Risk Management Program for agriculture. The Liberals did that, but they got taken out because they disregarded the peoples' concerns on the Green Energy Act.

1420

I hope you see a parallel here, because you are also disregarding peoples' concerns. You're taking people for granted, appointing regional chairs, the OSAP scandal: All those things, you're just taking people for granted. And you know what? People aren't as warm to you as you think they are. I don't know when your castle is going to fall; I can't predict that. But believe me, it's going to fall and it's going to fall hard. And you know what? The people who have actually sat on this side of the House, like the government House leader, like the member from Sarnia and a few others—because most of you haven't—will realize that when you have a majority government, with no real controls, they become victims of their own hubris—that's a big word for me.

Mr. John Fraser: I was thinking that.

Mr. John Vanthof: I knew you were.

Mr. John Fraser: Did somebody pass it to you?

Mr. John Vanthof: Hey, I went to grade 11.

But it's happening. Now, you maybe don't see it. At the end of the day we all want—I'm going to go to you again, Speaker; I am not trying to ignore you, I promise—to make Ontario a better place. I said it at the start of my remarks that I agree. I don't agree with everything in the fall economic statement—I disagree with most of it, actually—but if there are things that can be made better and if that takes making it go back to committee and hopefully helping those orchid growers and a few other people, great.

But on bills like Bill 140, there have definitely been people who want to speak—and everyone should have the right to speak—people who are actually there, who are dealing with the issues on the ground, which we aren't here, and you're eliminating their right. And you have. You voted against it in committee, when more people wanted to speak, and now you're saying, "We're taking the bill back because we need to fix the budget." But you're not fixing that; you're picking and choosing what you want to fix. You are choosing, in Bill 140, to ignore peoples' voices. It would be different if two people said, "We want to depute" and no one else. That happens sometimes. But Bill 140 wasn't like that.

I've got a couple of minutes left. When I first came here, you know how novel it was? I'll give the former Liberal government, scandal-ridden as they were, a few roses. When I first came here, for the first few years I didn't know at all what was going on—I'm still trying to figure it out—but I got on the House team. And we actually had meetings every Thursday at noon. Remember those? The government House leader was on the opposition House team, and we actually discussed the bills that were going to come up in the next month or so. We actually knew what bills were going to come up. Now, often, the government House leader gets up on Thursday afternoon: "Yes, you will be debating a bill that we are going to introduce on Monday." And when you ask the government House leader, it's "Yes, well, just check out the news."

Now, if I was on a board in any agricultural organization and someone asked me, "What's going to be on the agenda for Monday?" and I said, "Well, check out the newspaper," I wouldn't be on that board very long. They'd take me out.

We make laws here. So to have something dropped on Monday and have to debate it on Tuesday, obviously, you don't want good debate—you really don't. You really don't. I don't know any organization that puts something on the table one day, and—on the government side, maybe you don't know that. Maybe you have lots of time to discuss. I don't know. I belong to the loyal opposition. I'm loyal to the system. But if you actually want informed debate, you would actually do that.

We used to have that if the government did drop a bill really fast, there was a thing in the standing orders that we could delay the debate by one day, so we could have some time to get some research together. The former House leader used the power of his majority to get rid of that, too. So you can introduce a bill on Monday and have it be law by Friday or Thursday or Monday the next week—really? Really?

Now, I get that things need to move fast, and regulations need to be—there's red tape, and there's regulation. Not all regulation is red tape. But the actual policy framework does not have to be done in a week. It doesn't. And actually, you would get much better policies.

Bill 124: If you had taken some time, maybe somebody would have figured out that nurses, for example, would have walked—that the nurses—and I'm glad to see a few nurses.

Bill 124, where you limited nurses' wages to 1% and some of them went to nursing agencies because they got a lot more money—I don't blame the nurses one bit. The government should have known that. The government should have paid those nurses what they're worth instead of forcing them to go to nursing agencies, and then having to have the hospital system pay way more because the nursing agency got their cut too. It ended up costing way more. You should have known that. Maybe you did know it, but you rushed that bill through so fast that we all end up paying.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: It's always hard to follow the member from Timiskaming because he's so entertaining. But I'm so glad that I'm here because I learned something—and then I hear things that I hear every time he gets up and speaks. But here's what we have here: He's right.

This government has created what's called the legislative autobahn—no speed limits, all gas, no brake, all gas. But the challenge with it is that if you change the other rules, which were, "You can introduce a bill," as my colleague said, "one day, and start debating it the next"—the problem with that is your bills have multiple schedules of things that are pretty unrelated—sometimes six, seven; sometimes 12, 16—and they actually should be looked at. My colleague is using humour to point it out. The reality is, it's not a good way of doing business. You're not thinking things through. We're in a big hurry to do this.

You know, this morning we were talking about online gambling, the scourge that is online gambling, and what it's doing to young men—actually, young people. It's not just young men. There are a lot of young men.

1430

We talked about what was happening, about a threefold increase in suicides and 130,000 people who are identified as having a problem with gambling. That's a big problem. That needs an urgent fix. That's why we asked the Premier this morning and you to pass a bill before Christmas—actually before the end of the year.

We're happy to stay tonight all the way through—oh, by the way, I noticed there are no night sittings, but maybe it's because people can't afford the hotels.

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: Sorry about that; I think I just got us on night sittings. I had to bring it up. It's ironic, right? I said, "We haven't done night sittings yet? We usually start mid-November, and the House leader is giddy about putting forward night sittings"—I guess because there are some pretty good parties. No, I wouldn't say that of the House leader, but maybe some other people are having some good parties.

But let's go back to online gambling.

Hon. Steve Clark: Yes, please.

Mr. John Fraser: I know you want that.

It's a serious problem. People are being hurt. I listened to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke when he spoke against my colleague's bill. I listened to the first four minutes of his speech. He knows it's a problem, not just because somebody told him, but he knows some people. I know; I can tell. Go back and read it.

Gambling addiction is like heroin. It's pernicious, it gets its hooks in and it takes everything. Like I said this morning, so much death, debt and despair. And so, there's something that has urgency. I would encourage the government to allocate some time to solving that before the end of the year. I think it's important. I think we can do it together. I think we all agree—even the Premier said the other day it's crazy. It would be a good thing to do because next year is too late. Next week is too late. If we're going

to allocate some time and some effort to doing something, it should be to ban the advertising of online gambling in this province because it's hurting too many people.

I want to get to Bill 148. I know my colleague spoke with regard to what was happening with career colleges and the people who are now experiencing financial hardship because a loan that the government promised them—a loan, not a grant—the government cut off. It didn't appear. But they enrolled, quit a job, got child care, and then the loan didn't show up and it's still not there. We made a promise to them. We broke that promise. They didn't do anything wrong. They did everything right. But the government has got a big problem. It needs to be doing something big, so you cut everybody off. Think about that. Think about if that happened to you. Think if you were depending on financial support to feed your kids, to pay the rent, to pay the mortgage, to put gas in your car and it didn't come, and you don't have a job because you left yours—what do you do? Not much.

But every day the minister gets up and talks about bad actors that are a very small number. Maybe they got away with a lot of money—because it looks like it's close to a billion dollars and that's why the government has basically granted itself immunity. It got that cut-and-paste thing they have for these bills that give them indemnity. "Indemnity" is a big word, and what that means is the government saying, "You can't get us. We messed up big time and in order to look like we're doing something, we hurt you." And you know what? I know you all care. I can tell because when we ask these questions, I see your faces. I see where people are looking, like some of you are right now. Not that you have to listen to me; I'm not saying that.

What I'm saying is, what's happening to these people is wrong, and the government is not addressing it in a way that's fair or right or decent. It's really hurting people.

So, how is it—I think my colleague from Don Valley North mentioned it this morning—that a college can have no risk, no fraud, no concern, and all their students are cut off and they're going to food banks? And the head of the school—it's a religious college—is asking people to pray for the students. They don't need prayers; they just need the loan they were promised. This is thousands and thousands and thousands of people.

And the other thing that you've done is—it's not just OSAP; Better Jobs Ontario, Ontario Job Grant—gone. Crossroads trucking school in my riding—30 years, good people—is going to go out of business. I just got an email from them—not good.

It's not just the workers at the school; it's the people who run legitimate businesses, who have worked hard, who don't make a ton of money, invested in a company that's their livelihood and their savings and their retirement, and you guys can't get your act together. They're paying. You got immunity, or will get immunity, but they're paying. That's not right. That's not fair. And I know that all of you know that's true, so why can't we do something? We can rush through these bills.

The last thing I want to talk about—and I don't want to use up my colleague's time here—is we're bringing back Bill 105, which is a bill that was passed this summer that benefited workers. There were some things in it that weren't so good. You could actually pass the bill and not enact certain sections, and that's the way you get away with it.

If there are things that were put in there that weren't right, you could say, "Well, I'm going to pass the bill, but I'm just not going to do this section, ever." I've seen that happen. This government has done it. I've seen previous governments do it. But it's coming back—all of it's coming back.

I've got little pieces of information about why it's happening, and what I hear—and I hope it's not true, and the minister is going to speak right after me—is that you're removing all those sections that deal with WSIB from the bill. That would be a bad thing. That's not working for workers or protecting workers.

So inside that bill, and the minister may or may not be aware, is a provision that—something that people came to me about seven, eight, nine years ago—they've been asking for it for decades—and that is WSIB coverage for workers in residential care, retirement homes, group homes, youth homes, youth addictions. They're not covered by WSIB. They could be a nurse working in a retirement home. If they were in a long-term-care home, they'd get it; they don't get it.

Here's the thing: number one is, these folks are the people we care for most, whether it's our mom or our dad or our intellectually challenged, developmentally delayed son or daughter, or cousin or friend. It's hard work. It's risky work.

And it's really hard to make ends meet just working in one place—sometimes you have to work two, three. They have insurance. The problem is, if they get hurt at one job, with WSIB, they get paid for all their jobs, but the insurance—just the job they're in. Think about that. Is that fair? People who are breaking their back to help the people we love, they're caring for the people we care for most, and the government would take that away?

I've introduced that bill about six times, debated it twice—that's a lot. It's important because the fact that they don't have it is unfair and unjust and is not a recognition of what they do for us. We give billions and billions and billions of dollars back to their employers. And who are their employers? Michael Dell owns retirement homes. The retirement homes came in and said, "You can't do this. It's going to cost too much money. We don't make enough." Really? American hedge funds.

1440

So instead of working for workers and protecting workers, if the government doesn't do this, the only people they are protecting are the Michael Dells and the millionaires and billionaires who own retirement homes. They're not protecting workers. They're not giving them the coverage they deserve. I don't know who's up there, but there may be people who work in retirement homes up there. They know—they're not covered.

Can you imagine a nurse not being covered by WSIB? My mom was a nurse. It's dangerous work just because

there are a lot of—people are sometimes difficult; sometimes they're heavy. There's a lot going on sometimes. They have too many patients, too many residents.

So I'm glad I got this opportunity and the minister is here, because I think it's really important—and I just hope that that's not the case, because there was a commitment made to these workers back in the spring. The minister at the time—and the Premier was with them, saying, "We're going to do this." We did a big announcement. I'm hearing a lot of stuff to the contrary now. So I am not wagging a finger, but I'm pointing out that I really hope that this isn't the case—and that if it is the direction that the government is headed in, that you reverse course; that you don't do it. Slow down. Slow down. Slow down.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Hon. Trevor Jones: Speaker, it's a privilege to rise in the House today to speak to Bill 105, the Protecting Ontario's Workers and Economic Resilience Act, and in doing so, I'd like to also take a moment to speak for a moment about democracy.

Democracy does reside in this House, in this chamber, but more importantly, it resides in our communities across Ontario, where we work and where we live. I have heard some of the opposition members speak today about breaks and being away from democracy and long breaks and not doing anything. The member from Ottawa–Vanier and the member from Waterloo spoke frequently about breaks. But I know 79 people in this caucus who work tirelessly to be champions of democracy, to get the best ideas from the communities, from the doers, the people of action—the farmers, the unions, the workers, the small business owners. That's democracy in action. That's elected members, with responsibility and care and attention to detail, in their community, listening to their community, bringing those ideas back to this place, using our time wisely and being people of action, like the people we listen to.

Speaker, we've had to accept that our economic relationship with the US has changed. I'm honoured that the Premier has trusted me to serve as a leader in this government, as our collective Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, and to be an advocate and champion for the important work our public service does and our ministry does on behalf of Ontario's workers. If our economy is vibrant and strong, we have an ability to invest in health care, education, social supports, recreation and all the things that improve our quality of life. But President Trump's tariffs have created challenges for our businesses and sectors that have depended on cross-border trade for generations.

In my home community, I remember the day the Right Honourable Stephen Harper and Governor Rick Snyder from Michigan came together with a vision, a vision of a publicly owned crossing to move automotive parts, automobiles, agribusiness, fresh fruits and vegetables between Ontario and Michigan and beyond—a portal to the world. But these recent challenges have caused a ripple effect into areas where families are now dealing with rising costs in food and housing and everyday living. People are sincerely worried about their jobs and what the future holds. Employers are dealing with difficult decisions about how they can keep their businesses going and protect their workforce.

This is happening across the province. It's happening in Waterloo. It's happening in Ottawa–Vanier. It's certainly happening in Chatham-Kent–Leamington where I live. I know how deeply families in my community depend on industries connected to trade, manufacturing, agriculture. As lawmakers, we have a responsibility to protect Ontario workers, support our businesses and make sure our province is prepared for whatever comes next.

Speaker, it's a joke I use sometimes—it came from someone else, but, respectfully, I'm still apprenticing in my role as Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. I appreciate that leadership comes with great responsibility. To lead, I listen first and then act. I take that responsibility seriously, and I'll act every day with integrity. Part of that integrity is days like today, where we seize upon the democratic processes in this place to improve, to renew, to pivot, to understand what's happening in the world and take decisive action. We're elected to serve all the people of Ontario. And I was trusted with a role to enhance our government's work in supporting our workers and employers while continuing to build a stronger, more resilient economy. As a leader and our Minister of Labour, I have to ensure the legislation we bring forward reflects the challenges people are facing today while keeping an eye on the horizon.

During a recent tour of a union training facility—I was there with the Premier—I was speaking to some of our journeypersons, our mentors, our trainers of new apprentices, apprentices like me. At first, one of the journeypersons started with a joke, and he said something like, "I was interviewing an apprentice the other day, and I talked to him about potentially working a 60-hour workweek." The apprentice said, "I'm sorry, sir, I thought this was a full-time job." And I got that right away. But then, as I was disarmed with a little bit of humour, that journeyperson asked me a serious question. He said, "Minister, what's your mission? What are your priorities?" I wasn't prepared with anything specific, so I just spoke from the heart. I said three simple words that came to my mind: "Sir, we want to inspire the next generation of skilled workers. We want to train those workers the Ontario way and, most importantly, we want to protect them and get them home safely to their families every day."

They are these words, and the people behind these words, they're connected, and together they reflect the kind of future I want to help build for all our workers. I want to inspire young people across Ontario to see opportunities available to them and to see a future in the skilled trades. But I want them to understand that becoming an electrician, a plumber, a welder, or a heavy equipment operator can lead to a rewarding, well-paying career that comes with responsibility. I want them to know there's dignity and pride in building something with your hands, building something with technology.

Ontario needs that next generation of skilled workers in our young people, but it also needs people that are anywhere, at any point in their professional careers, to have the confidence and the courage to pivot and to embrace a challenging, rewarding career in the trades. There's a place for you. You can feel welcome at any point in your career.

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Recently, we celebrated leaders and champions and winners from Skilled Trades Ontario, where many are at various points in their career. One, a 40-year-old single mom who was celebrated for her work, celebrated her apprenticeship and taking her transferable skills from a past life into her future life in the skilled trades. Talk about a mentor. Talk about a leader.

Our economy is changing so quickly with technology. We also have a duty and responsibility to make sure that Ontario workers have all the skills they need to succeed in an ever-changing environment. Training gives people options. It gives people the confidence to build a sustainable future for themselves and their families.

Most importantly, Speaker, we have to protect our workers. This responsibility is one I take personally. It's in my nature to protect the people I serve. Every worker deserves to feel secure when they get to work, to be treated fairly while they're there, have the PPE they need—the protective equipment and the gear they need—that fits, feels comfortable and they're proud to wear, so they can return home safely to loved ones waiting for them.

As a police officer, I witnessed how quickly someone's life can change in an instant. I took my training seriously. I wore my personal protective gear and equipment. I understand its importance, and we're going to take safety seriously. We have to all embrace and promote safety, get our workers home at the end of every shift.

Protecting people requires us to be proactive and prepared and willing to act. Speaker, these three priorities will guide how I approach the work we do at this ministry, and they guide how we should all consider how we approach the legislation and the laws we create and debate here.

Our government understands that workers and families need more than reassurance in uncertain times. They need to know that when help is available, it's going to be there. Help will be available. Opportunities exist, and the government is prepared to act.

Across Ontario, we're making key investments to help workers navigate economic uncertainty, strengthen their skills and prepare for opportunities ahead. For workers affected by layoffs at any time and anywhere, we're investing $20 million to strengthen our POWER centres and improve supports available to them where they need them. And right now, 12 such POWER centres are operating across the province, offering a wide range of supports to more than 27,000 workers affected by some sort of work disruption. Through these centres, workers can access employment services, career guidance and help prepare for their next opportunity.

We're working with the federal government to invest more than $228 million through the Canada-Ontario Workforce Tariff Response Initiative. This investment will help those 27,000 workers—and more—upgrade their skills and prepare to embrace new opportunities.

Through round 6, our most recent round of our Skills Development Fund, we've invested nearly $260 million to support training projects, including those helping workers and industries affected by US tariffs. These investments are creating real opportunities in sectors like manufacturing, construction and other industries that are vital to our economy.

Speaker, I want workers to know that their experience is valued and there are opportunities for them to continue building their future right here in Ontario. While we work to create opportunities for tomorrow, we're helping families manage, today, the pressures they face.

Just on October 1, our minimum wage increased to $17.95 per hour. That means more money in the pockets of workers doing their best to support themselves and their families. For someone working full time at minimum wage, that increase means a substantial raise at the end of the year. I know that every dollar counts to a family paying for the costs of groceries, housing and everyday expenses. These are practical steps we're taking that make a difference in peoples' lives, and it reflects the work our government is doing to protect workers, strengthen our economy and prepare for everyone's future now.

We have a bright future. I'm optimistic. We have talented people and strong communities. We have industries that have helped build this province to be a global leader over generations. The challenges before us right now are significant, but, as an optimist, I'd like to think those opportunities that we can seize are also significant. Our responsibility here, collectively, is to make sure Ontario is ready to meet them. That means preparing our workforce and supporting our businesses. It means making sure legislation keeps pace.

Bill 105 was introduced as part of our government's broader work to protect Ontario workers and strengthen our economy. Now, I understand the importance of the issues the legislation seeks to address, and I recognize that the economic environment facing Ontario today is evolving. We need to make sure our approach reflects that reality, and we need to make sure the legislation we advance serves everyone well.

Speaker, when this legislation was first introduced back in April—take your mind back to that time and now understand that legislation and those intentions in today's context. We're clearly facing a different set of economic circumstances. Since then, tariffs have become broader, higher and more disruptive. Again, they're disrupting my communities. I want to make sure we have the right tools to protect workers, support employers and respond to the realities of today. I want to make sure the decisions we make put Ontario in the strongest possible position now and tomorrow.

Good legislation should give people confidence that their rights are protected, that employers understand their obligations to workers and that workplace safety is paramount. Our work to support workers doesn't stop with the

measures contained in this legislation. It has to continue as we learn from workers, we learn from employers, and we learn from unions and all our stakeholders. Our stakeholders are our advisers. They share their lived experience and their expertise to make us better members of provincial Parliament, to make me a better minister, to make us all better lawmakers. The work we do has to continue examining opportunities to improve workplace protections and supports.

This legislation, like most legislation, is about people: the people who get up every morning to go to work and work a long shift away from their homes, away from their families at all hours of the day; the person working an extra shift to support their kids; the apprentice building a career as a learner and a doer; workers getting close to retirement after devoting decades of service; the small business owner trying to create an opportunity and create jobs in their community; and even, and most importantly, an injured or ill worker who wants to recover and return to work, return to the life they know and the life they love. These are the people I think about when I consider the responsibility of this ministry. They deserve a government that listens, a government that's agile, a government that's prepared to act.

I entered this role, I entered public life, to be here with those three priorities in mind, in my heart and in my mind: inspire, train, protect. We all need to inspire the next generation to see opportunities. I want to help Ontario workers develop the skills they need to succeed in a changing economy. I want to strengthen protections that get people home safe every day. Speaker, if we all take the time to invest in people, we will strengthen Ontario together.

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Earlier, I spoke about 79 members that live democracy in their home communities. They work long hours tirelessly. I might add an 80th. I've seen the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane also work in his community, and I think he believes that democracy lives here and lives in his beautiful northern community, which I've visited. So maybe we'll say 80 believe democracy lives here and in our home communities and everywhere in Ontario.

We have to work together to protect workers, protect families and protect our communities for the future of this province. The economic challenges we're facing now are real. It's a clear and present danger. The pressures on workers are real, on their families, on employers.

I can assure you that as your Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, I'm passionate about making connections with the people—and learning from them—that I'm honoured to represent. I'll continue listening to people, listening to people across the aisle from me, listening to people across our communities. You can depend on my ministry to continue working with our partners to understand the challenges before us and adapt to them. I believe our government has an important role to play in helping them and helping our economy succeed. That's my responsibility. That's the one I accepted as your minister. With that responsibility, I intend to deliver on it and support the agility and the work we have to do to listen, adapt and improve lives. By improving a critical piece of legislation in this House, together we're going to improve lives.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Before I go to further debate, I recognize the member from Parkdale–High Park on a point of order.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Earlier today I introduced the page from Parkdale–High Park as the page captain, but I wanted to correct my record. It's Emily Schabas who is the page captain.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

MPP Tyler Watt: Another motion to shut down debate—I've debated far too many of these. I hear a lot from the government side talking a lot about democracy. It's a strange argument to make when we are literally debating shutting down debate early.

They don't want to hear from opposition. They don't want to hear from elected officials from across Ontario and what our constituents are concerned about. You know they said that it's urgent that they pass this bill, that they're about efficiency, and that's why we've got to shut down debate. That's why we've got to yank it out of committee. They don't want to hear amendments from opposition. They don't want to hear from experts or stakeholders in the field. They've got to get this passed as soon as possible.

So I ask: Then why were we gone for five months from this Legislature? Five months we were gone. Then we come back, Speaker, and we just ram through a bunch of omnibus bills, one that has 18 different schedules in it consisting of things like dentures, child welfare, chiropractors, long-term care, X-rays, OHIP—major changes to public health—social services, health care appeals, OSAP—that one got slipped in there—private career colleges, optometrists, patient privacy, retirement homes—all in one omnibus bill. And right now, we're having to sit here wasting time debating shutting down debate early.

I see some amazing health care workers that are up in the public gallery right now. I love you all. Keep up the amazing work. While this government is here debating shutting down debate, we should be spending time debating what we're going to do for those people, those health care workers who are having to go every single day. They're just burnt out. Their workplace isn't safe. They don't have proper support. They themselves may not even have health care.

I mentioned the other day, when we were debating the NDP's motion, that it took me four years before I finally got health care as a registered nurse. We are not taking care of our health care workers. Isn't there a bill here we're debating that's all about protecting workers? What is there for our health care workers in this bill? We won't even be able to put forward amendments in it.

So when I hear the government talking about democracy, sure, you're playing by the technical democratic rules, but when you shut down the Legislature for five months and you come back with barely any legislation

ready—this is why the OSAP stuff, by the way, was put into that bill. Let's be real. They're like, "Okay, we got caught. The scam has been exposed. We left this loophole open for years and years. Hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayer dollars has just been funnelled to a handful of private career colleges defrauding the taxpayer and government. Let's throw it in the denture bill. Let's throw it in that one, because you know what? We're not going to debate it anyway. We'll just shut down debate, we'll pass it and we'll move on."

It will be interesting to see when they shut down and when we're coming back. I have a sneaking suspicion we won't be back in February. So, again, if this is all about efficiency, speed and action for Ontario, then why were we gone so long? Why do we have to rush through these bills?

You know what's not in any of these bills? No real solutions for students. This OSAP legislation that was slipped in the omnibus bill, in the denture bill, the only thing it does is it finally closes the loopholes that this government made permanent in 2022, and it protects this government from any lawsuits.

There is so much smoke with this OSAP scandal but no solutions for students. What about all of those students in private career colleges that are training to become PSWs, early childhood educators, lab techs, dental hygienists, massage therapists—their year, it's gone; it's over. There's nothing for them in this omnibus bill. There's no restitution for them. They are now on the hook to pay back whatever OSAP loan they had in the past, but they couldn't even finish their program. So much for protecting students and future workers.

There's nothing in these bills for health care workers. There's a lot of power grab to the health minister when it comes to taking over public health boards, again removing any of the importance of local representation, local democracy and centralizing it to the health minister here in downtown Toronto at Queen's Park—nothing to actually address what's going on in our hospitals.

Nothing to deal with the fact that our emergency rooms are beyond overrun—the Queensway Carleton Hospital, my hospital in Nepean, just the other day was over 120% capacity. You know what's going on right now? They are laying off nurses across Ontario. They're laying off health care workers across Ontario. Why is that happening? You would think if I trusted what the health minister is saying, this world-class health care system has never been better—yet nurses and health care workers are getting laid off. Where is the protection for those workers in any of this legislation? None—we won't even have the chance to add amendments to that.

Nothing in here for affordability—we're in a cost-of-living crisis. You hear about this all the time. Listen to your constituents. They are struggling right now—nothing in here about that.

No real safety measures in here—I was happy to see at least something to address the muffler, or noise, situation, but again, it's just increasing the fine. It's not actually doing anything to address the problem in the first place.

MPP Wayne Gates: That's a big issue too.

MPP Tyler Watt: It is a big issue. It is. A lot of people contact my office about it.

Nothing in here for education—we have a bunch of education worker unions that are potentially going on strike in the near future. This government isn't serious about making a deal with them. They are not serious about listening to front-line workers' problems, the fact that class sizes are out of control, violence in classrooms is the norm. The stories that I hear from teachers and EAs and parents and students, they're insane. And you know what I had to hear the other day on the radio? A Protect Ontario ad about how they're reducing class sizes. My mind is constantly blown by this government.

1510

We were away for five months, and the tradition now—and do you know what? I've asked some of my colleagues who have been here longer than me—I've only been here for about two years. I've asked them, "Is this the norm?"—and it's not. We get legislation introduced—an omnibus bill—and then we are expected to debate it the very next day because we've got to rush it through. "We've got to get this passed so we can close up shop and take a few months off." So to hear—

Interjections.

MPP Tyler Watt: Sorry, gentlemen; it's a little distracting.

To hear this government make an argument of how this is democratic—as I mentioned, yes, you are technically within the rules. But the disrespect towards your constituents is outrageous. For every single bill that is introduced, I like to get feedback from my constituents in Nepean; I want to hear what their thoughts are on it. I want to hear what they like about the bill, and I want to hear what they don't like and what they would like changed. But there's no room for opportunity to actually get that done with this government. The Minister of Labour said that we have to work together. I totally agree. But there is zero collaboration between the government and this side. So how are the values and needs and concerns of constituents across the whole province actually being addressed and reflected in any of this legislation?

And at the end of the day, it's just frustrating to have to waste time debating a time allocation motion.

What we could do right now to start the healing in our health care system and our education system and so many other issues that are going on—real, tangible legislation; action and change for those health care workers, for our students, for our teachers, our education workers, your everyday Ontarian, young people who are struggling so hard right now not only to get an education but to get a good-paying job that's secure.

Youth unemployment in this province—it's historically high, one of the worst in Canada. Young people feel totally left behind, so when they have to look at what's going on with their government—"What is the government of Ontario actually doing for me?"—and they see this. They see that we are spending our time debating a time allocation motion to shut down debate on a handful of pieces of

legislation that, frankly, does nothing to actually address all of those issues.

What isn't on fire right now? I know we say "this is in crisis" a lot—but, frankly, it is.

When thousands of health care workers are being laid off and those positions are being cancelled across Ontario, I would argue that that's a crisis. Hospitals are already taking on the brunt of our health care system. There is not enough investment in the community, in home care. Prevention? Ha! It's not happening in this province. So everyone ends up in the hospital, in the emergency room. Luckily enough, at least in Ottawa, the emergency rooms are open; you'll be waiting an eternity, but they're open. But that's not true for many rural and northern parts of Ontario. Imagine that you're having a stroke and you have to be helicoptered to Toronto. Our health care system is in crisis, and nothing is being addressed. I can't even get the health minister to acknowledge the fact that my colleagues are being laid off right now. I am perplexed as to what working at a hospital is even going to be like—I'm looking forward to returning, but as I've mentioned before, I have never seen morale this bad. And when you make nurses and health care workers feel like just a number, it's atrocious for morale; it's not good for the workers; it's not good for the patients. But that's where the brunt of health care is being dealt with right now.

This government's priorities are just all over the place. They're spending hundreds of millions of dollars on self-congratulating ads instead of dealing with the hospital crisis, instead of actually making a deal with teachers and education workers in Ontario and addressing what their actual concerns are.

When was the last time the education minister actually visited a classroom that wasn't prepared and set up for him? When was the last time the health minister went to an emergency room that, again, wasn't prepared for her, to see what is real? Every time I visit anything, whether it be a hospital, long-term care etc., I like to pull one of the workers aside and say, "Tell me what's really going on." The health minister has so much power and should be doing that. I'm starting to believe she believes what she's saying.

I'm not making this up. This is real lived experience. I still work at a hospital. I'm sharing my own personal experience. I'm sharing the experience of my colleagues, these just horrific stories, and it's like the minister is just on planet Mars. So when we have a bill that's about protecting Ontario workers, I sure expect that we're going to do something to actually protect Ontario workers—but alas.

Well, Speaker, on that note, as much as I know everyone here would love to hear me speak for another six minutes—

Interjections.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Yes, keep going. You can do it.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you. Thank you.

I just want to say I oppose this. It's not necessary. We should be trying to do our best to improve people's lives. We should be doing our best to actually put forward good, thoughtful, informed, evidence-based legislation that actually reflects what people are asking for.

There is some good stuff in these bills. There's some great long-term-care stuff in that omnibus bill. But when there's no ability to actually discuss it properly, there's no properly debating it—we're having to stand here and debate ending debate. So yes, that is technically your democracy, but that's not democracy that's thriving.

With that, Speaker, thank you all for your attention. I love you all out there. Keep up the great work.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Mr. Adil Shamji: I'm very grateful for the opportunity to address the motion that is before us, which actually represents the one and only time this government has tried to speed anything up.

Across our province, we have ER wait times that have gone up. We've got hallway health care at levels that we've never seen before—2,000 people getting care in hallways, closets and bathrooms, more than we've ever seen before. We've got people waiting longer to get in to see their family doctor and people struggling to get access to care.

Instead of doing the work to try and make those things faster, to eliminate those wait-lists, to look after the health care workers who are in the galleries above us—instead of doing any of that kind of stuff—the only thing that they're interested in speeding up is any possible scrutiny of the legislation that they're bringing before us.

I cannot fathom any reason whatsoever that we can't possibly have enough time to examine these three pieces of legislation properly. This Legislature will have sat for 14 weeks out of 52 this year, when in fact it should have sat closer to 26 weeks. We are scheduled to adjourn on December 8 and, quite frankly, I have no problem if we were to continue for another week or two weeks after that if it meant that this would allow us to do the work properly, to allow the democratic scrutiny that our government and our democracy requires.

In fact, this very motion is proof for why we shouldn't be speeding this up. We're bringing Bill 105, which has already gone through committee, back to committee for further amendments because it was sped through the last time. Literally, what is being asked for in this motion is proof of what happens when you don't do your homework and try and rush things through.

Now, this government doesn't really care about doing homework. It really only cares about getting out and getting through things as quickly as possible. For example, the Legislature today is going to adjourn about three hours earlier than it should. The members who are sitting in the galleries, our health care workers, our nurses and people that keep our health care system operating never have the luxury of leaving three hours early just so that they can attend a—believe it or not—$1,500-a-plate fundraiser with the Premier.

1520

For those of us who are health care workers, we stay to the end of the shift and actually, more often than not, stay

a couple of hours after the shift because there aren't enough of us around—because we have a government that's too busy rushing out to the latest fundraiser, too busy rushing on its legislation, too busy twiddling its thumbs over the summer to actually get their legislation right. Meanwhile, the rest of us who are toiling in emergency departments, toiling in our hospitals, in our community care clinics and primary care, doing what it takes to make sure that patients get the care that they deserve, no matter how cash-strapped our health care system is and no matter how much disrespect is flung our way.

Today, we have an opportunity to actually make sure that we don't just give health care workers the respect that they deserve, but to give Ontarians the respect that they deserve and to make sure that this Legislature, our government, this democracy gets the respect that it deserves by making sure that three bills—Bill 105, Bill 140 and Bill 148—get the time and attention that they deserve.

I would urge all members to respect our democracy and to learn something from the work ethic of the health care workers who are in the gallery here. If we don't have enough time by December 8 to study Bill 140 and Bill 148 properly in committee, then do what they would do: Stay past the end of your shift. Let's stay for another week. Let's make sure that the public has an opportunity to weigh in on these vital pieces of legislation.

I wish I had the time to reiterate what is wrong, in my opinion, with Bill 140 and Bill 148, but I yield the rest of my time so we can get on to the more important—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate? Further debate? Further debate?

Pursuant to standing order 50(b), I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Clark has moved government notice of motion number 21, relating to the allocation of time on the following bills: Bill 105, An Act to enact the Strengthening Talent Agency Regulation Act, 2026 and to amend various Acts; Bill 140, An Act to enact two Acts and to amend various Acts; and Bill 148, An Act to enact the Intimate Images Protection Act, 2026 and to amend various Acts.

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

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

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

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

Vote deferred.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Orders of the day?

Hon. Steve Clark: If you seek it, you'll find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to see the clock at 6 o'clock. Agreed? Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

PATIENT-TO-NURSE RATIOS FOR HOSPITALS ACT, 2026

LOI DE 2026 SUR LES RATIOS PATIENTS-PERSONNEL INFIRMIER DANS LES HÔPITAUX

Madame Gélinas moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 19, An Act to amend the Health Protection and Promotion Act with respect to maximum patient-to-nurse ratios / Projet de loi 19, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection et la promotion de la santé en ce qui concerne les ratios patients-personnel infirmier maximaux.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Pursuant to standing order 100, the member has 12 minutes for their presentation.

M^me^ France Gélinas: I would like to start by thanking all of the hard-working nurses who switched shifts, who took time off so that they could be here with us today to show how important it is for all of them to get nurse-to-patient-ratio legislation in Ontario.

Thank you to the tens of thousands of nurses who signed petitions. Many of them were read in this House, and I know that many more are watching us on TV and online. I'll name a few. I cannot name all of you—I'm sorry—but I will say a huge thank you to Jamie-Lynne Hunt from CUPE, Sharon Richer from OCHU, Karen McKay-Eden from ONA. We also have Roslynn Blodgett from OPSEU, as well as Alanna Coleman, Ashley Fry-O'Rourke and Trinity Schenk, all three of them nurses with RNAO who came for the press conference this morning.

Thank you, ladies, for your support, and thank you for what you do on a daily basis, taking care of us. It's much appreciated.

Nurse-to-patient ratios, Speaker, are very important for many, many reasons. They directly affect patient survival, complication rates, care quality. They shape how quickly and safely care is delivered, which directly influences the level of stress and pressure that nurses are facing every day at work.

The bill is quite simple. It sets out how many patients a nurse should care for at any time. I will read the bill. It's very simple, one page.

The Ministry of Health shall ensure that the ratio of patients to nurses does not exceed the following:

—one patient for one nurse for critical care patients on ventilators;

—two patients per nurse for critical care patients not on ventilators, and highly dependent patients who need mental health care;

—three patients to one nurse for specialized care;

—four patients per nurse for in-patient and palliative care;

—five patients per nurse for rehab care, except seven patients per nurse for rehab on night shift—very simple.

The mix of nurse practitioners, registered nurses, registered practical nurses will be figured out during regulation.

I made the bill as simple as possible so that everybody could support.

I'm also fully aware that there are other health professionals in our hospitals: respiratory technologists, physiotherapists etc. We're certainly open to helping every member of the teams. But these nurses here today, they are the only 24/7 bedside health care providers. They need our help, which is why they are here today. They need to pass the nurse-to-patient ratio bill.

On Monday this week, I had Toni and Darin Heffern come to Queen's Park. They are the parents of Jordan Heffern. Their daughter, Jordan, was an amazing athlete, a straight-A student, a leader. She was also deeply empathetic, compassionate, approachable. She was patient. She was kind. Nursing was a natural fit for her. After graduating from university, she started working as a nurse in the spring of 2023. Unfortunately, she died by suicide in August 2024 because of the multiple work injuries and working conditions at her hospital that led her to take her own life.

Following her death, Dr. Rietze and Dr. Heale did a study and found that 41% of newly graduated nurses working in our hospitals right now have considered suicide since entering the profession. Think about that, Speaker: 41%. Some 60% are in therapy, and nearly 30% of them rely on medication for anxiety, PTSD and severe depression. All of those nurses deserve our help. One huge step to help them is to bring nurse-to-patient ratios to our hospitals.

I'm sharing this with you because the researchers made recommendations. The number one recommendation: Implement nurse-to-patient ratios. It not only saves patients' lives; it saves nurses' lives. I hope that every member in this House will vote to protect all of the new grad nurses from considering suicide and ending their life.

1530

We can do this today by voting for a nurse-to-patient ratio. It is doable. California did it decades ago. Australia did it decades ago. More recently, British Columbia and Oregon implemented a nurse-to-patient ratio, and I'm proud to say that Manitoba and Nova Scotia are both working on implementation of nursing ratios right now.

There are, I would say, many, many reasons why nurse-to-patient ratios are good, but let me give you three major reasons why you should vote for this bill, why Ontario should implement a nurse-to-patient ratio. First, it improves patient care. Second, it makes working conditions for nurses livable. And third, it saves money.

On the patient side, it enables timely monitoring. A nurse can spot early warning signs of deterioration and act fast. That helps people, and it often saves lives. It reduces preventable harm, lowers the risk of medical errors, medication errors, the risk of falls, pressure ulcers, hospital-acquired infections. It improves communications during discharge when nurses have the time to listen to their patient, to answer their questions. They prepare them for discharge, and it lowers the rate of readmission.

Patient safety research links safe nurse-to-patient ratios to lower mortality rates. For every additional patient a nurse takes on, there is a 7% increase in patients' deaths. A study found that patients in hospital without a safe ratio had a 26% higher death rate. The opposite research shows that death rates have declined in California since a nurse-to-patient ratio came into effect in 2004. In other words, staffing ratios save patients' lives, shorten hospital stays, give better infection control, fewer complications, higher patient satisfaction, while lowering readmission rates.

What does it do for nurses? Everybody here could tell you way better than I, but I will try. Low staffing levels are unsafe for nurses. They are physically, mentally and emotionally draining, as evidenced by what many, many studies show us. There's a high rate of physical injury, depression, burnout, sadness, moral distress and moral injury, workplace violence, a sense of powerlessness and demoralization. The studies for all of the nurses, not just the young nurses, show that 61% of nurses right now are having trouble sleeping, 36% suffer from depression, 65% report anxiety, 75% report high stress and 56% of all the good people in here dread going to work.

A nurse-to-patient ratio changes all of that. It reduces burnout. It helps with recruitment and retention. It addresses the hardships that are faced by nurses on each and every shift. I'll give you an example: In Australia, the number of nurses increased by 24%, with more than 7,000 inactive nurses rejoining the workforce once they implemented safe patient ratios.

And it saves hospitals money. Decades of research shows that hiring enough nurses—sure, there's an upfront investment, but it leads to fewer complications, which can be very expensive; shorter hospital stays; lower readmission rates; and reduced staff turnover. It saves hospitals money. There's research in Pennsylvania that shows that hospitals that were able to reduce nursing burnout had 6,200 fewer hospital-acquired infections, with a $6-million savings.

A nurse-to-patient ratio is a win-win-win. It's a win for patients, who will get better care and face less risk of infection, bedsores and death. It is a win for nurses, who are able to provide the top-quality care that they know how to provide. They avoid burnout, injury, violence, aggression at work. All of this can be addressed by passing the nurse-to-patient ratio. It is also a win for hospitals. Hospitals can save money on care that doesn't need to be provided because there were no medical errors. It saves money on sick leave, on short- and long-term disability, on recruitment costs, which allows millions of dollars to be redirected to patient care rather than to those expenses.

We have debated this bill before, but since then, the crisis in our hospitals has gone from bad to worse. Look at all the people here, Speaker. Over 500 nurses took time off work, switched shifts. Many of them will end up working nights or weekends because they wanted to be here today. They want to be here today because they need our help. As legislators, we can help them. When we need them, those

nurses are there for us. They are here now because they need us to be there for them.

I hope all of you will realize the important decision you have to make today. Will you help the nurses who came here, the nurses who are working so hard to try to take care of us, who say they need nurse-to-patient ratios in order to continue to provide quality care, in order to stay in the profession and not leave the profession of nursing because of burnout? Will you listen to them? Will you show that you care? Will you show the important decision that you're able to make to help all of the people here and all of the 200,000 nurses in this province? I hope you say yes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Mr. Adil Shamji: I'm pleased to rise today to discuss Bill 19, what I consider to be legislation that could be profoundly transformational for our health care system.

On December 8, our Legislature will adjourn, if all goes as planned. And while the members in this House will go home, the members in the gallery and other health care workers like them across our province will not. In fact, this will be their busiest time of year because as we enter the holidays, they will be there in our emergency departments, in our hospitals and in our primary care clinics delivering the vital and life-saving care that Ontarians require.

But the reality is that over the last roughly eight and a half years, it's become more and more difficult than ever to provide that care. Hallway health care has skyrocketed. Emergency department wait times have gone up. And the conditions under which our health care workers are operating have become more challenging and more difficult than ever before.

We have out-migration of health care workers. We have massive attrition that has arisen because of an epidemic of workplace violence, because of burnout, because of moral injury. Not too many years ago, we were in the very depths of the pandemic and people were assembling on their porches and banging on pots and pans. At the very same time, though, we had a government that was implementing Bill 124, calling them heroes but simultaneously saying, "You know what? Their work actually wasn't worth more than 1% per year."

As a result, it's no surprise that we have a profound challenge of understaffing across our health care system, which is creating massive problems. The challenge with understaffing is that it leads to more mistakes because people have to rush to do more with less time. They have to assume more responsibility, more than is reasonable to expect anyone to take on.

You can have as many hospital beds as you want, but if you don't have the people to actually staff those beds, what ends up happening? People end up backing up into the emergency department, driving up wait times in our ERs. And, of course, the health care workforce that we depend on to keep us safe becomes burnt out. They decide to leave their profession, or they cut back on the number of shifts that they take.

Those members in the House who know my history will know that I too am a health care worker. I'm a physician. And there are many people that say that physicians are the most trusted profession. That's not true. They're the second-most trusted profession. Nurses are the most trusted profession, and I know exactly why, because nurses have saved my butt on more than one occasion. They spend a ton of time with the patients. They are looking over my shoulder, and they know if I've put the wrong label on the chart or done the wrong prescription; or, "You know what? I think that I can discharge a patient"—but they've spent just a little bit more time with the patient and, because of that, that there's some sort of concern: The patient is worried; they don't have somewhere safe to go home. And they're tapping me on the shoulder and saying, "You know what? I want you to hold off, or call medicine and get them admitted to hospital."

1540

We need more nurses, not fewer nurses. We need more of them at the bedside, and this is what this legislation proposes to do. It proposes to establish safe staffing levels, implemented through ratios. I think there is incredible merit to that, which is why I'm proud to rise to this legislation.

I don't have a lot of time. My admiration for nurses and all health care workers is well known. You may also know, if you belong to the Ontario Nurses' Association in particular, that I tried to pass legislation that was focused on health care worker retention. It included not just nurse-to-patient ratios but patient-provider ratios because we don't just need nurses at the bedside; we need a range of health care workers so that everybody can contribute to their maximum ability. I tried to introduce that last week, and, regrettably, the members on this side of the House voted against that, and I'm very sorry for that.

But what I wanted to do was to take a moment just to go through this legislation and actually share how I think that we can make it even better and how we can make it even stronger.

As a health care worker, I'll always stand up for nurses, but I will always stand up for all health care workers. I think, as we talk about safe staffing, the conversation should be about nurses but not only nurses. We should be talking about safe staffing levels for PSWs and porters and respiratory therapists. For example, when I look at this and I see that there's a proposed patient-to-nurse ratio of 1 to 1 for critical care patients on ventilators, well, I think that's very reasonable. But I also think that nurses shouldn't be the ones who are exclusively responsible for the ventilator. We should have safe standards for the number of respiratory therapists who are there.

I've been in operating rooms where the patient is so critically ill that we don't have one anesthesiologist monitoring the patient; we have two anesthesiologists monitoring the patient. In the same way, for some of our most critically ill patients in the ICU I actually think that 1 to 1 may not be enough. We may actually have to have 1 to 2. I'm talking about two nurses, not two patients, just to be clear, because I find the members on this side of the House always find the worst way to interpret my remarks.

I think there's merit in talking about all health care workers, and also I think there is even merit in going beyond the ratios that have been enumerated in this legislation. For example, when I look at a patient-to-nurse ratio of 5 to 1 for rehab care, other than on night shifts, well I actually think that there are some hospitals in our province that are already doing a better job than that—5 to 1, even that may be rather onerous. I know that there are good rehab hospitals in our province that set a standard of no more than 3 to 1 or 4 to 1. Again, I'm talking about three or four patients to one nurse, not five patients to one nurse.

I would encourage all members in the House—I hope that people are going to vote to support this legislation. And if passed, when it goes to public hearings and committee and we look at clause-by-clause, I hope that there will be an opportunity for us to actually make some of these things stricter.

Look, I could go on and on and on. I love the health care workers who are here in the Legislature and across the province, but there's someone that we need to hear from more than that. That is my good friend and colleague the member for Nepean, who is a registered nurse and is far more qualified to talk about this than I am. With that, I yield the rest of my time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

M. Anthony Leardi: J'aimerais, tout d'abord, remercier les milliers d'infirmières et d'infirmiers de l'Ontario qui, chaque jour, contribuent à prendre soin de la population de l'Ontario. Que ce soit les infirmiers qui travaillent dans les hôpitaux ou dans les foyers de soins de longue durée ou dans un autre endroit, le gouvernement de l'Ontario vous remercie pour votre travail assidu.

L'Ontario s'attaque aux défis liés à la main-d'oeuvre en augmentant le nombre de professionnels de la santé. Depuis 2018, notre gouvernement a enregistré plus de 100 000 infirmières et infirmiers supplémentaires en Ontario. Ce n'est pas seulement une augmentation du nombre de personnel; c'est une augmentation nette. Ça veut dire que, lorsqu'on tient compte de l'ensemble du personnel infirmier qui a quitté la profession, par exemple pour partir à la retraite, et lorsque vous ajoutez le nombre d'infirmières qui sont entrées, il y a une augmentation d'environ 17 % totale de personnel dans notre système de santé publique. En plus, depuis 2018, notre gouvernement a enregistré près de 20 000 médecins supplémentaires.

Nos hôpitaux n'emploient pas uniquement des infirmières et des infirmiers. Nos hôpitaux s'appuient sur un mélange de professionnels de la santé. Le personnel de nos hôpitaux comprend également des préposés au services de soutien à la personne et de nombreux autres professionnels paramédicaux.

L'Ontario compte maintenant plus de 192 000 infirmières et infirmiers, soit une augmentation de 17 % depuis 2018. Cette croissance est soutenue par des investissements importants dans l'éducation, et la formation et la rétention du personnel.

D'abord, parlons de nos investissements dans l'éducation. Nous avons ajouté 8 000 nouvelles places dans les programmes d'éducation. Sur ces 8 000 nouvelles places, 150 places sont réservées pour l'éducation d'infirmières praticiennes ou d'infirmiers praticiens. Actuellement, 30 000 étudiants sont inscrits à des programmes de sciences infirmières. Tous ces investissements permettent de poursuivre la croissance de la main-d'oeuvre sans avoir recours à des exigences rigides en matière de dotation.

Les hôpitaux doivent disposer de la souplesse nécessaire pour déployer différents professionnels de la santé, notamment des infirmières et infirmiers, des infirmières praticiennes et infirmiers praticiens, des médecins, des pharmaciens et d'autres professionnels paramédicaux en fonction des besoins des patients et des réalités locales.

Les ratios obligatoires entre le personnel infirmier et les patients ne tiennent pas compte du fait que la complexité des besoins des patients, la taille des hôpitaux, les services spécialisés et les besoins en personnel varient considérablement d'une collectivité et d'un milieu de soins à l'autre. Des ratios fixes pourraient aggraver les pénuries de personnel en obligeant les hôpitaux à réduire le nombre de lits ou les services offerts lorsque les niveaux de dotation ne répondent pas aux exigences prescrites. Les hôpitaux ruraux et du Nord seraient particulièrement touchés par l'imposition de ratios obligatoires, ce qui pourrait nuire à l'accès aux soins dans ces collectivités.

L'Ontario devrait favoriser la sécurité des patients tout en permettant aux hôpitaux de répondre aux besoins opérationnels en temps réel.

La province réduit sa dépendance envers les agences de placement de personnel. L'élargissement des champs de pratique des infirmières autorisées, des infirmières auxiliaires autorisées et des infirmières praticiennes et infirmiers praticiens permet aux équipes de soins de santé de travailler plus efficacement et d'améliorer l'accès aux soins sans devoir s'appuyer sur des formules rigides en matière de dotation. Nous faisons confiance aux experts médicaux pour prendre les bonnes décisions quant à la manière d'assurer une dotation en personnel sécuritaire dans leurs hôpitaux.

Selon l'Association des hôpitaux de l'Ontario, le gouvernement devrait avoir des préoccupations concernant ce qui a été proposé ce soir. Selon Anthony Dale, de l'Association des hôpitaux de l'Ontario : « Les hôpitaux prennent continuellement, en temps réel, des décisions visant à assurer des niveaux de dotation sécuritaires et appropriés. Pour ce faire, ils s'appuient sur des équipes interdisciplinaires, composées notamment d'infirmières autorisées et d'autres professionnels de la santé, qui exercent pleinement leur champ de pratique. »

1550

Et pour conclure, j'aimerais remercier toujours les milliers d'infirmières et d'infirmiers de l'Ontario qui, chaque jour, contribuent à prendre soin de notre population.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I just want to say, I don't know how much more nurses can take in this province. They're at the breaking point.

I'm going to read and amplify their voices. An Ontario nurse dealt with a chaotic shift; her mind raced between priorities: "'Am I going to be able to make the palliative patient comfortable? Am I going to try to save the drug user? Or am I going to get the naked and confused woman off the floor? What am I going to do?' ... She painted a scene of urgency and confusion as she attempted to split her attention among five high-needs patients."

Nurses tell us they don't have the equipment to do the work that they're asked to do. Violence against them in the workplace is increasing. One nurse watched her own colleague get knocked out in the emergency room.

The motion that the member from Nickel Belt has brought forward is not prescriptive. It's a reach across the aisle. It's like, let's work together. Let's figure out nurse-to-patient ratios in Ontario.

Nanos Research reports that out of 551 nurses in Ontario, roughly eight in 10 said they're fearful one of their patients might be harmed because they have so many demands on them. This is not tenable, it is not sustainable and there doesn't seem to be any empathy for nurses in Ontario on their working conditions or the lived experiences of their patients.

Let's do this. Do the right thing. It feels good to support nurses in Ontario; trust us.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I recognize the member from Nepean.

MPP Tyler Watt: I want to start off by saying that I am a proud registered nurse and I love being a nurse.

Interjections.

MPP Tyler Watt: Thank you. Thank you.

What is challenging, though, is working in the current health care system in Ontario. It's a big reason why I decided to run for this position, because I couldn't stand aside and watch what was happening to our health care system; what is happening to nurses, health care workers and our patients.

When a common experience that most nurses and health care workers can relate to is being spit on, verbally assaulted, physically assaulted, permanently injured, there is something that is gravely wrong in our health care system, and it is this government's responsibility to ensure that we are actually taking care of our health care workers.

If we actually ensure that nurses and health care workers are healthy, that they are properly supported, that violence and harassment is not tolerated whatsoever in any health care setting, that we make sure that they have access to health care themselves—mental health supports and enough physical expertise and support where they work—then we can actually start to work in a system that is going to protect our patients and actually provide competent, quality care to them.

That's why we all got into this sector. That's why I became a nurse, because I want to help people. I studied for years in nursing school, did a ton of clinical placements, graduated at the start of COVID. I remember when they banged their pots and pans for us, called us heroes—which we're sick of hearing from this government, by the way—and then slapped us in the face with Bill 124. They froze our wages during a pandemic. Think of how insulting that is. Think of how demoralizing that is. Then you've got to go into work, day in and day out, and you have no idea what you're walking into. I am used to and, frankly, at this point, expect that I will be working short, meaning, how many nurses have called in sick for that day?

I want to reiterate that I'm going to be sharing my experience as a nurse, but I applaud and appreciate all the health care workers who go into taking care of our patients. We couldn't do it without the PSWs and everyone else involved.

When it comes to something like nurse-patient ratios, that is something that would actually tell nurses that the government is listening. It's a step forward in actually healing our health care system. It would give nurses a bit of hope that we are working towards something: to create an actual safe environment where we can actually take care of our patients. It's not abnormal that a patient will code, that you deal with some type of health emergency and then, of course, all of your attention and expertise is on that patient.

My patient codes, myself and my whole team, we are there, but when you are working so short, what happens to all the other patients that are there when you are always working with the absolute bare minimum, if that? Think of what that does to someone. You don't have enough resources to actually protect everyone and take care of everyone and do the things that you want do as a nurse. It's more than just keeping someone alive; it is about connecting with them, human to human.

Building that nurse-to-patient therapeutic relationship is one of the most special things about this career. I work in geriatric rehab, and I love sitting down with my patients—they could be 90 to 100 years old—and hearing about their life. You don't have time to do that anymore. When you have six to 10 patients, you're just going around surviving. You have so many tasks you've got to get done; you have so many meds you have to give out. You don't have time to do all the extra stuff that actually will benefit that patient: to have a proper sit-down, a conversation with them and find out what they're concerned about, find out what they're worried about. There's probably other stuff going on than just whatever their immediate health care need is. I don't know what's going on at home; I don't know if they have proper supports. But the fact of the matter is, we don't have the time anymore to actually even start to address that. We are just surviving in this health care system.

At the Queensway Carleton, in particular, in Nepean, we do incredible work there. I have so much respect and absolutely adore my nurse colleagues there, but we need proper support from this government. We need to stop the nurse layoffs. We need to make sure that we're properly funding and supporting our health care workers. That starts with stopping the layoffs. We need to make sure that

if we are going to get to something like nurse-patient ratios, that the funding is there, that the political will from the government is there. I'm tired of listening to the health minister talk about a health care system that doesn't exist.

We deserve better. Nurses deserve better. Our patients deserve better. And something like this, voting yes, would go a long way for our health care workers.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's an honour to rise and speak in support of Bill 19, and I want to thank the member from Nickel Belt for bringing this bill forward.

The reality in Ontario is, all of our systems of care are in crisis. Nurses feel this each and every day. We see it especially in our hospitals, with emergency department wait times off the charts and hallway medicine levels happening at an unprecedented rate.

I remember in 2022, during the leaders' debate, I think the most shared clip is when I asked the Premier if he'd ever spoken to a nurse, and I'm asking that question today. Because if he had spoken to nurses, he would know that 90% of nurses surveyed say they're burned out, stressed out and barely hanging on. If he had spoken to nurses, he would know that 95% have experienced violence or harassment in the workplace and that 60% have experienced significant physical violence in the workplace.

Let's be very clear in the province of Ontario right now: Our nurses are overworked, they're underpaid, they're exhausted and they're stressed out. But to their credit, they are holding our health care system together with love and duct tape, and they need more duct tape. They need more reinforcements. But what they have gotten instead in the last year and a half is a cut of 1,900 registered nurses and a cut of almost three million patient hours of care. Like, how is that even possible? How is that even possible that the government would somehow think that's the right way to handle the human resource crisis in our health care system? I just don't get it.

I want to quote Erin Ariss, who's the president of ONA, the Ontario Nurses' Association: "The loss of more than three million hours of front-line care per year will have a devastating impact on nurses and health care professionals, and everyone in this province"—and I want to emphasize the "everyone," because it's patients who pay the price. And let's be honest: If we don't take care of the people who care for our loved ones, our loved ones will not get the care they deserve.

1600

That's exactly why all of us should be supporting this bill to bring in mandatory nurse-to-patient ratios—because we know they work. When they were brought in in California, there was a major reduction in occupational injury and illness rates. They've been brought in in British Columbia, Australia. In other jurisdictions where they've had mandatory ratios, they have worked. So why isn't it happening in Ontario? Why isn't it happening here?

I'm actually sick and tired of this. I'm sick and tired of Ontario being the lowest per capita funded health care system in the country. The government says we don't have the money. In addition to being the lowest per capita funded, we have the lowest number of nurses per 100,00 patients in the country as well. And it's all related to the fact that we have a government that's not willing to make the investments needed to shore up our health care system and ensure that the nurses, the doctors, the PSWs and all the other front-line health care workers have the resources they need across our entire systems of care.

We know where we can find the money. If we ask the 1,550 people in Ontario with wealth over $100 million and the 38 billionaires in Ontario with wealth over a billion dollars just to pay a little, tiny percentage of that wealth as a wealth tax, we can raise $26 billion. Imagine what these nurses could do with a fraction of that $26 billion to shore up our health care system. They deserve it. The people of Ontario deserve it. Our patients deserve it. Let's get it done.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

MPP Susan Lahey: I rise today to speak to Bill 19, which would amend the Health Protection and Promotion Act to establish maximum patient-to-nurse ratios in hospitals.

I am quite sure I can safely say that every member of this House shares the same belief: that patients should receive safe, timely and appropriate care, and that the nurses and other health professionals who care for them should have the support they need to do their jobs.

That being said, care requirements can vary greatly from one patient to another and from one moment to the next. Staffing decisions must be able to reflect those needs.

Bill 19 proposes fixed ratios for certain settings, including a 1-to-1 ratio for ventilated critical care and a 2-to-1 ratio for other intensive care and highly dependent mental health care. The intention to support patients and nurses is admirable, but legislating fixed ratios across every hospital and care setting in the province would limit their ability to respond to the actual needs of their patients and their communities.

Patient acuity varies. Hospital size, specialty services and local circumstances vary. A staffing model may work in one setting but may not be appropriate in another. And hospitals need the flexibility to make evidence-based decisions in real time—decisions based on the patients in their care and the team available to support them. That team could include a variety of care workers: registered nurses, registered practical nurses, nurse practitioners, physicians, respiratory therapists, pharmacists, and other allied health professionals. That is not a team that can be boiled down to simple ratios. When each professional is able to work to their full scope of practice, the whole team can respond more effectively to their patients, meaning more effective care.

The Ontario Hospital Association has emphasized the importance of this approach. Anthony Dale has said, "Ontario's hospitals continuously make safe and appropriate staffing decisions in real time, relying on inter professional teams, including registered nurses as well as other

health care professionals, working to their full scope of practice."

Speaker, that flexibility is particularly important in rural and northern communities, where hospitals are already facing workforce challenges. A rigid staffing requirement could make it harder to keep beds open or maintain critical services. The result would be reduced access for patients, who may already have fewer options close to home.

Ontario is working to reduce reliance on staffing agencies through stronger oversight and transparency, while investing in programs to recruit, retain and support nurses in the public health care system. This bill would force us to rely on those agencies even more.

We are also expanding scopes of practice so that health professionals can contribute more fully to care. More than 30,000 students are currently enrolled in nursing programs across Ontario, helping build the workforce for the years ahead. These efforts recognize that safe staffing is much more than a ratio, despite the way it is represented in this bill. It depends on having the right trained professionals, the right support staff and giving hospitals the ability to organize care around their own patients' needs.

In the mental health and addiction setting, patients' needs can be complex and change rapidly. We must leave the clinicians, who are experts on their own patients, to make the final judgment on what constitutes appropriate care from patient to patient, allowing them to keep the tools they need to make care decisions in real time.

We support providing the appropriate care in the appropriate place for patients across Ontario, but Bill 19's mandatory ratios would constrain hospitals, create unnecessary challenges and ultimately affect access to care.

For those reasons, I cannot support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

MPP Wayne Gates: I want to say to all the nurses here: I support the bill. I support the bill because when COVID was hitting us and you were sitting there in the parking lot at 5:30 in the morning with tears in your eyes because of all the stress that you had during COVID, you know what you did? You went in to work every single day to take care of patients. You made sure they were taken care of because you care.

What was the reward? You are heroes. You just hear that? They're not supporting the bill. Absolutely ridiculous. Well, I'm telling you, you are heroes, and you have the respect of people who are here today. Maybe not on that side of the House, but certainly on this side of the house. I want to say from the bottom of my heart: Thank you.

What was your reward? She talked about care in the right place at the right time. You know what they're doing in Niagara? They're shutting down urgent care centres in Fort Erie, in Port Colborne, and you're laying off 560 people. If you include the long-term-care facility, it's over 600. That's the reward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Address the Chair, please.

MPP Wayne Gates: It's wrong. It has got to stop. You should support this bill. There is nothing more important than our doctors and our nurses and making sure they're taking care of our kids, our grandkids and, quite frankly, maybe me someday.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: It's always an honour to rise on behalf of the people of Parkdale–High Park, and especially the nurses—the 500 here and the hundreds that serve my community.

Andy Hanson said, "I was treated with the utmost care by ... competent people at St. Joseph's Health Centre. But there were not enough of them. Premier ... you need to fix this or seniors will be dropping while they wait for treatment."

Even the most uneducated among us know—and you are the experts, you know. To have you standing here and to have this disrespect from this government breaks my heart. It also encourages us in the Ontario NDP official opposition to keep fighting for you, for our children, for each one of us.

We will not stop because the numbers are grave: 48% of you being physically abused at work, 30% taking medication for anxiety, more than a third with suicidal thoughts—40% of those less than five years. This is unacceptable. It must change.

The solutions are out there. My colleague from Nickel Belt has brought them forward, and we will continue until those realities are here and you have safe ratios.

1610

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): I want to remind members that they are to address their comments through the Speaker.

I will recognize the member from Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: It's an honour to stand here today in front of all these nurses who have come and demand that this government implement safe nurse-to-patient ratios in the province of Ontario.

Two years ago, my brother was admitted to the hospital. He ended up spending a year in the hospital. The first 11 days, he was in a hallway. He was one of 2,088 patients who are in hallways on average in hospitals in Ontario every day.

We have the lowest number of nurses per capita in Ontario—661 per 100,000 versus 825 as the average in Canada—and yet this government says that's not low enough. Just in one hospital setting, at Hamilton Health Sciences, they're cutting 413 health care workers.

There's a study out of Illinois that said by increasing the nurse-to-patient ratios to 1 to 4 in surgical units, they saved 1,500 lives and $117 million through shorter hospital stays.

So the question people may be asking is, "Why isn't the government going to pass this?" Because their goal is to privatize our public health care system. That's what they're after. They are sending our tax dollars to private nursing agencies, to private surgeries.

I just want to say one other thing. My brother's stay in the hospital should have been about two months, but the 11 days in the hallway led to a series of complications that made him stay in the hospital for the full year.

The government needs to pass this motion to implement nurse-to-patient ratios.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

MPP Lisa Gretzky: I want to start by introducing and thanking ONA chapter 8 members who are here from Windsor-Essex: Jo-Dee Brown, Kristine Malott, Barb Marcolin, Irene Aguiar, Janina Livermore and Nancy Anouti. They made significant travel to get here today.

I'm going to address some remarks from my colleague from the neighbouring riding of Essex, where he said the PC government thanks nurses. Well, my friend, your thanks don't actually protect nurses from violence in the workplace. Your thanks do not support their emotional, mental and physical well-being and your thanks do not actually provide the hands-on care that their patients need and deserve to have the best possible health outcome. And your Bill 124 sure as heck was a funny way of saying thank you to the people in this gallery and around the province.

But today, you have an opportunity to walk the walk, to push aside the platitudes and actually take action by supporting my colleague from Nickel Belt's motion to bring in mandatory safe nurse-to-patient ratios to support these health care workers and the people that they provide care for.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I know that there are nurses from London who are here today, and I want to say thank you. Thank you to all the nurses who have joined us.

There is no more important issue for both nurses and patients in this province than safe nurse-to-patient ratios. Without safe staffing, patient care suffers and nurses are put at risk. We need to stop firing nurses and start hiring them instead.

In London, more than 400 RN positions have been lost in just eight months. I recently met with ONA Local 100, which represents nurses at LHSC. They told me about a 172% increase over last year in the number of workload reports filed when nurses' working conditions compromise safety and quality of care. They told me about the devastating impact of staffing shortages for patients on the hospital floor and the moral injury for nurses when they can't provide the care they know is needed. They told me they feel like they are nursing in a disaster zone, desperately trying to care for patients without resources or a team.

We need legislated safe staffing ratios to reduce nurse burnout, reduce workplace violence and improve patient care. Let's pass this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I have to say I cannot believe I heard the member from York–Simcoe suggest that nurses are not experts in their field. They are the experts, and that needs to be acknowledged and respected.

There are bizarre things happening in our public health care system. The government is increasing the number of people training to become nurses at the same time as over 2,000 nursing positions have been cut. Patients are waiting for care for hours, and yet employment outcomes for newly registered RNs have dropped by 16% since 2021. What the heck is going on?

We already had an understaffing crisis before COVID, and then Bill 124—we know what that means. The reality is that 35% of nurses are considering leaving their current job or the nursing workforce altogether within the next year because of insufficient staffing levels. This is from burnout and moral injury. What the government should be doing is legislating nurse-to-patient ratios.

I want to thank nurses, all the people who are here. I want to thank you for your work, your care, and I hope very much that this government will finally use some good sense and give you the nurse-to-patient ratios that you need and deserve.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

MPP Jamie West: Speaker, I heard this quote at a graduation from a nurse who was graduating. She said, "I'll never work in this field. Nurses are set to fail." She told me she loved her classes. She always wanted to be a nurse, but she would never work in the field because nurses had been set to fail. When I look around the gallery at these faces here, Speaker, I think this is comparable to the number of people who show up for a budget. These are nurses who showed up with hope. They were desperate for hope, desperate the government would be on their side for once, but let down again.

Bill 124 was a slap in the face—failed and failed and failed. I look around the room, and I see a young daughter in the crowd, hopeful her mom will have proper care, that the government will care about that as well, but they let her down as well.

Do you know why we're not debating this at 6 00 p.m.? Because the priority for the Conservative government is a fundraiser—not nurses, not health care, but a fundraiser: "We've got to get out of here because there's a fundraiser for the Premier, and don't be late." They don't care about nurses.

But I'll tell you one thing, Speaker: New Democrats do, and we always will. We'll keep fighting for nurses every single day.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Further debate?

If there's no further debate, the member has two minutes to respond.

M^me^ France Gélinas: Again, I want to say thank you to every nurse who took the time out of their busy schedule to be here today to send a strong message to every member of Parliament that they need our help. They came here when they knew full well that the hospital where they work needed them, but it was important enough to bring their own voices to this Parliament where democracy is

supposed to work, where the voice of the people is supposed to be heard.

In a democracy, you do what people need to do, not what an executive director of a hospital tells you needs to be done. Trust the hundreds of nurses that are here. Trust the thousands of nurses who signed petitions that tell you that nurse-to-patient ratios will help patients, will help nurses and will help the budgets of our hospitals.

When I hear the member from the Conservatives say, "Oh, it will be too difficult in northern and rural hospitals," have any of you ever come to a northern or rural hospital? I can tell you that I have.

Those nurses, they deserve nurse-to-patient ratios. British Columbia makes it work. They have just as many northern and rural hospitals as we do. Actually, they have more than we do, although the population is lower. They have more nurses than we do, although their population is lower, and nurse-to-patient ratios changed everything for the better.

I want every member of the Conservative government to know that every nurse who leaves her work because she can't handle it anymore, every nurse—and I hope it doesn't happen—that follows in the path of Jordan and takes her own life because of what she lived through at work—you could have helped those nurses. You could have voted in favour of nurse-to-patient ratios.

Send it to second reading. At second reading—you have a majority government—do all of the changes that you want to do. But give them hope. This is why they came today, to show that you care about nurses and giving them hope. Vote yes.

1620

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Députée Gélinas has moved second reading of Bill 19, An Act to amend the Health Protection and Promotion Act with respect to maximum patient-to-nurse ratios.

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

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

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

In my opinion, the nays have it.

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

Second reading vote deferred.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): All matters relating to private members' public business having now been completed, we will now move to the late show.

Pursuant to standing order 36, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

GAMING CONTROL

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): The member for Niagara Falls has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Gaming. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

I recognize the member for Niagara Falls.

MPP Wayne Gates: Yesterday, the Premier acknowledged that online gaming advertising has gone overboard. I agree with him. But we've watched five Stanley Cups since this government opened up online gaming markets. It has mostly been to the benefit of offshore online gaming corporations.

We have left our parents worried that when they watch a hockey game or a sporting event—when you sit and share professional sports with our kids—they're being hammered—actually hammered—with online gaming advertising. It has been enough to know that the iGaming policy hasn't worked, so I continue to bring it up.

For me, it's about supporting our families with young kids, supporting our health care system. But for me, locally, it's about more than that; it's about supporting our casino workers both in Niagara and straight across Ontario. It's about supporting good-paying jobs because offshore gambling advertising is diverting revenue out of our province.

And think about this: In Niagara, we've lost 1,000 bricks-and-mortar jobs—that, by the way, was voted on in Niagara Falls by all the residents. That was a way to help tourism and have jobs. How many more jobs have to be lost at bricks-and-mortars for iGaming?

I want to take a moment to share what some of our country's leading health experts are telling us. These are numbers that are from studies that have mostly been undertaken since Ontario started their iGaming policy.

CAMH's latest survey of Ontario students in grades 7 through 12—think about this: One in 10 reported betting on sports online and nearly one in four reported being exposed to gambling advertisements every single day.

Research published this year in the Canadian Medical Association Journal: Gambling-related helpline contacts among boys and young men aged 15 to 24 were estimated to be 144% higher than expected without the private market expansion.

Research released by ICES in September—think about this: Emergency room visits for gambling disorders were nearly twice the expected levels and almost a third of those visits resulted in hospital admissions.

Research from the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction: Nearly one in four young adults surveyed who gambled online reported high levels of gambling-related harm.

Imagine being a parent watching your son or your daughter go through that. That's why I'm raising this issue. That's why I'm expecting a real timeline, a real response. How many times are we going to review the advertising?

Quick timeline—a check here—on advertising: In 2023, my caucus in the official opposition put a bill forward to restrict advertising on online gaming. A year later, you made some changes. In February 2024, this government changed advertising restrictions to protect kids, but it wasn't enough.

This April, research at the TMU and their partners found 60% of young male sports betters surveyed said advertising influenced them to start gambling online.

In May, Minister Cho acknowledged more needed to be done. On October 6, we were told in committee that the minister was already reviewing the results of the comprehensive gaming review. Now, the Premier wants officials to look into advertising again. What's the timeline? When are parents actually going to see change?

Release the problem-gambling study. Here's why we're asking: This government has already hidden online gambling studies when they didn't like the results before the market even opened. The government's own agency commissioned a study to measure problem gambling. They promised to make it public. According to the Toronto Star, the final draft was delivered on August 24, 2024. A decision not to release it followed in September. Internal documents even reference election considerations.

On October 28, I asked the minister whether he'd read the study. I didn't get an answer. What possible—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): Thank you.

I recognize the member from Oakville North–Burlington.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the concerns raised by the member for Niagara Falls regarding online gaming advertising and the need to protect Ontarians from the potential harms of problem gambling.

Our government will always consider ways to make online gambling safer. I have heard from parents in my own community about the number of betting advertisements their children see while watching a hockey game, and I also share those concerns.

When the minister appeared before committee, he was speaking about our government's broader review of gaming. Advertising is very much part of that work, and our team is looking at where we can strengthen the rules, particularly when it comes to advertising.

Speaker, Ontario already has some of the strictest safeguards in North America, and we will continue to strengthen them wherever people need greater protection. For example, if you were to turn on the television in Ontario, a betting company cannot offer you a free bet simply to sign up. We are one of the few jurisdictions in the world with that rule.

We've also introduced BetGuard, which allows anyone who decides they need to stop gambling online to register once and exclude themselves from every regulated online gaming site in Ontario, and when someone needs help with a gambling problem, they should be able to access it. Last year, our government and gaming operators invested more than $84 million in prevention, outreach and treatment.

Speaker, it is important to remember that people in Ontario were already betting online before 2022. What our government did was to bring operators out of the grey market and require them to follow Ontario rules. In the past, we had no way to hold those operators accountable to provincial standards. By bringing them into a regulated market, we now have the information to identify where stronger safeguards are needed and the authority to act when companies break the rules. As the minister has said, he is looking at what more we can do to strengthen those rules, particularly around advertising.

Speaker, our priority is to continue protecting Ontarians and ensuring they have the safeguards and supports they need to game safely and responsibly.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee): There being no further matters to debate, pursuant to standing order 36(c), I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried.

This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1629.

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Bowman, Stephanie (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du troisième parti
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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
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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
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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	
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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	