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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 10 March 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 10 mars 2021

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Good morning. Let us pray
Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPLY ACT, 2021

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2021

Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 261, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021 / Projet de loi 261, Loi autorisant l'utilisation de certaines sommes pour l'exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2021.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the minister to lead off the debate.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the President of the Treasury Board, I'm pleased to rise in the House today to discuss the Supply Act for the 2020-21 fiscal year.

The passage of the Supply Act by the Ontario Legislature is required every fiscal year. It provides the final approval of all spending for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021, by the government and its legislative offices.

Mr. Speaker, it's fair to say that the 2020-21 fiscal year is like no other in recent memory. Monsieur le Président, on peut dire sans hésitation que l'exercice 2020-2021 ne ressemble en rien aux années précédentes.

But I'm proud to say that amidst a global pandemic that's impacted our health, our economy and our communities;

C'est cependant avec fierté que j'affirme que malgré une pandémie qui a impacté notre santé, notre économie et notre communauté;

We have not wavered in doing whatever it takes;

Nous n'avons jamais hésité à prendre les décisions nécessaires;

And spending every dollar necessary;

Et de dépenser toute somme nécessaire;

To protect the health and safety of the people of Ontario;

Pour protéger la santé et la sécurité des citoyens de l'Ontario.

We have pulled out all the stops and made historic investments in front-line services, like health care and education. We know this is making a difference in the lives

of Ontarians. Nous avons fait tout le possible et procédé à des investissements historiques dans les services de première ligne, comme les soins de santé et l'éducation. Nous savons que ces efforts ont fait une différence dans la vie des habitants.

We did so by providing unprecedented levels of support to combat COVID-19 from the outset of the pandemic to now.

On March 25, 2020, at the height of the pandemic's first wave, our government released Ontario's action plan responding to COVID-19.

Ontario was the first province to release a fiscal outlook that reflected the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and charted a path forward to support people through difficult and extraordinary times.

Our \$17-billion action plan was a critical and crucial first step to ensure our province was well positioned to weather the immense challenges that lay ahead. It included \$7 billion in additional resources for the health care system, as well as direct support for people and jobs. It also made available \$10 billion for support for people and businesses through tax and other deferrals to improve their cash flow, protecting jobs and household budgets.

On November 5, 2020, we released Ontario's 2020 budget, which set out a total of \$45 billion in support over three years to make available the necessary health resources to continue protecting people, as well as measures to support individuals, families and job creators impacted by the virus.

Our budget committed to making \$15.2 billion over three years available to support Ontario's front-line health care heroes and protect people from COVID-19. This includes supporting 141 hospitals and health care facilities. It included 626 long-term-care homes and over 770 retirement homes since the beginning of the pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, since day one, health care has been a top priority, and our investments reflect that. For 2020-21, the government of Ontario announced Ontario's Action Plan: Responding to COVID-19, which provided \$935 million for the hospital sector. This included \$341 million for additional acute care and critical care beds and assessment centres in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It's critical that I remind everyone that since the start of the pandemic back in March of last year, our government has opened over 3,000 new hospital beds around the province. We will continue to ensure there is capacity across the province to provide care for COVID-19 patients and any other Ontarians requiring hospitalization.

Ontario is also investing \$1.75 billion to create 30,000 new long-term-care beds over 10 years. In November

2020, the ministry announced the government is moving forward with 29 new long-term-care projects, which will lead to an additional 3,000 new and upgraded long-term-care spaces across the province. In addition to the 29 projects announced, Ontario is investing an additional \$761 million to build and renovate 74 projects under the modernized funding model, creating over 11,000 safe and modern spaces.

As part of our government's plan to create new long-term-care beds across the province that meet modern design standards, the Accelerated Build Pilot Program will enable the construction of up to 1,280 new long-term-care beds in Ontario. This brings the total number of new and upgraded long-term-care spaces in the pipeline to 22,368.

As part of the government's long-term-care preparedness plan to support COVID-19 infection, prevention and control practices and to enable homes to prepare for outbreaks, the government offered all long-term-care homes access to an eight-week supply of PPE, at no cost to the homes. In addition, when the PPE supply at a home is low, the province will urgently top up supplies and fulfill priority requests within 24 hours. This was made possible by leveraging our provincial buying power.

Mr. Speaker, we have also invested \$1.1 billion in personal protective equipment and other critical supplies to protect our health care workers, patients and people across the province. This investment has purchased nearly 300 million masks, 900 million gloves, 50 million gowns and over six million face shields.

Our front-line workers in particular have stepped up and embodied the Ontario spirit. They have been absolutely critical to our province's response to the pandemic, and we can't thank them enough.

0910

In the early days of the pandemic, we announced Ontario's pandemic pay program to recognize the dedication and sacrifice of our front-line health care heroes. This program benefited nearly 430,000 employees across 4,000 employers and helped to provide additional support and relief to our front-line health care heroes. We took further steps to support our front-line heroes by investing \$461 million to temporarily enhance the wages of personal support workers and direct support workers in the home and community care, the long-term care, public hospitals and social services sectors.

This February, we launched a \$115-million program to train up to 8,200 new personal support workers for high-demand jobs in Ontario's health and long-term-care sectors. And through the COVID-19 fall preparedness plan announced on September 30, 2020, the government is investing \$52.5 million to recruit, retain and support over 3,700 more front-line health care workers and caregivers.

We are also making vital investments in education, including our \$1.6-billion plan to reopen schools safely, which included hiring more teachers, custodians and nurses; keeping class sizes small; providing PPE; and supporting virtual learning. As of February 16, 2021, more than 520,000 students across Ontario were able to resume

learning in-person, following a period of remote learning that began province-wide in January and saw students returning to in-person learning throughout January.

To support students' safe return to in-person learning, we implemented several measures to protect students and staff. These include:

- province-wide access to targeted asymptomatic testing for students and staff, using a combination of lab-processed PCR tests as well as rapid antigen tests;

- mandatory masking for students in grades 1 to 3, including outdoors where physical distancing cannot be maintained; and

- enhanced screening of secondary students and staff.

And we provided much-needed relief for families facing new education-related expenses through our Support For Learners program, Mr. Speaker, making available over \$800 million.

In addition to the government's work to support a safe return to our schools, we're working hard to support countless small businesses in Ontario, which are the backbone and often the identity of our communities across the province. We have provided \$13.5 billion to support people, families and businesses. This is in addition to the \$4.8 billion to lay the foundation for a strong economic recovery fuelled by growth. We have done this through targeted supports, new tax relief measures and electricity cost relief.

Premier Ford, Ministers Fedeli, Sarkaria and I announced in January the opening of applications for the Ontario small business grant program. This is a vital lifeline for small businesses that have had to restrict their operations due to the provincial shutdown, providing up to \$20,000 in one-time grants to use whatever way makes the most sense for their individual businesses.

Because as Ontario's employers do their part to defeat COVID-19—they are facing unprecedented challenges as a result of this global pandemic—we're doing everything we can to support them. In many cases, this is the difference between keeping the lights on and closing their doors for good. So far, the uptake of these grants has been tremendous. Nearly 90,000 applications have been processed, representing more than \$1.276 billion in support.

We have also cut taxes by \$360 million in 2021-22, by raising the Employer Health Tax, EHT, exemption amount from \$490,000 to \$1 million. This increase started in 2020 and will be permanent, benefiting about 57,000 employers in 2021.

We introduced the Digital Main Street program to assist businesses with their adoption of technology by developing simple, easy-to-use online tools and resources—because providing continued supports to enable e-commerce, develop digital strategies and leverage technology are critical to helping Ontario's small businesses remain competitive and expand their markets.

Our online hub, ontario.ca/smallbusiness, connects small business with resources that offer mental health support, financial planning, tailored local advice, and provincial and federal assistance. In fact, through our

partnership with the federal government on Digital Main Street, we're helping nearly 23,000 small businesses tap into the opportunities of e-commerce. This program allows small businesses to maintain their operations through the pandemic while positioning them for future growth.

To keep our much-loved small and independent restaurants in business across the region, we've capped delivery fees where indoor dining is prohibited. We have permanently allowed them to include alcohol with food as part of their takeout or delivery orders, helping them carve out new revenue streams that they can rely on once the pandemic is behind us.

Mr. Speaker, this is about supporting small businesses so they can keep supporting us, enabling them to serve our communities, employ our neighbours and boost our economy.

This brings me to a key part of our plan for our province's COVID-19 response and the future of service delivery in Ontario. COVID-19 revealed that in these unprecedented times, Ontario's programs and services needed to be simpler and easier to access when, where and how the people needed them. When the pandemic hit, we moved swiftly and safely to transition vital programs and services online. A good example of this is the COVID-19 web portal at ontario.ca/covid19. This one-stop dashboard provides all the latest data and information that Ontarians need to stay safe and healthy. Since July 2020, the COVID-19 web portal has been visited almost 50 million times, with 120 million total page views.

Another example of how we're leveraging technology is the COVID Alert app. Developed in partnership between the Ontario Digital Service, Ottawa-based Shopify and the federal government, the app gives Ontario a digital defence against COVID-19. It's free, easy to use, private and secure. The app notifies you if you've been in contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19, and with over 6.3 million downloads to date, the COVID Alert app is a bona fide made-in-Ontario success story.

Our government has introduced our Digital First for Health plan, which brings the patient experience into the 21st century by offering more choices and making health care simpler, easier and more convenient for patients—because as the world has changed, people expect and deserve unprecedented speed and convenience, and the latest information at their fingertips.

Digital technologies and the data that power them are changing the way that we live and connect with one another. That's why our government has focused on rapidly expanding access to online options, including investing in innovation, delivering more convenient digital services and using data to drive our decisions. Ontario Onwards: Ontario's COVID-19 Action Plan for a People-Focused Government is our groundbreaking plan to do just that. By continuing to expand digital options that Ontarians can access at their fingertips while preserving in-person options, we will build a government that's truly responding to the needs of the people.

We know that there is no time to spare. That's why, last fall, I announced the Ontario Onwards Acceleration Fund,

which is enabling us to expedite the digital transformation of our vital programs and services. Over the next four years, we will invest \$500 million on projects with measurable, quantifiable and evidence-based results that improve the way people that people and businesses interact with government, saving them both time and money. It will also provide seed funding to set up pilot projects that test drive new initiatives that show promise.

0920

Mr. Speaker, I rose today to discuss the Supply Act for the 2020-21 fiscal year, which is a routine parliamentary procedure. However, as I'm sure we can all agree, this year has been anything but routine. But if we learned one thing from the global pandemic, it is this: Change is constant. And leveraging change and applying the lessons we've learned from the pandemic will help us transform government to better serve the people and businesses of our province. This willingness to adopt bold, transformational measures represents the essence of the Ontario spirit, and will help us emerge from these difficult times stronger and more resilient than ever.

Mr. Speaker, we've made these investments to lift every single Ontarian up, and to ensure that they have a brighter tomorrow.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: As Her Majesty's official opposition, it's my pleasure, as the finance critic and the critic of the Treasury Board, to weigh in on today's Supply Act.

It is an interesting disconnect I feel that we're experiencing on this side of the House over the last year. But before I get into that disconnect, I want to thank the finance minister for reaching out to me just this week so that we can talk about the priorities that we see and some common ground that perhaps we might find in the upcoming budget.

That said, we view the expenditures of this province to date to be insufficient. In fact, I was thinking about this last night in anticipation of some time in the future debating this bill—not exactly an hour later—that this component, so far, of the Supply Act should be called “mind the gap” because there are significant gaps in opportunities to invest strategically in our economic recovery to address the immediate needs of Ontarians.

Perhaps the upcoming budget may reflect some of those needs; I certainly hope so, particularly on behalf of the small businesses that I've been working with for the most of this year, as the economic development critic, and as well on behalf of women. We have tried really hard to get this government to recognize that an economic recovery plan must be very focused strategically on lifting women up and providing opportunities and supports so that they reach their potential, because if women do not reach their potential in this province, Ontario will not reach its potential either.

As the finance minister mentioned, the Supply Act simply closes off this fiscal year and so it is really a procedural component. However, it is also an opportunity,

Mr. Speaker, to review where the money went and where the money did not go. For us, it is interesting for me to hear about the investments in health care, because on this side of the House, we have been fighting for very strategic investments, particularly the long-term-care sector, particularly on behalf of the personal support workers who have essentially been trying to hold that system together during—we share the words and the thoughts of the government in this—what has been unprecedented.

But this was also an opportunity for the government of Ontario to move past that ideology around for-profit and not-for-profit care and to invest in the very people who deliver the direct care, who primarily are women and, in many parts of this province, racialized women.

When I was reviewing where the gaps are, where we should be mindful of the gaps, I was looking at health care in particular. We on this side of the House recognize that prior to the pandemic, the investments that this government was pulling back on behalf of public health and health care were quite damaging. We went into this pandemic limping, Mr. Speaker. You'll know, of course, that we didn't have the appropriate amount of personal protective equipment. The health minister herself, in testimony at the long-term-care commission, has admitted that she was not aware that the previous stock had been discarded.

So we asked companies across this province, many across all of our ridings, to step up and help. One of those companies I'm incredibly proud of, as is my colleague from Kitchener Centre, is Canadian Shield. They were a 3D printing company that pivoted—because that was the word of 2020—and started making the plastic face shields and PPE masks.

Of late, though, we have discovered from companies, including Eclipse in Cambridge, that accessing government contracts to supply much-needed personal protective equipment is not an easy thing. The government was aware of this for the last five to six months, and to their credit, these companies have said, "Listen, just let us bid on some of these contracts. Let us provide the much-needed personal protective equipment that Ontario needs, so we don't make the same mistakes again." I think that that's the lens that I would like to put on the supply bill today: Let's be mindful of where the missteps happened, because they happened.

To date, Canadian Shield and companies like Eclipse are doing their best to start to look at exports, for instance, but the Premier himself has said, "Listen, we need these companies to be strong in Ontario. We need them to provide these much-needed supplies, because we're going to be wearing masks for a long time." Unfortunately, two weeks ago Canadian Shield had to lay off 47 employees, because they can't get their product into our health care system.

Now, let's agree that we need to fix this. Let's agree that we want those jobs to stay in Ontario. Let's agree that we shouldn't be very focused on creating jobs in other sectors like China. This is something that the government can address through their procurement strategy. We have

great companies in Sudbury, in Toronto and in Etobicoke, in the Premier's own riding, who want to be part of the solution on keeping people safe, and I want to focus on why it's so important to keep people safe: because we have never before in the history of this province been at a precipice where we fully can no longer ignore the connection between the health and well-being of the citizens that we serve and our economy.

It did take this government a long time to come to the table with tangible direct supports for businesses, particularly on the personal protective equipment side. We have made the case that that \$1,000 is an insufficient amount; we have companies, I have to say, where it costs them \$4,000 on a monthly basis to clean their facilities. So when we introduced our Save Main Street strategy back in April, almost a full year ago, we were really focused on those direct financial supports that would save businesses, including rent support; commercial rent, we all know, was a huge issue. The government took a different tack. They decided to rely very heavily on the federal program, instead of a made-in-Ontario program.

That federal rent support strategy was, unfortunately, very focused on the landlord applying for the funding. Imagine being a business owner and hoping that you can see yourself through that first wave—because we also didn't learn as much as we should have in that first wave and apply that knowledge for the second wave. Imagine hoping—praying, really—that this government sees those mistakes in the first and second wave and addresses them so that we don't have to shut down again.

But the CECRA program that this government touted through four months of SCOFEA, the finance committee, saying that this is the best program—in the end, you had to admit that it was a complete and utter failure, because if you go along Queen Street in some of our members' ridings, you will see storefront after storefront after storefront closed up and boarded up. That was avoidable. Those businesses said, "Listen, help us get through this period of time and we will help you recover as a province," and that really was the only way that it was going to happen.

0930

I do find it curious to hear the finance minister talk about the health care investment and be very proud of that. Just yesterday, the Washington Post ran a story about how the 4,000 deaths in our long-term-care system—4,000, Mr. Speaker—were avoidable. This was an article that was published on March 8, so on International Women's Day. It was posted by David Moscrop. It said, "On March 3"—so it was reviewing what had happened up to that point—"Ontario surpassed 7,000 COVID-19 deaths. Yet, for a 'we're all in this together' pandemic, as the often-repeated refrain goes, a breakdown of the mortality figures reveals jarring inequities, especially for those living in the province's long-term-care facilities." Our performance—or underperformance, or complete and utter failure—in the long-term-care sector is now receiving international attention.

It goes on to say, "Of the 7,014 deaths recorded" at this point, "3,745 came from" the long-term-care sector. "The

extraordinary level of suffering and death in these care facilities was avoidable.” I’m connecting this to the Supply Act, about where the money went and where the money didn’t go. “Those who could have done better to mitigate or prevent the tragedy ought to be held to account” in Ontario—and I suspect you will be in approximately 449 days, by the time the next election gets here. “Ontario—indeed, Canada—ought to look ahead to structural elder-care reform, including new or converted public homes and ending for-profit care.

“As the early March death statistics were shared, the” CBC “reported that Ontario’s” long-term-care centres “were still breaking the rules.” That’s the disconnect between the supply bill, which touts unprecedented investment in long-term care, and the reality on the ground in our ridings.

It goes on to say, “Extendicare, responsible for 22% of infractions. According to the CBC’s investigation, ‘for-profit long-term-care homes received 70% of the violation citations despite accounting for 56% of the homes in’” Ontario. I mean, that stat, in and of itself, should inform future investment: where the money goes and where the money does not go. “An additional 8% of the violations were found in non-profit homes managed by for-profit companies.” This is the other piece that we learned through all of this: If a for-profit company is managing a not-for-profit company, the damage still happens, Mr. Speaker.

Now, listen, I’m the first one to admit that the Liberal government had 15 years to address this. They essentially pushed it off to the private sector. Really, it is ageism at its core. It is ageism at its core, and it needs to be acknowledged. The upcoming budget, I’m very hopeful, will address this disconnect.

There is “further evidence that while the” long-term-care “crisis in Ontario is widespread, the heart of the problem is found among for-profit homes.” I know that the government will say that on this side of the House, we are ideologically favouring the not-for-profit sector. We have enough evidence and research, and now the PC government of Ontario has that evidence to inform budgetary expenses. We favour the not-for-profit model because we want to see every dollar go to care. When you invest in the people who are doing the care—primarily in long-term care, but this also extends to child care. When you’re investing in those ECEs or those PSWs or those nurses and you’re ensuring that elderly residents—because they’re not patients; they’re not clients. This is their home. They need four hours of care. This government has said 2025: That’s when we’re going to get to the four hours of care.

When I talk to seniors in my community—and it’s usually the only place that I go these days, the grocery store. They still find me. I’m wearing a hat and a mask, but apparently, they can still recognize me. They say, “Why is the government treating us this way? We built this province.” They also built this country. This is their time to be truly respected and to ensure that their dignity is maintained. The only way that happens is to invest in the people, the public services that bathe them, that feed them,

that have social interaction with them, where their quality of life is at the centre of a decision around where that funding goes.

The fact that the Washington Post posted this this week—Ontario’s record on how many deaths happened in our long-term-care homes—is really astounding. Other sectors are looking at what not to do by looking at Ontario. So I make that point.

Then it goes on to say, “Who’s to blame?” And that’s being sorted out. But blame, accountability will happen, Mr. Speaker. I hope it doesn’t take as long as the election, but the election is the ultimate test of a government’s integrity.

Listen, I have stood on this side of the House. I remember all of that side was Liberals. I know my former PC colleagues who were on this side of the House—once that trust is gone, once a citizenry has lost confidence in the ruling government of the day, it is a very hard thing to turn around. I’ll tell you, given the fact that you have introduced some pieces of legislation here that do not put people at the forefront, you all have to—you know, I remember that the Premier gave all the MPPs “For the people” little desk things at the beginning of 2018. Well, given that you are prioritizing donors and those who contribute to the PC Party, it should read, “For the donors.” You all should get new desk bling.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say, the Washington Post goes on—and this piece, actually, is called, “Democracy Dies in Darkness.” There are a lot of people hurting out there across this province. The long-term-care commission continues to do its work. Of course, you will know that we wanted that to be an open, public process. But for the people, for the family members, for the friends who have lost almost 4,000 family members, that grief has no place to go, so it is mobilizing. It is mobilizing, and people want to see this government invest in an elder care model that puts seniors at the centre and not profit. I can’t make that point strongly enough. This budget must invest strategically so that every dollar, every hard-earned tax dollar, goes right into the care of the people who depend on us and the people who are working for us. Those are the personal support workers; those are the nurses; those are the essential workers.

Yesterday, I have to say, I had been asking questions about essentially the Election Act, which is Bill 254, and Bill 257, supporting broadband and infrastructure. I raise that today in this House because it does speak to the priorities. If we were reading this scathing, scathing op-ed in the Washington Post about what happened in our long-term-care homes, I think that we would really be taking a step back and saying, “How can we correct this quickly?” Nobody would have thought that—we expected a piece of legislation specifically for long-term care. We did not see that from this government. Even though the rates of deaths in the first wave really took our breath away, in the second wave, it wasn’t an overwhelming sense of sadness and mourning; it was anger. It was anger that the cycle had continued.

I have on the corner of my desk the report from the Canadian Armed Forces. I read it randomly. I just pick it

up—because you actually can't read it all at one time because it is heartbreaking. It is heartbreaking that seniors died of dehydration in our homes. It is heartbreaking that people choked to death because there weren't enough people to feed them and to care for them, and to bathe them. This is something that will be a black mark on the history of this province on a go-forward basis. When you look at the supply bill, though, you do not see a marked improvement in funding specifically to address the level of dignity and care of our seniors. It just isn't there. Why? That is the question. It's an ethical question that we are asking the government of the day.

0940

The minister responsible for long-term care will say, just as the Premier has said—this “iron ring” business; you have to stop saying that. Nobody in Ontario, or apparently in the United States, believes that there is any kind of an iron ring, that there was ever an iron ring, that there was ever a plan to create an iron ring. I don't know who made it up. Maybe it was like the Premier's comments yesterday about mud huts when I asked him about housing and MZO orders, which is deeply offensive, I have to say, Mr. Speaker.

But sometimes the Premier just throws things out, like “everything is on the table.” That's what we've been hearing for almost a year: “Everything is on the table.” The table is about this big, Mr. Speaker. It's less than a card table, because paid sick days have not been on that table. Ensuring that women across this province have access to quality child care, that was never on the table. This promise of 50,000 asymptomatic tests for students in our school system, that didn't happen. The Minister of Education promised 50,000. Our education critic asked the question yesterday. He couldn't answer the question, because there were no 50,000 tests.

But I will connect this testing to the sick days. I'll tell you one thing, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education has said, “Oh, it's very disappointing that people aren't going to these community centres to get their kids tested for asymptomatic COVID transmission.” I'm going to tell you why they're not going. They're not going because if they go and their child tests for COVID-19, even without any symptoms, that parent then has to stay home for 14 days. That parent does not have paid sick days. People are not going to go and get tested if they are going to face two weeks of unpaid leave. That's why we're fighting so hard for it. That's why we stand up every day and we ask for unanimous consent. We're like, “Let's do this together; let's be in this together.”

They always come back to the federal program, and it's so interesting because it is a complete, utter position of privilege that you stand in your place and you say, “They can just apply for the federal program.” The federal program is delayed. The federal program is insufficient. And if you are living paycheque to paycheque, you can't wait two or three weeks for the federal government to get their act together and get that money into the account, despite what the Minister of Labour has said that it's in there in two or three days. I'm sorry; you actually have to

talk and listen to people in your ridings to know how insufficient that program is.

But a made-in-Ontario program, as proposed by my colleague here in London West and as every member on this side has continually fought for—a made-in-Ontario sick day program would prevent people from going to work sick, and therefore would prevent the transmission of COVID-19, and therefore would prevent a third wave and a shutdown of the economy. That's how clearly we see it, and we're not alone, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Mike Harris: Got it all figured out, eh?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, we do. It's actually not rocket science.

Sick people should not go to work and not transmit COVID-19, but they have to be in a position to make that decision. They have to be in a financial position to make that decision, and that is the truth. That is why almost every public health unit across this province has asked the government to bring in paid sick days. Just yesterday, Peterborough came to the table, so it's taken some a little bit longer. In the region of Waterloo, it happened almost two months ago. They asked us, “Can you get the government to do this?” We are a high-risk area in the region of Waterloo. The member from Kitchener—Conestoga knows that full well.

So there are tangible measures that should be considered not only an investment in keeping people safe, but an investment in the economy and ensuring that we all recover, Mr. Speaker. But what have we seen from this government to date? This is pretty interesting. To date, we have Bill 254, Protecting Ontario Elections Act. This is really the biggest misstep that I think the government has taken in a long time. And listen, you've given us a lot of material to work with, but I'm going to say, putting a taxpayer-funded subsidy towards politicians in the middle of a pandemic not only demonstrates a huge disconnect between what happens here in this Pink Palace and what happens in those communities, it really defies all logic because it actually goes against what you have said in the past when you were opposition members here, around the taxpayer-funded program.

I know how much the government likes when I quote Martin Regg Cohn, but he just wrote a piece a week ago about the doubling down on private donation limits, “undermining the democratic process.” Those are his words.

The people of this province, when they find out that the government is going to be moving forward with doubling private donations in a pandemic and then also increasing the taxpayer-funded political subsidies that political parties get, they shake their heads. They're still waiting for justice. I've spoken about the grief that people experience in the health care system, people who have been waiting for surgeries even, people who have family members that they haven't been able to see for months and months. There is a cost to that.

In fact, our education critic yesterday introduced her private member's motion called centring youth in the COVID-19 recovery. I hope the government is going to

support it. I hope that they do, because that will be an investment in our future recovery on a mental health perspective, on the disruption that has happened with our education system, despite the best efforts of teachers like my sister, for instance, in Peel, and my husband in Waterloo-Oxford. Everyone on this side of the House has a story to tell you of what's happened in education and the negative impact that that has had on students and children and their mental health across the province.

But just back to the Protecting Ontario Elections Act. It's a strange name for a bill. It should not have been prioritized by this government. This is what Martin Regg Cohn says about it:

"And then he did the right-wing thing"—which is cute—"by wrongly doubling private donation limits, undermining the democratic process.

"Think of those controversial ministerial zoning orders (MZO) that do the devil's work for developers who donate money to the party in power. Like a greenbelt up for grabs, MZO equals quid pro quo, not to mention highways to nowhere that lead to the developer's door." I think he's referring to Highway 413 here.

He says, "That's why it's worth circling back for a closer look at the government's byplay—and its unexpected about-face—on campaign finance rules last week."

Then he goes on to say, "Let's get the bad news out of the way first.

"Under cover of COVID-19, Ford's Tories have set back the cause of campaign finance reform by boosting the individual contribution limit of \$1,650 by what can only be described as an astronomical amount—100 per cent—to \$3,300 a year."

So now private donors—once this bill passes, because it's going to pass—we've been very clear where we stand on it. It goes on to say that now the donation limit is \$3,300. No one has come into my office or sent me an email saying, "You know what, I really think politicians should be able to secure higher donations." No one has said that, and I guarantee you that no PC MPP has ever had somebody come knocking on their door, emailing them or calling them and saying, "You know what, you guys should be able to raise a little bit more money in private donations. I think those donors should really have even more access to you." Nope, I'm fairly certain that—and I know that my parents who are watching right now, Allan and Sheila Wood in Peterborough, I know for a fact that this is not a priority for them. I can tell you.

He goes on to say, "That's not an inflationary hike"—nope—"nor a catch-up increase, it's double your money—and double trouble for democracy."

When money does infiltrate politics—Mr. Speaker, we saw this in the last government with the Liberals. In fact I was part of the process, working with Yasir Naqvi, who at the time was the government House leader, because I was the finance critic back then—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Do you have something to say? Are you asking for more money over there?

0950

When Martin Regg Cohn actually asked the Attorney General and said, "Listen, what are you doing here? What are you thinking?"—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order.

Ms. Catherine Fife: They're a little sensitive because I'm going to quote them later on.

The Attorney General was asked, and he says, "The newer, higher limit 'takes us to the middle of the pack in the country,' he explained helpfully. 'Going to the middle of the pack is going in the right direction,'" he says.

Then Martin says, "Ah, no it's not. It's going in circles.

"Before the Toronto Star ran a series of investigative columns in 2016 crusading for campaign finance reform, the upper limit was ... astronomical..." It used to be \$9,975.

I personally never received that kind of money, I can tell you, and our colleague from Niagara Falls, when he was talking about that, said his average donation is \$29. That is our strength over here. We may not get the big bucks, but we get a lot of people who donate to us because they believe in us. And we're not authorizing the paving over of Ontario's environmentally sensitive wetlands. That's what they're looking at from you.

Now the price went up from \$1,650 to \$3,300.

He goes on to say, "Under pressure, the last Liberal government dialed it down to \$1,200 annually per person, which Ford's Tories adjusted up again to \$1,650—and are now doubling up on" again.

"How is heading backwards 'going in the right direction'?" he writes. "It wrongly and unfairly advantages the provincial Tories, who rely far more on big donations than the opposition...."

I've made that point and it went over very well, I have to say. But at the end of the day this is what's going to happen. This is where the money is going to go, because we're talking about budgetary priorities and where the money went and where the money didn't go. It says, in fact, "Based on the results of the most recent election, the Tories" are going to get "\$5.7 million annually." We're going to get \$4.9 million. The Liberals are going to get \$2.9 million and the Greens are going to get \$672,000.

I'm pretty sure that the people of this province, in the middle of a pandemic—as the long-term-care minister likes to say, "a global pandemic," as if she's responsible for the global pandemic. We just want her to pay attention to what's happening in long-term care. That's what we've asked for from this minister.

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Your enthusiasm is absolutely amazing, I have to tell you. What else have we got? I think I've made my point on the Election Act. I don't think I'm going to get a chance to speak to it, so that's helpful for me, because I wanted to get on the record that the people of this province do not consider us giving ourselves more money a priority in Ontario. I don't know how much clearer I can be on that.

The other issue ties to lobbying and it ties to where money is going. The government has introduced Bill 251, Combating Human Trafficking Act. You may be wondering where I'm going with this, but it's an interesting point. The act itself has a good measure in it. It's asking hotels and motels to keep a registry, because we know that human trafficking happens not only along the 401 highways; it happens in our northern communities, it happens to the girl next door, it's happening in our schools. My daughter's friend was almost snapped up on the campus of the University of Waterloo. It is everywhere.

This measure is good. It's meant to have a level of accountability in those hotels/motels so that people are aware of what's actually happening to these young women—and these young men, because young boys are also trafficked. But it's missing one component. It's missing the fact that Airbnbs are not part of the legislation. When our critic Jill Andrew was talking about this, she was like, "Why have you left Airbnbs out of the legislation?" Because we know from research and from listening to people on the ground—and one of those individuals is Richard Dunwoody. He's the executive director of Project Recover, which is a not-for-profit agency that helps young women or men who have been trafficked. He helps them regain their financial footing, because it's absolutely devastating. Our critic here has mentioned, Chris Glover has mentioned, we should not be charging—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Can I just ask the member to refer to the members by their riding, not by their name, please.

Ms. Catherine Fife: What's your riding—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Spadina—Fort York.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Spadina—Fort York. Thank you. His bill is trying to address this financial inequity. We shouldn't be penalizing these victims of human trafficking when they try to get back on their feet again.

So Richard Dunwoody from Project Recover has documented the recovery of these victims. He says that among the "120 human trafficking survivors ... credit card receipts showed their traffickers used hotels and services like Airbnb ... equally." So the government knows that human trafficking is happening in Airbnb locations. In fact, it's almost more underground. So it deserves our full attention if you really want to address this huge issue that's happening.

So I was wondering, why has the government not included Airbnbs in the legislation? It should be right there and it's not. And then I did a search at the—anybody can do this. In fact, it's quite interesting to see who is lobbying the government. But on November 3, for instance, Airbnb hired two in-house lobbyists to address the government on issues that relate to Airbnbs, and then on January 14, Shakir Chambers also registered as a lobbyist for Airbnb.

So I have to say, is it coincidental that in November, in January, when this piece of legislation was being drafted, when it was being informed by concerned voices, that Airbnb was left out of the legislation? That's concerning for us because if we actually want to address this scourge

on our province, then you shouldn't be missing opportunities to hold everyone accountable, including Airbnbs.

This made me think about the last finance minister when I was a finance critic, the former member Charles Sousa. I remember very clearly when the whole "sharing economy"—because it's not really about sharing, Mr. Speaker. But when the whole sharing economy was really at its forefront in 2015-16, the finance minister stood up with the CEO of Airbnb and said, "We're really going to figure out how these guys can pay some taxes." I remember we asked questions about it in the House at the time. So the influx of and the opening of the door to more money into how legislation is crafted, developed and informed is hugely concerning to us, especially during a pandemic, I have to say, when we really should be focused on who is most affected by this pandemic—and that is by and large women.

I'm going to get to that in just one second, but just before I mention it, Bill 257 is also on the order paper, as you know. This is a bill aptly named "supporting broadband and infrastructure," and yet it has another poison pill that favours donors and developers in it.

So there is a huge pattern here that we see very clearly, and I just want to get it on the record because it was an incredibly interesting debate. Our critic from Oshawa did a great job yesterday, highlighting the importance of planning, of progressive planning principles, of ensuring that we are making investments that do not undermine our health and well-being. This is the "mind the gap" part of the supply bill.

But Bill 257 is going to ask municipalities and utility companies to co-operate with broadband services. I have to say, I'm not sure that this is going to be overly successful, because what was the broadband—was it Ontera? So the Liberals sold Ontera because they thought, "Well, the private sector is just going to take care of broadband." When has the private sector ever taken care of any issue if they're not going to make money on it? And there are places in Ontario where broadband will not be profitable for the company, so I'm not sure that this is going to be successful. I'm hoping it is, because given where we are going as a province, I think the need for broadband investment should be considered, at this point in time, a public investment in an inclusionary economy.

1000

But Bill 257 has this little poison pill in it: schedule 3. This exempts the minister's zoning orders retroactively from the requirement to be consistent with the provincial policy statement. The provincial policy statement, just in case folks don't know, is the foundational set of planning rules for the province. Now, why is this concerning for us? Well, because the government should be very focused on broadband investment. It can be and should be the great equalizer for our economy, especially in an economy that has had to pivot online. So if we don't get the broadband piece right, then we're going to double down on inequities that exist in the province of Ontario.

What has this government done? It has directly connected schedule 3 to the Duffins Creek issue, which

has really galvanized a whole community. When I go through the timeline on the Duffins Creek issue, back in the fall—October 30—an MZO was issued for the project. Immediately, our critic and the local MPP said, “Listen, paving over these environmentally sensitive wetlands for a large infrastructure project is not the best investment to be making, particularly in that location.”

Yesterday, the member from Northumberland—Peterborough South said that this was called “ideological hatred.” For me, that was fairly unparliamentary, but I’m going to use it, because it really indicates how strident this government is—and we actually heard it from the Premier yesterday, in the response to the question on MZOs, when he said he was going to continue to override local planning councils, he’s going to continue to ignore the environmental implications and he’s going to continue to ignore our own provincial planning directives in the name of putting up major infrastructure projects.

On Monday of this week, I did raise the concern that, following the October 30 MZO which was issued, on February 24, Triple Properties owners made significant investments—\$1,600—to the party, and then on March 4, the Minister of Natural Resources makes regulations forcing the warehouse to be built on top of a wetland—I’ve never seen this before in the history of this place, and we’ve seen a lot of things from the former government—just as Triple Properties had requested, preventing the conservation authority from stopping the warehouse from being built. So instead of getting an environmentally sensitive, beautiful Duffins Creek, something that should be cherished—also, we know about water filtration. The member from Oshawa talked about the environmental significance and the long-term economic impact of destroying this particular creek—because do you know what’s good for the economy? Clean air. Do you know what’s good for the economy? Clean drinking water. Do you know what’s good for attracting people into jurisdictions where they normally wouldn’t be? Having beautiful wetlands where people can actually visit.

After the Minister of Natural Resources created this regulation—I mean, we were shaking our heads on March 4, but then on the same day, it made sense, because then the minister tabled legislation in Bill 257, a bill supposedly about broadband Internet, that will likely stop a lawsuit against this whole thing. It allows the minister to ignore the previous planning laws by applying it retroactively to this one and all previous MZOs.

And then on March 5, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority issues a late-afternoon release calling the new law “unheralded”—that is their word—and says their decision-making is being done “under duress.”

Now, does this instill confidence that this government has its priorities straight? The Premier said yesterday that housing is a priority. Well, is an environmentally sensitive wetland the only place that you can build housing? If you wanted to do infill right here in downtown Toronto—Kitchener-Waterloo has brownfield developments. Let’s build housing, for instance, where it’s needed, which is along transit corridors. But a warehouse on environmentally sensitive land? The disconnect between what the

Premier has claimed is a priority and then the action that we are seeing is profound. I would like to say, with as much respect as I can, that nobody is buying what he is selling. There is a lack of confidence and credibility in that argument, because you can build a warehouse almost anywhere. You certainly do not have to build it on an environmentally sensitive wetland.

I think I’ve made my point on Bill 254 and Bill 257, but I would like to address the issue of businesses, because we heard a lot at the beginning of the term of this government the “open for business” mantra. You used to all say it together and do that rah-rah thing. I’m glad you’re not doing that anymore because it was kind of irritating.

It’s interesting, because this is a government that got the carbon tax stickers wrong, they got the licence plates wrong—what else did they get wrong? There was one other thing.

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, long-term care. Long-term care really surpassed—oh, the buck a beer. It was the buck a beer; sorry. The buck a beer didn’t really happen, the stickers peeled off and the whole issue of cap-and-trade has really left us in a fiscal deficit as a province, because you have no plan. You have a litter day, which is not going to work for most of us.

On the health care piece, we have to make the case for investment in public services, and we are going to continue to do that. The small business community that we heard is pleased with this government: I have to say, when I’ve done round tables with Ottawa, with Toronto, the BIAs in rural communities, which I did with Waterloo-Wellington, the lack of support and tangible measures to see businesses through this pandemic was actually quite shocking, even for me. I mean, I didn’t have very high expectations, but we certainly came to the table back in April with our Save Main Street strategy and said, “Listen. Yes, this is going to be a costly investment, but look at the return on investment. Look at the return on investment from keeping people employed, from ensuring that communities have a viable way back to economic security.” That’s what small businesses asked of us.

They also asked us not create an unequal playing field, and what did this government do? They kept the Costcos open. They kept the Walmarts open. They intentionally disaffected the main street businesses that have supported the economy. Those small businesses that create 83% of the jobs in Ontario were intentionally sidelined. They were absolutely sidelined by ensuring that the Walmarts of the world and the Costcos of the world could still sell non-essential items.

Rabbi Moshe, who I was talking to about this, said that—he heard me one day in the House and he said, “You just proposed a reasonable proposal. Cordon off those non-essential items in those stores.” Walmart’s going to be fine. I know that the Premier talks to the CEO on a regular basis and sometimes takes his marching orders from the CEO of Walmart, but I do want to say, Walmart’s going to be okay. Costco’s going to be okay. Words Worth Books on main street Waterloo? Maybe not so much. The

Works, not so much. Camerons flowers, not so much. These are those small family-owned business—they are actually the heart of the community. When we stand up for those businesses, we are actually standing up for the workers who are part of that ecosystem.

1010

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce and the CFIB supported our plan. These are not traditional allies of ours, but they said that providing commercial rent support, ensuring that there is some direct financial support to see businesses through this time, makes a lot of sense.

And then what happened on Thursday, February 18? In a fundraising email from the Premier, he touted the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, even though the group called his government the worst in Canada for businesses during a pandemic: “The non-partisan business group said Ford’s Tories deserve a failing grade for their handling of the COVID-19 outbreak that has killed more than 6,700 Ontarians and left tens of thousands of businesses shuttered.”

It’s unprecedented, really, to see the CFIB coming up—and also, it did catch the CFIB by surprise: “It was very surprising that Premier Ford would reference CFIB in a fundraising email,” said Dan Kelly, president and CEO of the organization representing 110,000 small and medium-sized businesses across Ontario.

“From a small business perspective, the Ford government’s handling of the economic ramifications of the pandemic is the worst in Canada’....

“Kelly pointed out that ‘for most of the second wave, Ontario was the only province to maintain a policy allowing big box stores to remain open while shutting down tight indoor shopping’” in small businesses.

“This will go down as one of the most anti-small business measures in Canada’s history.”

So when the finance minister stands up and says, “We’ve gone above and beyond,” the reality on the ground is very different for small businesses.

We’re going to be making the case to this government around strategic investment, particularly for women in Ontario, because the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives put out a report just this Monday. To date, the government has primarily treated everybody the same, not recognizing the key differences that female workers in Ontario experience. They said that “women’s economic security is fragile.” So if a government knows that economic security is fragile, then they should be very strategic about what investments they make.

Child care, for instance, investing in early learning and care: For every dollar that you invest, there’s a \$7 return on investment to the economy. Women reach their potential—women go to school; women retrain. It could even be part of the apprenticeship program that the government has been touting—although the first paid internship program in Ontario’s history is for prison guards. If you thought about all the paid internship programs that could be in place to assist with the pandemic, wouldn’t a personal support worker paid internship program be good, or an ECE paid internship program—or all of those

workers who would love to be part of the health care sector? It’s just that they don’t have child care, they’re still teaching their kids at home, they’re still doing elder care, because they’re not going to send their mother or father to a long-term-care centre in the province of Ontario—not after we saw almost 4,000 deaths. It’s really a challenge. Who is driving these decisions? When we look at the legislation that you’ve brought to the floor of this Legislature in a pandemic, it is very singular-focused on you. What we would encourage you to do on a go-forward basis is to be focused on the people we serve, including women. There are solutions out there.

The unpaid caring demands impact women’s paid work. We know this for a fact. Young women are particularly hard hit. Many mothers exited the workforce. The impact of COVID-19—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. Unfortunately, the time for debate this morning has expired. However, when this bill is brought back into the Legislature, which I believe may be this afternoon, you will be entitled, if you so choose, to continue with debate.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS’ STATEMENTS

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Chris Glover: Residents and business owners in Spadina–Fort York are angry with this government for their handling of the pandemic. This government has had months to plan the rollout of the vaccines, but the online registration portal still hasn’t launched. In some areas, you’ve got 80-year-olds competing for online vaccine registrations as if they were concert tickets.

But the vaccine rollout is just one of the recent many failures of this government. This government is using lockdowns as if they are the solution. Lockdowns are necessary, but they were supposed to be a temporary measure to get transmission under control and to buy time so the government could set up testing and tracing and make long-term care, schools and workplaces safe.

Sarah, a Spadina–Fort York parent, says, “Our children are terribly affected by the lockdowns. You failed. You lost your chance to do it right. Now make a new plan where our children can get out and play with other kids.”

Yvonne, a business owner, says, “If I ran my business like Ford runs the province, I’d have been bankrupt years ago.”

Another business owner, Jeff Cohen, who owns—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock for a minute, please. Excuse me. You may be reading something that someone else may have said, but in reference to a member in here, I would ask that you refer to their riding name, or if they have a title such as Premier, I would ask that you refer to that, please.

Mr. Chris Glover: Yvonne, a business owner, says, “If I ran my business like” the Premier “runs the province, I’d have been bankrupt years ago.” I hope that’s better.

Another business owner, Jeff Cohen, who owns live music venues, says that the inability to get insurance and the lack of supports from this government are threatening the very existence of the live music industry in Toronto.

Your responsibilities were clear through this pandemic, Mr. Premier: make long-term-care homes, schools and workplaces safe so they aren't transmission points; keep our small businesses solvent; and plan the vaccine rollout. Will the Premier please focus on getting us through this pandemic rather than planning in secret the destruction of wetlands and heritage buildings.

PERSONAL SUPPORT WORKERS

Mr. Lorne Coe: Good morning, Speaker. Durham College in my riding started to accept applications earlier this week to Ontario's new accelerated training program for personal support workers. The program is part of the government's \$115-million investment to train up to 8,200 new personal support workers for high-demand jobs in Ontario's health and long-term-care sectors. We will be training, Speaker, some of our best and brightest in Durham region to be personal support workers.

The accelerated personal support workers training program is a tuition-free opportunity for new students, and is expected to take only six months to complete rather than the typical eight months. After three months of coursework and experiential learning in a clinical setting, students will complete the final three months in paid, on-site training in a long-term-care home or in a home and community care environment.

Speaker, this personal support training program is yet another way Ontario is collaborating with its partners like Durham College to provide innovative services and build a 21st-century long-term-care system.

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Last night, I heard the disturbing news that 12 families that had been living at 2419 Keele Street in my riding of York South–Weston received an N13 notice within days of their building being bought by a new landlord and are being kicked out for renovations. Displacing tenants in a housing crisis and during a pandemic is unacceptable and wrong, Mr. Speaker. These tenants, in many cases, have lived in the building for over 20 years.

The pandemic has left many without work or underemployed. Some have newborn children. How is it that during a pandemic, families like this can have their world turned upside down?

Renovictions are occurring more and more in Toronto. Bad landlords like this one boast on their website to potential visitors that “timing and precision are two key drivers” and that they excel at acquiring “undervalued properties and stabilizing at today's market rents”—fancy words for renovicting tenants and forcing them during a pandemic to leave their homes, often with no options for

housing that they can afford, all to maximize rents and to return dividends to their stakeholders.

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When is this government going to take the housing crisis seriously and put protections in place for families in my riding of York South–Weston and in Ontario?

DR. ROBIN POOLE

Mr. Jim McDonell: I rise today to commemorate the achievements of Dr. Robin Poole, who recently was awarded the Order of Canada. A native of Great Britain, he moved to South Glengarry with his wife, Mary, and their children, Lucianne and Jonathan, about 20 years ago.

Dr. Poole won worldwide recognition for his groundbreaking research that led to the creation of faster diagnosis techniques for osteoarthritis. International acknowledgements include being named the president and symposium/workshop chair of the sixth world congress of inflammation research associations, and he is an honorary member of the British Society for Matrix Biology. He received the Holley Research Prize and was appointed master of the American College of Rheumatology. Lifetime achievement awards were bestowed upon him from the Osteoarthritis Research Society International, the International Cartilage Repair Society and the Canadian Connective Tissue Society.

Locally, Dr. Poole has found time to support the Cooper Marsh conservation authority.

Dr. Poole continues to be a positive influence in the medical field, acting as a mentor for young scientists while fulfilling a role as chair of the international academic advisory board of U of T's arthritis program at the Toronto Western Hospital.

Thank you and congratulations, Dr. Poole, for your local and international achievements.

BUSINESSES IN WINDSOR–TECUMSEH

Mr. Percy Hatfield: We have a great community college, an outstanding university and a high-class symphony orchestra in Windsor. The Ford Motor Co. builds really good engines. Stellantis makes fantastic mini-vans. Our molding, machining and tool-and-die industries are world-renowned, and we manufacture some of the best whisky in the world.

Canadian Club 43 is the Canadian Whisky of the Year. For the fourth straight year, Hiram Walker has been named Canada's Distillery of the Year. J.P. Wiser's Triple Barrel Rye won a Sippin' Whisky of the Year honour, Lot No. 40 Dark Oak claimed the Best New Whisky award, and J.P. Wiser's 22 Year Old Port Cask Finished came out on top in the Cask Strength Whisky of the Year category.

Hats off to Ontario's grain farmers. Ninety-seven per cent of the grain that we put into Hiram Walker's award-winning whiskies comes from fields in Essex county and Chatham-Kent.

Windsor's master blender, Don Livermore, says, “This year there were more competitors than ever before.” The

craft distilling industry is really taking off in Canada. The competition was fierce, with 130 entries. Windsor is so proud of our distillery district in Olde Walkerville. We've been making whisky there since the 1850s. We know a thing or two about whisky, Speaker. The awards just keep on coming. And just so you know, we haven't given up on reopening the doors to the Canadian Club Brand Heritage Centre either.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Good morning. On January 7, the newest provincial political party was registered with Elections Ontario with the New Blue Party of Ontario, and I'm happy to sit as its first member of this Legislature.

Today I present various concerns from constituents. Parents in Cambridge, North Dumfries and North Brant are concerned about the draconian measure to mandate mask wearing for children over the age of 2. Even the World Health Organization doesn't recommend that children under the age of 5 wear masks.

Small business owners continue to lose their livelihoods and have to consider, if they haven't already, the prospects of starting over as a result of the government's inconsistent application of policies that favour their lobbyist friends and big corporate interests over small businesses that are the lifeblood of our economy.

Finally, it would be remiss of me not to mention the disappointment of watching this government, the Premier and members of the media ridicule, insult and condemn those churches like Trinity Bible Chapel that decided to gather for worship over the last month.

Perhaps, if the Premier and his government wanted Ontarians to take their public scolding seriously, they can work on abiding by their own rules, because apparently, while attending church or a synagogue or opening your small business is not deemed essential, travelling to a sunny location, visiting a cottage, going to a politician's wedding or singing Happy Birthday to a former mayor are all acts that the Premier believes exempt him and his cabinet from the rules they've set for everyone else.

WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN PROVINCIAL PARLIAMENT

Ms. Jane McKenna: Speaker, 86% of women say that seeing more women in leadership positions inspires and encourages them to blaze their own trail.

Our PC government has many strong women in critical leadership positions. Christine Elliott is Ontario's Deputy Premier and Minister of Health; Dr. Merrilee Fullerton is our Minister of Long-Term Care; Caroline Mulroney is Ontario's Minister of Transportation and Minister of Francophone Affairs; Lisa Thompson is the Minister of Government and Consumer Services; Laurie Scott is the Minister of Infrastructure; Lisa MacLeod is Ontario's Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries; Sylvia Jones is our Ontario Solicitor General; and

our two associate ministers, Minister Jill Dunlop in children and women's issues, and Kinga Surma in transportation.

Together, these women are responsible for the majority of all government spending in Ontario. I'm proud to serve alongside these incredible women who are making a positive difference in our communities every day.

Tomorrow, I'll be speaking at Wonder Women Conference 2.0, an event hosted by our Burlington Chamber of Commerce. This event brings together local women—virtually this year—who are trailblazers and leaders in our community. I'm proud to represent Burlington, a community led by so many strong women.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I want to thank the member for Burlington for her presentation. I noticed a few eyebrows going up, but I wanted to say that normally the rule, of course, is that we refer to each other by our riding name or our ministerial title, but obviously those were favourable references, colleague to colleague, and I allowed it. If anybody has an issue with it, we can talk about it later.

PROTESTS IN INDIA

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I'm proud to rise on behalf of the residents of Brampton North. There's been a peaceful protest going around the world, and it's one of the largest ones. It's been going on for several months now. It's the farmers' protest against the Indian farmers bill, a bill which will allow the agricultural sector to be taken over by large corporations. Unfortunately, these peaceful protestors have been met with tear gas, water cannons, and all they're trying to do is save their livelihood from mass privatization.

I've been getting calls to my constituency office and emails by concerned citizens who have family back home and they want me to stand up for the farmers. That is exactly what I'm doing.

What is happening now is we are seeing arrests of journalists, of peaceful protestors, as well as—we've seen arrests of people who are more or less just trying to make sure that the government is doing the right thing. One person, Disha Ravi, who is a human rights activist, was arrested recently.

Peaceful protest is needed in our governments, and I'm calling on the Indian government to resolve this with dialogue with these protestors. The Canadian government must also set an example. They must set an example by standing up for these peaceful protestors.

For the front-line protestors, my brothers and sisters out there, I want them to know that I stand with them in these protests.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Norman Miller: Just a few minutes ago, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing announced a new round of provincial social services relief funding. Today's announcement is an investment of \$255 million that can

be used by local service managers across Ontario to reduce the impacts of COVID on some of our most vulnerable citizens—those who are homeless or rely on housing supports and other social services.

Locally, Ontario is providing almost \$1.2 million to the district of Muskoka and \$950,000 to the Parry Sound District Social Services Administration Board. With this funding, our government is continuing to provide the resources necessary to protect those residents who rely on housing supports and other social services during the pandemic.

This funding is critical to so many people in my riding. While Parry Sound–Muskoka is often seen as the playground of the rich and famous, the average income of the year-round population is well below the provincial average. The pandemic has only made this situation worse, with many in the hospitality and tourism sectors unemployed, and at the same time the cost of housing has been driven up.

In order to address those trends, our government is providing a great deal of flexibility in how this funding can be used. For example, it could be used to acquire motel and hotel spaces for homeless individuals, purchase PPE or food, or add to rent and utility banks to help prevent people from becoming homeless.

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On behalf of the people of Parry Sound–Muskoka, I want to thank Minister Clark for this funding. I know that both the district of Muskoka and the Parry Sound DSSAB will put this money to great use and support those residents who rely upon those services.

WALTER GRETZKY

Mr. Will Bouma: I rise today to pay tribute to arguably Canada's favourite hockey dad, Walter Gretzky. It was with profound sadness that I learned of his passing last week. Not only was he a Brantford institution, legend and tireless promoter of our community, but he was a family man.

Walter was an avid hockey player as a youth and a keen analyst of the game. He built a backyard rink for his children and coached Wayne, the Great One, from the age of three, devising creative exercises and drills and teaching him profound insights into how to play successfully.

He was known for his charitable work with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind Foundation and with the Summer Computer Orientation Recreational Education program, known as SCORE. SCORE helps blind students learn computer skills that will be needed for jobs in their future and increases blind students' access to computer programs and Internet applications.

Walter was awarded the Brantford Citizen of the Year in 1996. He was also an inductee of the Brantford Walk of Fame.

He was appointed as a member of the Order of Ontario in 2002.

Gretzky was named a member of the Order of Canada on December 28, 2007.

On February 12, 2010, Gretzky carried the Olympic torch during the Olympic relay, hours before the opening ceremonies in Vancouver, British Columbia, where Wayne later lit the Olympic flame.

On behalf of the government of Ontario, I send our sincere condolences to the Gretzky family and to the city that he loved so dearly.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our members' statements for this morning.

DRAPEAU FRANCO-ONTARIEN

FRANCO-ONTARIAN FLAG

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I understand the member for Ottawa–Vanier has a point of order.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Yes.

Je demande le consentement unanime pour présenter une motion sans préavis concernant le déploiement permanent du drapeau franco-ontarien dans la chambre législative, pour célébrer le drapeau comme emblème officiel de l'Ontario.

I seek unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding the permanent display of the Franco-Ontarian flag in the legislative chamber in celebration of the flag as an official emblem of Ontario.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): On the same point of order, government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I just want to thank the member for that motion. It is a very good motion, which we will be supporting.

I wonder if she would entertain a friendly amendment that we recommend to the Speaker that the Franco-Ontarian flag be flown on the legislative grounds as well as in the chamber.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member care to reply to that?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you very much for that amendment, which is actually an improvement to the motion.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa–Vanier is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion without notice regarding the permanent display of the Franco-Ontarian flag in the legislative chamber, in celebration of the flag as an official emblem of Ontario, and to display the flag outside. Agreed? Agreed.

Just to be clear, you have unanimous consent to now move the motion.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Je propose que, de l'avis de cette Chambre, le drapeau franco-ontarien devrait être déployé de façon permanente dans la chambre législative et sur le terrain de Queen's Park. I don't know how to say it in French.

I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Franco-Ontarian flag should be permanently displayed in the legislative chamber and on the legislative grounds.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Collard has moved that, in the opinion of this House, the Franco-Ontarian flag should be permanently displayed in the legislative chamber and on the legislative grounds.

I'm just seeing if there's any debate.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Brampton East, I think, has a point of order.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: I seek the unanimous consent of this House to bring forward a motion to call on the Conservative government to immediately implement paid sick days so that workers in Brampton and throughout Ontario are protected from COVID-19 and so they don't have to make the terrible decision between going to work sick or paying their bills.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Singh is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to bring forward a motion requiring the government to implement paid sick days legislation.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I apologize. The government House leader: point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I wanted to just mention that, of course, there are already 20 sick days. I'm just wondering if the member opposite in his point of order is suggesting that we repeal the 20 sick days that are already in place?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): He's seeking unanimous consent to bring forward a motion requiring the government to implement paid sick days legislation. Agreed? I heard a no.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my first question this morning is to the Premier. I think it's pretty positive that Ontario is finally joining the rest of the world in receiving vaccinations; that's a positive thing. But questions still remain about the fair inoculation process, whether the inoculation process here in our province is actually going to be done fairly.

I ask the question this morning because I think there are still lots of questions that are swirling out there in Ontario about how this government intends—or whether this government has a plan—to actually make sure that those folks who need the vaccines the most are in fact going to get them first, as opposed to folks who are going to decide to queue jump.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the leader of the official opposition for the question. There is a plan that has been developed that was based on the work of bioethicists. We did receive recommendations from them. The plan that has

been developed is based on age and risk and making sure that our most vulnerable receive the vaccines first, which is why we have vaccinated the people who want to receive them in long-term-care homes; 80% of them have also received their second vaccine. We are well on our way to implementing our plan, based on the plan that was developed with the assistance of the vaccine task force, based on the work of a bioethicist who assisted us in that regard.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Premier: It's really the case that the questions around people getting the vaccine who need them first are even much more confusing because of the system that the government has put in place. It's a really confusing system. We have six regions that are going to go it alone and have their own registration. And then all of the other regions in Ontario are going to have their own registration, and they're going to be in part of the provincial registration. Then they're going to have hospitals registering. Then they're going to have pharmacies registering. How is it that people are going to be able to understand this? Maybe folks are going to put their names on every single list.

The question remains: How do we make sure that people who need the vaccine the most are actually going to be able to get it first when the process is such a confusing mess?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Premier?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker, the only person that's confused is the Leader of the Opposition. This is the way we have to deal with it.

What I'm hearing from the Leader of the Opposition is that maybe we shouldn't have pharmacies, we shouldn't have family physicians, we shouldn't have mass vaccination centres. No, this is all hands on deck.

The great news is, someone in Ontario will receive the one millionth dose today. It just goes to show you everyone is pitching in. We're going to ramp that up, along with AstraZeneca. The good news is, again, today, at a Shoppers Drug Mart, they're going to start pumping out the AstraZeneca and people will be getting needles in the arms.

I want to thank all the front-line folks, no matter if it's the health care mobile unit, paramedics, front-line health care workers or mass vaccination centres. All the PHUs are doing an incredible job, and once we get more vaccines we're just going to ramp it up more. Thank you for the question.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In fact, Speaker, what we should have in Ontario is a plan, instead of mass confusion and chaos that likely leaves vulnerable people behind when it comes to getting the vaccinations first. That's the concern that we have.

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In fact, we're not alone in that concern. Dr. Warner says this: "If we don't have a structure and we don't have a framework and we don't have true criteria that can be

enforced and checked, people will jump the queue. And the people who really need the vaccine will be forced to wait.”

People who need the vaccine most in this government's chaotic plan are going to not get it. They're going to be forced to have to wait. So the question is, how will this Premier and his government make sure that people who need the vaccine the most will actually get it first?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker, in other great news: zero mortalities in long-term care.

I could be quoting our doctors, too, as the Leader of the Opposition always quotes us Dr. Warner—and I'm sure he's a great doctor, by the way. But in saying that, Mr. Speaker, we're already rolling out the 80-pluses and hopefully very shortly, as we ramp this up, we're going to get through the 80-pluses. We're taking care of the most vulnerable people.

And then I guess the Leader of the Opposition is questioning the ethics of the people of Ontario. I think that would be the worst thing in the world, if a healthy young person tried to jump the queue and use a health condition for getting a vaccine. The difference between the Leader of the Opposition and ourselves is we actually have faith in the people of Ontario. The people of Ontario got us through this pandemic, so we appreciate it.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier, but I have to say, I question the ethics of a government that let 4,000 people die in long-term care in the first and second waves of this virus.

I do have to say, there are some positive things; there's no doubt about it. AstraZeneca is here. It's about to roll out. But the reality is that everybody who needs a vaccine should be able to get it as easily as possible. Of course, as folks know, last week we talked to the government and started asking the government—or, rather, not last week; a couple of days ago at the beginning of this week—about whether or not they're prepared to step up and support those front-line heroes, those front-line workers, who need to get vaccinated but can't afford to lose pay. We asked the government to come forward and say to folks, “If you need to get a vaccine, you need to have an appointment, you don't have to worry about losing a couple hours of pay.”

So the question is: Will the government do the right thing here and make sure those front-line heroes can easily get their vaccine and protect not only themselves but the rest of us as well?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker, a tremendous amount—thousands and thousands of front-line health care workers—have already received their vaccine. We actually encourage them. My big concern is there's probably 40% may not get the vaccine, so we're encouraging them to come and get it done. We have sites all over the province. We'll have the mobile units going into regions. We'll have the mass vaccination centres. We'll

have the family docs administering the vaccine as well, just to name a few.

But talk about ethics, okay? Talk about ethics. As we're working our back off, the Leader of the Opposition sent out a fundraising email to try to cash in on the tragedy of long-term care. Who does that? Who cashes in on the tragedy of long-term care? The same political party, the NDP, thought it would be appropriate to launch their campaign platform on the height of the second wave, using the second wave and the mortalities in long-term care to raise cash for their party. That's about as low as you can get, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I think the Premier is little confused and uncertain about the question I'm asking. I'm talking about front-line, essential workers: folks who work in warehouses and in factories, folks who have been there bagging groceries and working in the community; folks who literally can't afford to lose pay to go and get their vaccine.

This is a matter of fairness, Speaker. It's a matter of fairness to make sure that we do everything we can to help those workers be able to get the time off that they need and not have to lose pay. It's something that is not only about fairness, but it also makes sense. In fact, New York just passed legislation this week to give workers—all workers—the time off, with pay, to go get their vaccine.

Why is the Ford government turning their back on hard-working people, on front-line, essential workers, on heroes, not only in terms of not giving them paid sick days, but not giving them the paid time off to go get their vaccines?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker, I'll repeat what I said earlier on: that tens of thousands of front-line health care workers are getting their vaccinations. As a matter of fact, I talk to numerous CEOs of hospitals, and people are just getting them at the hospitals. They're getting vaccinated right there so they don't have to take time off.

There are going to be vaccination centres opening up right across this province—seven days a week in a wide range of different areas—to make it very convenient for these health care heroes to get vaccinated. Even in long-term care, I know first-hand many, many of them, probably the vast majority of the PSWs there, were in a lineup at the long-term care, and they were getting vaccinated.

I truly believe the Leader of the Opposition is blowing this way, way out of proportion. As a matter of fact, maybe she should do a little due diligence and find out how many are actually getting it at their place of work.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Maybe the Premier doesn't understand what an hourly waged worker has to go through to try to meet the bills. I think that is what's going on here: no concept.

Speaker, I'm talking about essential front-line workers in all kinds of workplaces who were working while the rest of us were able to stay safe at home. These are workers in places like Scarborough, Brampton, Etobicoke, Rexdale, all around the province. These workers were working and still are working and need to be given the opportunity to take time off without losing pay to get their vaccine. It is a matter of what people deserve in terms of our thankfulness for the work they've done. They deserve paid sick days and they deserve to be able to get their vaccine and not lose pay.

Will this Premier support this? I don't understand why he is so unwilling to support those essential front-line workers all around our province who have been there for us in every workplace. Just give them the time off with pay to get their vaccine so all of us can be safer and we can stop the spread.

Hon. Doug Ford: Again, rather than playing politics on the backs of our health care heroes, as the Leader of the Opposition did with our long-term-care tragedy throughout this province, these front-line health care heroes who I've talked to at the hospitals—and I've talked to dozens of them, more than dozens. They're getting it done at the hospitals. When I talked to long-term care, dozens, more than dozens, are getting it done right there at the long-term care.

We encourage the hospitals to continue protecting their front-line health care heroes, no matter if it's in long-term care or in hospitals or in any other area. We're going to continue doing it. I know our front-line first responders, they're getting taken care of as well. We're covering all the bases.

But it's not about us; it's about all the people pitching in, every single person. No matter how small or how large it is, everyone has pitched in in Ontario. We're doing so much better than the rest of the world and the rest of North America. We're going to continue on the path of recovery.

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question this morning is to the Premier. There is a report that broke this morning on the CBC that shows that the ultimate reason the Premier is paving over wetlands in Pickering seems to be for a giant Amazon warehouse. The main developers, Triple Group, are looking to cash in on skyrocketing property values if they get their way. They're making sure that this Premier knows that they're real close, tight buddies because they cut the PC Party a cheque for \$5,000 just a couple of weeks ago—more than a coincidence. If you're a big developer that needs an MZO right now, it seems that the world is your oyster.

Yesterday, the Premier said that he wants even more ministerial zoning orders. He will not put a stop to this. Speaker, why is this government bending over backwards to build another warehouse on top of protected environmental wetlands?

Hon. Doug Ford: I always stand behind the MZOs, as all these other parties changed the greenbelt 17 times, the

NDP and the Liberals. Guess what, Mr. Speaker? We're expanding the greenbelt. We will not build on the greenbelt. We'll make sure we protect the greenbelt, unlike the NDP and the Liberals did for 15 years, taking care of their developer buddies.

But let me tell you something, Mr. Speaker: What I'm hearing from the opposition is that the thousand affordable homes that we gave an MZO—we shouldn't do it. The MZO—we're giving and putting homes in Hamilton. I should call the people who are going to be in those homes and say, "Guess what? The Leader of the Opposition doesn't want them."

As for the 26,000 new jobs through the MZO—and thank God Amazon is building and expanding here, along with other companies throughout Ontario. What should I do when we get through the recovery, say, "No, let's go through the process that will take four years, and everyone sit in the unemployment lines"?"

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That's what the NDP believe in. Socialism doesn't work. Freedom, democracy and entrepreneurship works, and it's—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

The supplementary question.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: No one in this province should be left wondering whether projects are being sold for political donations to developers—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I feel the member has crossed the line. He's imputing motive and must withdraw.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'll withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Finish your question.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much. Speaker, if you're a worker desperate for paid sick days, there's no MZOs and magic wands for you, and the Premier won't even take your calls, but it's pretty apparent that the Premier will move heaven and earth to get these folks what they want. This is about a company whose owners donated big political cash in order to make millions of dollars on land speculation.

Why is this Premier, in the middle of this pandemic, so ready to do anything he can to build a warehouse for his donor buddies?

Hon. Doug Ford: Mr. Speaker, I have to laugh when I hear him speak, because I don't even know who the heck the developer is, to be very frank with you. As a matter of fact—I'm just reading off my notes—the developer, whoever this person is, actually donated to Steven Del Duca's riding, specifically to him—and also totalling over \$20,000 worth of donations from the group since 2014, including political donations. As I'm sitting, I'm reading off notes. Someone could give me a ton of money to figure out who this is. I don't have a clue who this person is.

Anyway, in saying that, let's be very clear: This is about creating jobs. It's not about donations. Maybe they can be bought; I can't be bought and neither can our party.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I ask the Premier to withdraw.

Hon. Doug Ford: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The next question.

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, I know the opposition fails to understand why you issue minister's zoning orders. These are local priority projects that municipalities identify to play a key role in the province's recovery, projects like affordable housing and long-term-care beds. Members of this House need to better understand how involved and engaged municipalities are throughout the ministerial zoning order process.

Will the minister speak to the typical process, working with municipalities, that leads to an MZO?

Hon. Steve Clark: I want to thank the member for Perth–Wellington for highlighting this very important topic. Our government has been clear that every single minister's zoning order issued on non-provincially owned land has been at the request of the local municipality, full stop. Municipalities are in the driver's seat, not us.

Of course, a municipal request simply starts the process for the government; we need to do our due diligence. For example, we've been clear that we are expanding the greenbelt and will not develop any part of it. That's why I've rejected nine different MZO requests from municipalities that would have allowed development in the greenbelt.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. The city of Stratford, which I'm proud to represent, made multiple requests for you to issue an MZO to allow a glass manufacturing plant, but following the concerns from residents, the company decided to suspend the proposal indefinitely. Then, on Monday, the city of Stratford passed a council resolution asking for the minister to revoke the MZO. As a former municipal councillor myself, I have always encouraged local decision-making, I have always respected the role of our elected municipal councils, and I know you've been clear that municipalities are in the driver's seat.

Given this new request, will you revoke the MZO in Stratford?

Hon. Steve Clark: Again, I want to thank the member for Perth–Wellington for the question. I also want to thank him for his letter that I've received.

Our government has always been clear that we are committed to working with our municipal partners to advance their local priorities. Our government has been clear on that matter, and I want to reiterate that every single MZO issued on non-provincially owned lands has been at the request of the local municipality. Given that the city of Stratford no longer wishes to have the MZO in place to allow for the proposed development, I will be issuing the required 30-day public consultation notice to revoke this MZO.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Gurratan Singh: My question is for the Premier. It has been months since Ontario has received vaccinations. Brampton is one of the cities worst hit by COVID-19 in this entire province, yet the Premier has failed to give Bramptonians the details about when they're going to receive the life-saving COVID-19 vaccine. Front-line workers, seniors, at-risk communities don't know when or how they're going to be getting their vaccine.

Now, Brampton has been a COVID-19 hot spot for months, with no support from this Conservative government. The health care crisis at our single underfunded and overcrowded hospital was bad before COVID-19, and it's worse now.

Despite the fact that there's a light at the end of the tunnel with the COVID-19 vaccine, Bramptonians are still being left in the dark. Why does this Premier think it's okay to leave front-line workers in the dark and refuse to give Bramptonians the details that they deserve to know about the COVID-19 vaccine rollout?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker, I had a great conversation with the mayor of Brampton. He was thanking us for all the things we're doing for Brampton and opening up William Osler. They're already on their way in vaccinating people 80-plus, of which they're doing a great job and throughout Brampton.

If you look at the numbers, we're really focusing—and it's been very transparent—on the hot spots, and Brampton was one of the hot spots. So was Etobicoke North and so was Scarborough, and so on and so forth. But we focused on Brampton, and they, per capita, ended up with more vaccinations than a lot of regions. A lot of regions are wondering, "Why Brampton? Why not me?" and so on and so forth, but it's a hot spot, so we focused on it.

I appreciate the mayor reaching out and having a great chat. But do you know something, Mr. Speaker? We have some great news coming to Brampton on a couple of fronts. I just can't wait until the budget rolls out. And I look forward to taking over the three other seats in Brampton in the next election.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Back to the Premier: The Premier loves to pretend to care about front-line workers, but in cities like Brampton and others across Ontario, where front-line workers are risking their lives every single day going to work, moving our economy, they've been given no details on when they're going to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

The people of Brampton and folks across Ontario have done their part. They have gone through the hardest months to stop the spread of COVID-19, and now they expect the Premier to do his job and prepare for this critical moment of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout. If this Premier actually cared about front-line workers, then he would immediately provide the details for the COVID-19 vaccine rollout now.

Why is the Premier keeping communities that have been the hardest hit by COVID-19, like Brampton, in the dark about the COVID-19 vaccine rollout?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the opposition. We're rolling it out big time in Brampton, and there's no secret: They're getting more than anyone. Now, the good news is the family physicians in Brampton are going to get the AstraZeneca. So we have the mobile units in there, we have the mass vaccination centres; we have the PHUs going full steam. We have the hospitals as well pitching in, and they're doing a great job out in the hospitals as well. So we're throwing everything and the kitchen sink into Brampton, and you're going to see the numbers start coming down.

The people of Brampton are incredible. I lived there for five years. That's where I first moved when we got married, so I have a really close spot in my heart for the people of Brampton. Thank you for the question.

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. Mike Schreiner: My question is for the Premier. Wetlands protect people, businesses, infrastructure and property from flooding. They clean our drinking water, they keep the Great Lakes clean, and wetlands do all of this for free, if we don't pave over them.

Yet the government is ripping up environmental protections to destroy the Duffins Creek wetland. These extreme actions are for what, Speaker? An Amazon warehouse—destroying wetlands for an Amazon warehouse, pulling out all the stops for an Amazon warehouse.

Speaker, will the Premier prioritize the people over Amazon by revoking the MZO to destroy the Duffins Creek wetland?

1100

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, the MZO requested by the city of Pickering and supported by the region of Durham would help create over 10,000 jobs and boost the economy in that region. We are, as a government, supporting these local municipalities. The proposed change will ensure that priority projects that play a key role in the province's economic recovery, located outside of the greenbelt, do not face unnecessary barriers and delays after an MZO has been made.

In this particular case that the member speaks about, the proponent and the TRCA have entered into an agreement that will ensure the creation of ecological benefits that will meet or exceed the loss of the natural environment system.

This is a project that the region and the municipality have asked our government to provide, and we've extended an MZO for that purpose, at their request.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, the city of Ajax, which is directly affected by this decision, has come out opposing this MZO.

If you look at their report, the TRCA says they've issued a permit under duress and there is nothing that can be done to fully prevent the damage that the government is doing with this MZO.

Think about what small business owners must be thinking about. First, the government kept big box stores open and allowed them to sell non-essential goods while small businesses were closed. Now small businesses are having to compete with Amazon, and the government is pulling out all the stops for an Amazon warehouse.

I'm asking the government: Will the minister, will the Premier put the people of Ontario first? Put small businesses first. Put the protection of our communities first by revoking the MZO that will allow the destruction of the lower Duffins Creek wetland.

Hon. Steve Clark: First of all, I'm not going to speak ill of a company that provides hundreds and thousands of jobs in the province. But I am going to go back to the member's question regarding the site.

The Ajax request happened after the city of Pickering and the region of Durham made the request to the government for the MZO.

I've talked about the proponent for the site in Pickering—that he has an agreement with TRCA to provide the replacement of wetlands.

I also understand that since that time, the mayor and the town of Ajax have put a request in regarding their property. I understand that they were in strong opposition to the Durham Live site. I was sort of surprised to see it, given the fact that Duffins Creek directly runs through the Annandale golf course, which is the subject of this. However, municipalities do make these requests, and we are obviously under active consideration of any request that a municipality gives us.

Thank you for the question.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is to the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Speaker, the parliamentary assistant to the minister represents Peterborough, and that's why I am sure he was very happy to hear that our government is investing \$695,000 to increase mental health and addiction services for students attending Trent University and Fleming College. This was excellent and welcome news, as we know that students at colleges and universities across Ontario have had their mental health negatively impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Even though the majority of students are not on campus, the government has a responsibility to make sure that our students are getting the support they need to succeed while attending college or university.

Can the minister tell us what our government is doing to support mental health services on campuses and for students?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Northumberland–Peterborough South and parliamentary assistant.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you to the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook for that important question on mental health.

She's right: COVID-19 has been a very challenging time for students across the province of Ontario. That's why I was so proud to join the member for Peterborough–Kawartha and the Minister of Infrastructure for a historic announcement of over \$695,000 to increase mental health supports and services for those students attending Trent University and Fleming College.

As I mentioned last week, this funding will be used to enhance important mental health supports for students, like increased access to mental health practitioners, increased access to crisis counselling, mental health planning, additional FPHL counselling, international counselling, peer support etc. These are critical supports for our students at a time when they need them most.

But our commitment goes beyond our post-secondary schools in Peterborough. Across the province, we have made a historic \$26-million-plus investment into mental health supports for students. I'll expand more on that in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you to the parliamentary assistant for the update. We know that before the COVID-19 outbreak, students on college and university campuses were increasingly facing mental health challenges. According to the last National College Health Assessment survey of the Canadian student population in 2019, 52% of students reported feeling depressed—that compares to 46% in 2016; 69% experienced anxiety; 12% of Canada's students had considered suicide compared to 14% in 2016; and 2.8% of students reported having attempted suicide. Those statistics are alarming and must change.

I hear in my constituency all the time from students and family members about the need for greater on-campus supports. Speaker, what is the government doing to address these concerns across Ontario's post-secondary campuses?

Mr. David Piccini: Again, thank you to that member for this important question. As I mentioned, this government has made a historic investment of over \$26.25 million in mental health supports for post-secondary students across the province of Ontario. That's a \$10-million-plus increase from last year, at a vital time for students.

This investment supports a number of new and ongoing initiatives, and that includes mental health grants to publicly assisted colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes, the Good2Talk/Allo J'écoute mental health helpline for post-secondary students, new investments to support partnerships embedded in local communities to support student needs arising out of COVID-19, and a new virtual mental health act.

Mr. Speaker, this Premier recognizes the challenges students are facing. That's why we've stood up with this historic \$26.25 million investment. We have expanded the virtual learning strategy to support students with a \$50-

million investment and a \$164-million investment to expand capital supports for our colleges and universities—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The next question.

LAND USE PLANNING

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question this morning is for the Premier.

The Environmental Bill of Rights provides Ontarians with essential protections, yet this government has repeatedly and shamelessly violated this legislation. In fact, there is a letter from me on the Minister of the Environment's desk with these concerns.

In late February, big developers dropped donations into PC Party coffers, and just days later, magically, this government tabled legislation and regulations to try to stop a lawsuit and pave over an environmentally sensitive wetland at Duffins Creek. Now, there are concerns that schedule 3 of Bill 257 could violate the province's own Environmental Bill of Rights—especially because there was no consultation, particularly with Indigenous peoples.

Why, just days after taking big developer donations, is the Premier plowing ahead with a plan that could violate Ontario's Environmental Bill of Rights?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Steve Clark: I want to correct the record of the member opposite. Every ministerial zoning order that our government has done on non-provincial lands has been at the request of the local council. In fact, the Premier was absolutely correct this morning when he indicated that we did receive a request from the city of Hamilton for an affordable housing project in that community. I want to thank MPP Skelly for making that announcement on my behalf.

Again, Speaker, the process is simple: The municipality makes the request to the government and the government considers it. There is no other process, as the member opposite alludes to. Municipalities are in the driver's seat.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll remind the House that you can't correct another member's record. You can correct your own.

Supplementary question.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thanks for that mansplaining, or MZO-splaining, this morning.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. I'm going to ask the member to take her seat.

I'm going to ask the member to withdraw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Withdraw, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Place the question.

1110

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Mr. Speaker, you will know that Ontarians are outraged that the Premier is pushing everyone aside and plowing ahead with this development, rather than protecting the natural wetlands. And now, this government is prepared to rewrite laws retroactively, just days after receiving developer donations.

Ontarians know that the Environmental Bill of Rights enshrines their rights to comment on and be notified of proposals that impact the environment. Once again, it looks like this government broke our environmental laws. Will the government do the right thing and pull back from this disastrous plan?

Hon. Steve Clark: Again, our government has been crystal clear that municipalities are the ones who make the requests for the MZO—*not* a proponent for a particular development, but the local municipality.

As well, again, through you, Speaker, to the environment critic for the official opposition, I've denied nine requests from municipalities because the proposal included development of the greenbelt. I have been, on behalf of our government, extremely clear that we will not accept a proposal to develop in the greenbelt. In fact—the member opposite talks about consultation—we're involved in a historic consultation on growing the greenbelt, which I hope, based on input from Ontarians, that we will have a situation where we will grow the greenbelt to a level that we haven't seen since it was created in 2005. We encourage members from all sides of the House to participate in that consultation opportunity.

Again, Speaker, through you, I want to thank the member for the question.

SUBVENTIONS DESTINÉES À L'ÉDUCATION EDUCATION FUNDING

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Monsieur le Président, malgré les affirmations des membres du gouvernement, les choses vont mal à Sudbury.

L'Université Laurentienne, qui offre une programmation importante en français, et qui est désignée en vertu de la Loi sur les services en français, est en train d'être restructurée par des avocats spécialisés en droit de la faillite de la rue Bay. Et oui, des technocrates de Bay Street détermineront l'avenir de l'une des plus importantes institutions du nord de l'Ontario. Pire encore, c'est Bay Street qui décidera du sort du statut du français dans le nord de l'Ontario.

Ça fait longtemps que l'Université Laurentienne est désignée en vertu de la loi, monsieur le Président. Et en vertu de cette loi, le gouvernement a l'obligation juridique de fournir les fonds requis pour que l'Université Laurentienne respecte la Loi sur les services en français. Pourtant, on me dit que ce gouvernement ne respecte pas ses obligations.

Ma question est simple : le gouvernement peut-il confirmer aujourd'hui, dans cette Chambre, qu'il fournira à l'Université Laurentienne le financement requis pour que la Loi sur les services en français soit respectée ?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Merci. To reply, the member for Northumberland–Peterborough South.

Mr. David Piccini: I thank the member opposite for that question and for her concern. Mr. Speaker, I do find it deeply concerning that that member opposite is referring

to our judicial system, referencing Bay Street. We have a proud history in this province of an independent judicial system. This matter is before the courts.

As I've said previously, this government does find the reality at Laurentian University deeply concerning. We've been working to ensure that the students have access to the supports that they need, that there will be continuity of learning.

As this matter is before the courts, I will provide a little more in the supplementary. But it is inappropriate to comment any further, as this matter, as I said, is before the courts.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Quite frankly, that's not an acceptable answer, because it's not about the matter being before the court or not; it's about the government respecting the French Language Services Act. That's separate of what's going on.

Monsieur le Président, on sait que le gouvernement vient tout juste de prendre connaissance de l'existence de la Loi sur les services en français, même si cette loi date d'avant même ma naissance, mais le gouvernement doit pouvoir répondre à la question, franchement. Pour respecter cette loi, ce gouvernement doit fournir à l'Université Laurentienne les sommes nécessaires pour qu'elle offre des programmes postsecondaires en français de qualité dans le nord de l'Ontario.

Alors le gouvernement va-t-il respecter la Loi sur les services en français, oui ou non ?

Mr. David Piccini: We will take no lessons from that member and her party after decimating the post-secondary sector, after—on the backs of students, over a decade—leading to some of the highest tuition costs in the country.

We put students first with a historic 10% reduction. Mr. Speaker, we've invested more into Laurentian University, with stable supports of over \$80 million a year. We've invested in the northern Ontario special purposes grant—\$6.1 million per year—and the graduate expansion grant—\$7.9 million per year.

We've stood to support francophones across the province. In fact, it was this government that launched a university governed for and by francophones in the province of Ontario.

So we'll take no lessons from that member opposite, who is now part of the independent party, on how to work collaboratively with partners in the post-secondary sector.

We will continue to support students in this province and—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Both sides of the House, come to order.

The next question.

PIPELINES

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Mr. Speaker, last week, members of this House debated a motion on the importance of the line 5 pipeline. We discussed the impact of line 5 on

our province's economic future and energy security and its importance to many sectors, including manufacturing and agriculture.

It is clear that line 5 isn't just a pipeline; it's a lifeline, one that supports thousands of people who work in well-paying, high-skilled jobs that help produce products we use every day. Most importantly, it is a supply that will be very hard, if not impossible, to replace if the pipeline shutters in May.

Will the minister inform this House about the government's efforts to ensure the continued safe operation of the line 5 pipeline?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bill Walker: I'd like to thank the member for Perth–Wellington for his question and for all of his dedicated work on behalf of his constituents.

Mr. Speaker, we've had two important debates over the past two weeks, and I thank colleagues on this side of the House for taking a strong stand on this important issue from day one.

I'm proud that our government is fighting to ensure the continued safe and responsible operation of line 5. We know that as many as 30,000 jobs are at stake, and they're worth fighting for.

I'm glad that the official opposition finally realized that it is appropriate to fight for families and jobs and joined us in supporting our motion on line 5, which recognized pipelines as the safest way of transporting energy resources.

All of us have a role to play in advocating for these jobs to stay in Ontario as we recover from this pandemic.

I can assure the member that this government and this Premier will never stop fighting for those jobs.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I want to thank the minister for reiterating the importance of line 5 to our government. I know that the minister has been a steadfast advocate since day one.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the continued safe operation of line 5 is not just important to Ontario, but to our whole country. I know that my colleagues and I have been writing to our federal counterparts to advocate on this important issue.

Can the minister please tell this House what he has heard about the federal government's response to the line 5 issue?

Hon. Bill Walker: As the member from Perth–Wellington knows, our government has taken a Team Canada approach on this issue. We've been advocating non-stop for the continued safe operation of line 5 since November.

As the member said, many of us have written to our federal colleagues. In addition to the Premier's advocacy, the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines and Indigenous Affairs and the Minister of Labour wrote to their counterparts in Ottawa to express concerns over the impact of line 5 on working-class, skilled trades jobs.

So we were relieved to hear the federal Minister of Natural Resources recently state that the line 5 pipeline is "a vital part of Canadian energy security and its continued operation is non-negotiable" in the context of our relationship with our neighbours and friends to the south.

Our government is glad to hear this news and looks forward to learning more about what the federal government has been doing on the diplomatic front to resolve this issue. Be assured, Mr. Speaker and the people of Ontario, we will continue to stand in unison and advocate with them to resolve this critical matter for the benefit of Ontario families.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Speaker. Good morning.

Remarks in Oji-Cree.

My question is to the Premier.

Ontario pays a lot of lip service to treaties. In Kiiwetinoong, Eabametoong First Nation is part of Treaty 9, a treaty that Ontario signed. Ontario has a relationship with Eabametoong that they like to ignore until Ontario needs environmental assessments approved for roads and mining.

It's inhumane to let people live in tents in the middle of winter anywhere, but there are multiple families living in tents in Eabametoong right now, today.

How can Ontario say it respects Treaty 9 when they do nothing to help Eabametoong?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Attorney General to respond.

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you to the member across for the question.

We are engaged with our First Nations, and Treaty 9 in particular, on so many different files, whether it be matters of vaccines, whether it be matters of justice, whether it be matters of services across the board. Is there more work to do? Absolutely, there's more work to do. That's why we're engaged every single day with our tremendous Minister of Indigenous Affairs, and our federal partners as well.

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We look forward to an ongoing ability to move things forward. Certainly it is something we value, and we continue to want to work with them on every solution we can possibly find.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Back to the Premier: I'm not talking about programs and services and funding; I'm talking about treaties.

This government has said that treaty relationships are as relevant today as they were when the treaties were first signed. The chief of the Scugog Island First Nation would disagree. The MZO issued last week to destroy the Duffins Creek wetlands impacts local Aboriginal and treaty rights. Chief LaRocca stated that the local First Nations were not consulted or included in the decision-making process.

Destroying this land and the water source sends a message, and the message is that there is no respect for First Nations treaty rights in Ontario. Speaker, why does Ontario not respect treaty rights?

Hon. Doug Downey: Again, I thank the member for his question and, really, his comment more than anything. Respecting treaty rights is something that the province is doing on so many fronts that we engage on. In fact, we engage on issues that are outside of treaty rights. We engage on issues that affect communities across Ontario.

I'm not going to speak to any particular matter that the member is trying to advance, but just to say that we look forward to continued engagement. I think almost every member of our government has engaged with a First Nation on some issue of relevance. I can tell you that my department, with the Indigenous justice division, is really a shining example of the way governments can work with and inform internally in the bureaucracy, as well as reaching out to the communities to make sure that their voices are heard. We continue to look for opportunities to engage and advance the interests of First Nations through respectful dialogue at every level.

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Premier. Mr. Speaker, Highway 413 is redundant and unnecessary. It would pave over farms, forests, wetlands and portions of the greenbelt and cost taxpayers billions.

The government knows the 413 would pave over two thousand acres of class 1 and 2 farmland, some of the most productive in the province. They know the 413 will impact the Credit River and Humber River watersheds that flow into Lake Ontario and are the source of drinking water for millions of residents in the GTHA. They know that the 413 will cost Ontario taxpayers \$6 billion or more and only save commuters 30 seconds. We know these things in part because of the report commissioned by our leader of our Liberal Party, Steven Del Duca, who led the way and shelved Highway 413.

My question to the government is: Will the government do the right thing, follow Steven Del Duca's example and cancel Highway 413?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Government side, come to order.

The Government House leader to respond.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I don't even know where to begin on a question like that. First of all, let me just say this: Steven Del Duca built an illegal pool on conservation lands, and after being a minister for so long, apparently he did not know about it. This is the same minister, Steven Del Duca, who decided to build a GO train station where nobody wanted it, where it wasn't supposed to go, against the advice of his officials.

And the question is coming from a member who was in charge of a light rail system, who built a light rail system that was over budget, that was late and that didn't work. I

think the people of Ontario know they're well served by this party.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question?

Mr. Stephen Blais: My supplemental is also for the Premier. The government has used the cover of the pandemic to trample local interests. They've trampled local democracy by unilaterally changing election laws. They've trampled local environmental knowledge and concerns by limiting conservation authorities. They've trampled local land use and planning policies by using ministerial zoning orders to exchange wetlands for warehouses.

More and more cities are now coming out opposing Highway 413. They know spending billions of dollars on a useless highway won't save any time, but it will take away from investments in public transit.

My question: With a \$6-billion white elephant of a highway preparing to stampede across thousands of acres of farmland and hundreds of acres of sensitive greenbelt, will the government do the right thing? Will the government listen to local leaders and stop Highway 413?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think we've already addressed that on a number of occasions. We of course have to work closely with our partners in the area. There is an environmental assessment to do. The leader of the Green Party actually asked about this a couple of weeks ago. As I said then, if it makes sense, we'll do it; if it doesn't, then we won't.

Look, when it comes to protecting class 1 farmland, this member should know that it was actually Steven Del Duca and his government, when in office, that evicted farmers from class 1 farmland in my riding. Generational farmers who had been there for years evicted, kicking and screaming, from their farms so that they could build an ecological park on class 1 farmland: It was that Liberal government.

When we were trying to create the Rouge National Urban Park, the largest urban park in the country, and protect class 1 farmland, it was Steven Del Duca and the Liberals who refused to transfer the lands into the Rouge National Urban Park because they wanted to evict farmers and reforest the area.

Steven Del Duca is the worst thing for farmers. He's the worst thing for ethical government. That's why the people will—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you.

The next question? The member for Scarborough Southwest.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Government House leader, come to order. Order.

I apologize to the member from Scarborough Southwest. I'll give you extra time.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you, Speaker. I

Constituents in my riding have been writing to my office for weeks, asking why their parents or grandparents cannot access vaccines, asking why Scarborough is being left behind. When vaccine registrations and pre-registrations for seniors over 80 and community health workers were open in many parts of the province, in Scarborough, people were left in the dark and had no option to book for a vaccine because the portal in our region was not open yet.

People were being told that the vaccine rollout actually took place: Pharmacies are open; Rexall is open. They ran out; the portal is closed. Then, we're hearing from word of mouth that other places like Costco opened last night; this morning, they're closed—just all-over confusion. People are deeply frustrated by the confusing nature of this vaccine rollout and, frankly, the sheer incompetence of this government.

My question is, what is the plan for the hard-hit communities like Scarborough? And when can seniors in my riding and the rest of Scarborough, frankly, because they have four ridings from the government side, get vaccines? Why is this government turning a blind eye on my community of Scarborough Southwest and all the ridings in Scarborough?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: There is one plan for the vaccination of all of the people of Ontario. It is being distributed through 34 public health units in their own way, because they know the geography. They know the people who live in the ridings. What happens in Toronto and the best way to do vaccinations there is going to be different than in Thunder Bay or in other parts of the province.

However, I can advise the member, through you, Mr. Speaker, that I visited a mass vaccination site in Scarborough the other day at Centennial College. It's working very, very well. They are able to process several thousand people there. It was quite busy, but it was moving very smoothly. People there don't seem to have a problem knowing where to go. They understand it very well. The system is working the way it was intended to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question.

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank all the health care workers, all the teams that are going out and vaccinating in Centennial that the minister is talking about. It started this week. That is the unfortunate part: that it started this week. When York, Peel, other regions were getting it, Scarborough did not, despite being ground zero for this province when it came to COVID. Over 20% of all COVID-19 cases in this province are in Scarborough, and yet the amount of vaccines that Scarborough has received is nowhere near an equitable amount to that statistic.

We have learned from the Scarborough Health Network that they currently have 10,000 doses of vaccine, despite having the capacity to administer 35,000 doses. Scarborough Health Network has one of the highest COVID in-patient numbers. For every 100 COVID-positive cases, SHN will have five admitted to hospital.

I'm once again asking, how can this government look at these statistics, look at the reality and still continue to overlook the critical need for an equitable vaccine distribution plan? Can this government commit to an equitable vaccine rollout strategy for communities like ours?

1130

Hon. Christine Elliott: Well, the short answer to that is yes. We do have one plan. We do have a plan that's rolling out. We are dependent on receiving vaccines from the federal government. There was a shortage of vaccines, as everyone will remember, in February; however, they are starting to come in in larger quantities now, and they are being equitably distributed across the province based on population, and also based on those areas that are at higher risk. There are a number of areas that are at higher risk, where there are more hospitalizations, more COVID cases and, unfortunately, more deaths. Those areas will receive more, and we anticipate that Scarborough will share in that.

But there is absolutely an equitable distribution. Scarborough is receiving its fair share, and we will receive more vaccine supplies coming in very shortly, which will allow us to triple or quadruple the number of vaccines that can be delivered to people every day. But we still have to wait to receive those vaccines through the federal government.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier. The long-term-care commission has shown Ontarians, has given us a clearer picture about the decisions the government made when it came to building an iron ring around long-term-care homes.

Testimony from Dr. Allison McGeer confirms that both the Ministries of Health and of Long-Term Care were presented with proposals allowing hospitals to support the long-term-care sector by getting residents out of three- and four-bed ward rooms. The ministries decided not to proceed with this life-saving recommendation because it was deemed to be "too expensive." Commission transcripts also reveal that the Minister of Long-Term Care rejected calling in the military again because it would look like a failure.

Speaker, through you, can the Premier explain to families of residents who've lost loved ones in long-term care why, if he was sparing no expense, these proposals were rejected?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Long-Term Care to respond.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Those accusations are preposterous. They are unfounded. They are wrong.

And so our government, no doubt, invested \$1.38 billion to shore up this sector during COVID. There is no doubt that every measure, every tool was used, and that no expense was spared. Dr. McGeer herself said in testimony to the long-term-care commission, "For me, a lot of this is second-hand."

The suggestion that Ontario rejected proposals based on cost is completely inaccurate and misleading, and so—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member to withdraw her unparliamentary remark.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Withdraw.

It would be helpful if the member opposite were to provide the actual proposals to which he is referring and for everyone to see that those were costed proposals and indicate how in fact they were rejected.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Mr. John Fraser: Well, perhaps in the supplementary the minister might want to explain why her Treasury Board submissions were rejected last February.

But here's the reality, Speaker: The staffing challenge grew worse after the first wave. Ontario did almost nothing to address it. By comparison, Quebec went out to hire 10,000 PSWs. They only got 7,000, but they paid them to train, and they deployed them in October. What did Ontario do? Well, \$14 million to train and recruit PSWs; \$42 million for security guards. And then, the government announced a staffing strategy last week, eight months after Quebec did essentially the same thing.

I don't know how that announcement last week addressed what happened in the second wave. Maybe the minister could explain that because—I don't know if they're going to do time travel, but I don't think that's going to protect or did protect families in long-term care. Why were these proposals—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you.

The Minister of Long-Term Care.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: I like to deal with the facts, and the facts are that our government, through its pandemic pay, was able to recruit 8,600 additional hires to stabilize the sector—8,600 and more.

Mr. John Fraser: They haven't arrived.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: No, the member opposite is confused. During the pandemic pay, \$461 million went to create 8,636 hires for long-term care. In addition to that, we have created an across-the-province program for PSWs. I will also correct the member opposite: They were not PSWs through Quebec. They did not attain 10,000. They were people trained in three weeks and sent out into the field. The member opposite needs to get his facts correct.

Mr. John Fraser: I've got my facts straight.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: No, you don't.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The next question.

challenges in learning and in their overall well-being. Now is the time for us to be putting more caring adults in our schools, not less.

How can the Premier justify a return to the kinds of deep cuts he was making before this pandemic began?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I do note the changing position of the opposition parties. It was on February 5 when the member herself said, "The fact that they don't know" where these hires occurred "is deeply troubling. If they don't know, they shouldn't be ..."—and a word that I can't say in this House—"Ontarians with these numbers that they are coming up with." They're "clearly not based in reality." That was February 5.

And yet today, the member purports that these critical investments were central to the safety of schools and that they ought not relapse. You have to choose one or the other. You actually can't have the benefit of both ways.

On this side of the House, we know that from day one we hired 3,400 more temporary teachers, 1,400 more custodians. We know that we hired hundreds of nurses—623—to support our schools, as well as over 400 EAs. We also know, Speaker, that before this pandemic, our Premier invested more in public education than the former Liberals did at the peak of their spending, and we know, as we look forward to September, that we will continue to invest more than we did the year prior for areas of mental health, for learning gaps and to give young people the hope and the opportunity they deserve to reach their full potential in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our question period for this morning.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has a point of order that he wishes to present.

Hon. Steve Clark: Thanks, Speaker. I want to correct my record. In response to a question by the member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas, I should have indicated that the government has ERO posting 019-3233 regarding the proposal she mentioned. It's posted from March 4 to April 3, and I have a copy that I'll ask an usher to send her.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Again, a member can correct their own record, not rebut something that was said in question period by way of a point of order after question period.

NOTICES OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Guelph has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing concerning revoking the MZO on the Duffins Creek wetland. This matter will be debated today following private members' public business.

Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. This question is for the Premier. When asked on Monday about the ministry memo that was warning of looming cuts to education funding, the minister assured us that funding was up and would continue. So it came as a real shock for parents and educators in Ottawa this morning who were waking up to news that the region's largest school board is expecting to cut at least 167 teachers this fall. Students have faced a year of turmoil and are dealing with huge

Minister of Colleges and Universities concerning the French Language Services Act and Laurentian University. This matter will be debated today following private members' public business.

DEFERRED VOTES

SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Now we have a deferred vote on the private members' notice of motion number 145, in the name of Ms. Stiles.

The bells will now ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their ballots, their votes.

I'll ask the Clerks to prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1140 to 1210.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote on private members' notice of motion number 145 has been held.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 19; the nays are 36.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): This House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1211 to 1500.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I beg leave to present a report on Metrolinx—GO Station Selection, section 3.06 of the 2018 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Natyshak presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations.

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: As Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I'm pleased to table the committee's report today entitled Metrolinx—GO Station Selection, section 3.06 of the 2018 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the permanent members of the committee: France Gélinas, the Vice-Chair; Deepak Anand; Toby Barrett; Jessica Bell; Stephen Blais; Stephen Crawford; Rudy Cuzzetto; Christine Hogarth; Daryl Kramp; Michael Parsa; as well as former committee members Jill Andrew, Stan Cho, Catherine Fife, Norm Miller and John Fraser.

The committee extends its appreciation to the officials from Metrolinx and the Ministry of Transportation.

The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided during the hearings and report-writing deliberations

by the Office of the Auditor General, the Clerk of the Committee and legislative research.

I move adjournment of the debate.

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

Debate adjourned.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Mr. Mike Harris: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Social Policy and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Short): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill 157, An Act to proclaim COPD Awareness Day /
Projet de loi 157, Loi proclamant la Journée de sensibilisation à la BPCO.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CONVENIENCE STORE WEEK ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LA SEMAINE DES DÉPANNEURS

Mr. Stan Cho moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 262, An Act to proclaim Convenience Store Week /
Projet de loi 262, Loi proclamant la Semaine des dépanneurs.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member for Willowdale care to make a brief statement about his bill?

Mr. Stan Cho: The bill, if passed, proclaims the seven-day period in each year that ends on the Saturday immediately before Labour Day as Convenience Store Week.

I am giving notice to the Clerks that the bill will be my ballot item.

PETITIONS

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: I have a number of petitions to table today, mostly on education. I'd like to read the first one, on behalf of the residents of Davenport.

"Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

“We support our public schools: Reverse the \$25-million cut to education!

“Whereas the people of Ontario are proud to have one of the best public education systems in the world, and recognize that public education is an essential resource for building and maintaining an equitable and prosperous province;

“Whereas the Education Program Other (EPO) Grants, which were cut by the Ontario government in December ... provided much-needed and effective supports to Ontario’s most vulnerable students;

“Whereas decades of research demonstrate that systemic inequality and discrimination hinder student success and long-term employment prospects, and therefore the economic growth of Ontario; and

“Whereas the EPO grants provided to students who face systemic barriers meaningful interventions and supports, including:

—the Focus on Youth program, which provides after-school and summer programming, and employment for youth in low-income and underserved neighbourhoods as a partial response to incidents of youth violence and gang involvement;

—post-secondary tutors to support struggling students in elementary school classrooms;

—re-engagement programs for students who leave high school with only a few credits to complete;

—pilots on ensuring equitable access to post-secondary education, which assists at-risk students with preparing and submitting post-secondary applications;

—daily physical activity funding for elementary schools;

—Indigenous-focused teacher training and support, and engagement initiatives for Indigenous students.

“We, the undersigned, implore the Ontario provincial government to immediately reverse these cuts, direct public school boards to reinstitute the above-noted programs, refrain from further cuts, and ensure public schools are adequately funded.”

I am proud to affix my signature to this petition, and I’ll hand it to the Clerk.

DOCUMENTS GOUVERNEMENTAUX

M^{me} France Gélinas: J’aimerais remercier le Centre communautaire francophone Windsor-Essex-Kent de m’avoir fait parvenir ces pétitions.

« Accents en français sur les cartes de santé de l’Ontario...

« À l’Assemblée législative...

« Alors qu’il est important d’avoir le nom exact des personnes sur les cartes émises par le gouvernement », telle « la carte santé...;

« Alors que plusieurs personnes francophones ont des accents dans l’épellation de leur nom »—comme moi;

« Alors que ... le ministère de la Santé » a « confirmé que le système informatique de l’Ontario ne permet pas l’enregistrement des lettres avec des accents;

Ils demandent à l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario pour que « les accents de la langue française soient inclus sur tous les documents et cartes émis par le gouvernement. »

J’approuve cette pétition. Je vais la signer et je l’envoie à la table des greffiers.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: I’m proud to present this petition on behalf of Elliot Tam from my riding, on behalf of the people of Davenport. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the provincial government has announced over \$1 billion in funding cuts to our schools, which will result in:

—much larger class sizes in grades 4 to 12;

—significantly less support for our most vulnerable students, including those with disabilities, special needs, and English-language learners;

—forcing secondary students to take four online courses;

—further deterioration of schools already in need of repair; and

“Whereas Ontario already ranked last in per pupil funding when compared to the per pupil funding of 18 northeastern and Great Lakes states and provinces prior to these cuts;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario to:

“(1) immediately halt and reverse all funding cuts to our public education system; eliminate mandatory e-learning;

“(2) amend the education funding formula to: increase program and resource support for special education; lower class sizes in kindergarten and grades 4 to 12; and increase school boards’ capacity to deliver front-line services by paraprofessionals;

“(3) support the development of an Ontario-wide ‘state of good repair standard’ for all publicly funded schools so that these public assets are healthy, well-maintained buildings that provide environments conducive to learning and working;

“(4) establish an evidence-based review of the education funding formula every five years to determine its effectiveness in supporting high-quality public education.”

I support this petition. I’m happy to affix my name and pass it to the Clerks.

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ABORTION IMAGES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, calling to block disturbing anti-abortion images. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas an anti-abortion group, the Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform, is distributing unwanted flyers to people’s homes and displaying placards on major streets

in London featuring horrifying and graphic images of aborted fetuses;

“Whereas regularly displaying graphic images on our streets and in our homes is traumatizing, difficult and misleading for women, children, and other vulnerable members of the community;

“Whereas the display of these images at crowded intersections creates a hazard and distraction to drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians;

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

“To support calls for an injunction based on the need to prevent a public nuisance, and should it not be possible to proceed with an injunction, to develop and bring forward legislation to prohibit the use of such graphic and disturbing images on flyers dropped in people’s mailboxes or exhibited on placards used in the street.”

I support this petition, affix my name and will send it to the table.

EDUCATION FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Frank Philippe from Val Caron in my riding for these petitions.

“Safe Return to School....”

“Whereas the ... government has announced that the schools will reopen...; and

“Whereas school boards across the province are preparing for students” and trying “to adapt to learning during COVID-19; and

“Whereas school boards are scrambling to meet the government’s ever-changing guidelines;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To call on the Ford government to implement an action plan to safely reopen and keep” open all of our schools “that includes smaller, safer class sizes; hire more teachers and education workers; support online learning including affordable, reliable Internet access; provide immediate funding for urgent school repairs and upgrades such as ventilation systems; provide more funding for school buses to allow for physical distancing; and provide additional support for students with special needs.”

I support this petition. I will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: I’m pleased, on behalf of the residents of Davenport and Andrea Bird, who has provided me with this petition, to present it. It reads as follows:

“Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

“Don’t Increase Class Sizes in Our Public Schools.

“Whereas the vast majority of parents, students, and educators support smaller class sizes and the current model of full-day kindergarten and want the best education possible for the students of Ontario; and

“Whereas larger class sizes negatively impacts the quality of education; reduces access to teaching resources

and significantly diminishes teacher-student interactions; and

“Whereas the impact of larger class sizes will be particularly detrimental to students who need additional support; and

“Whereas Ontario has an internationally recognized public education system that requires careful attention and the investment to ensure all of our students can succeed;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to commit to reducing class sizes, maintain the current model of full-day kindergarten, and make the necessary investments in public education to build the schools our students deserve.”

I am very happy to support this petition. I’ll be affixing my signature and handing it to the Clerk.

ANTI-SMOKING INITIATIVES FOR YOUTH

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have received petitions from all over Ontario. They read as follows:

“Whereas:

“—In the past 10 years in Ontario, 86% of all movies with on-screen smoking were rated for youth;

“—The tobacco industry has a long, well-documented history of promoting tobacco use on screen;

“—A scientific report released by the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit estimated that 185,000 children in Ontario today will be recruited to smoking by exposure to on-screen smoking;

“—More than 59,000 will eventually die from tobacco-related cancers, strokes, heart disease and emphysema, incurring at least \$1.1 billion in health care costs; and whereas an adult rating (18A) for movies that promote on-screen tobacco in Ontario would save at least 30,000 lives and half a billion health care dollars;

“—The Ontario government has a stated goal to achieve the lowest smoking rates in Canada;

“—79% of Ontarians support not allowing smoking in movies rated” for youth;

“—The Minister of Government and Consumer Services has the authority to amend the regulations of the Film Classification Act...;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“—To request the Standing Committee on Government Agencies examine the ways in which the regulations of the Film Classification Act could be amended to reduce smoking in youth-rated films released in Ontario;

“—That the committee report back on its findings to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and that the Minister of Government and Consumer Services prepare a response.”

I support this petition. I will affix my name to it and send to it the Clerk.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: I am looking forward to presenting this petition on behalf of Huma Ikram from my riding. It reads as follows:

“Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

“Do Not Cut Education Funding. Fully Fund the Equitable Education System Children, Families, and Education Workers Deserve.

“Whereas since July 2018 the Ontario provincial government has cut millions of dollars from public education funding including: \$100 million in funding allocated for school repairs; cancelled curriculum writing sessions to incorporate Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission into school curriculum; removed the 2015 health and physical education curriculum from kindergarten to grade 8, reverting to the 2010 version; launched a web-based ‘snitch line’ for parents to report on teachers they suspect are not following the outdated curriculum; cut education programs ... for at-risk youth, including Indigenous and racialized students by \$25 million; cut funding for autistic children and students; and

“Whereas the Ontario provincial government has announced a hiring freeze and significant class size increases from grades 4 to 12, mandatory e-learning and other detrimental changes to our public education system;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to oppose these damaging cuts and implement:

“—a fully funded public education system that includes low class caps, excellent needs support, no mandatory e-learning and well-maintained buildings;

“—funding that provides equitable enrichment opportunities across the system and reduces the burden on school-based fundraising;

“—an inclusive curriculum and respect for the diversity of our students and educators.”

I am very supportive of this petition. I’m happy to affix my signature and hand it to the Clerks.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Mr. Tessier from Hanmer in my riding for this petition.

“Neurological Movement Disorder Clinic in Sudbury.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas northeastern Ontario has a high rate of neurological movement disorders; and

“Whereas specialized neurological movement disorder clinics provide essential health care services to those living with diseases such as Parkinson’s, Huntington’s, dystonia, Tourette’s and others; and

“Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is recognized as a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“Immediately set up a neurological movement disorder clinic in the Sudbury area that is staffed by a neurologist who specializes in the treatment of movement disorders, a physiotherapist and a social worker, at a minimum.”

I support this petition. I will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk.

RÉMUNÉRATION DU SECTEUR PUBLIC

M^{me} France Gélinas: J’aimerais beaucoup remercier M^{me} Francine Leblanc de Blind River pour ces pétitions.

« Prime liée à la pandémie... »

« Alors que la prime liée à la pandémie doit être plus accessible et doit débiter en date de la déclaration d’urgence; et

« Alors que le premier ministre Ford a déclaré à maintes reprises que les travailleurs-es de première ligne ont tout son appui, mais c’est difficile à croire, compte tenu de tous ceux et celles qui sont exclus-es; et

« Alors que la liste de travailleurs-es et des lieux de travail admissibles » devrait « être élargie; et

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« Alors que tous les travailleurs-es de première ligne » devraient « être rémunérés-es de juste façon; »

Ils demandent à l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario « de demander au gouvernement Ford de rendre la prime de 4 \$ de l’heure disponible à tous les travailleurs-es de première ligne, qui ont mis les besoins de leur communauté au premier plan et de débiter la prime salariale, le jour où la situation d’urgence a été déclarée, afin que leurs sacrifices et leur travail acharné pour assurer notre sécurité soient reconnus. »

J’appuie cette pétition, je vais la signer et l’envoyer à la table des greffiers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPLY ACT, 2021

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2021

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 10, 2021, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 261, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021 / Projet de loi 261, Loi autorisant l’utilisation de certaines sommes pour l’exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2021.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Parsa: I’m pleased to rise in the House today to talk about the Supply Act for the 2020-21 fiscal year.

As my colleague the President of the Treasury Board mentioned earlier, the Supply Act is a procedural yet key step in the province’s annual fiscal cycle. The discussion today and the ensuing vote are critical steps in approving spending for this fiscal year ending March 31, 2021.

I would like to remind my fellow members that this bill does not propose any new spending. It is simply a step in approving the spending already outlined in the expenditure estimates.

Speaker, the President of the Treasury Board spoke about some of the great strides we have made as a government to support Ontarians through an unprecedented year—a year that included the worldwide declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I want to spend a few moments to talk about some of our government's critical investments in health care and education and in support of our front-line workers.

The President of the Treasury Board spoke earlier about our investments in health care and long-term care. Now more than ever, investing in and supporting our health care sector is absolutely vital, because it is, of course, at the centre of the province's COVID-19 response.

That is why we introduced the COVID-19 fall preparedness plan to plan for additional waves of COVID-19 and ensure all Ontarians were supported. Ontario's Action Plan: Protect, Support, Recover also prioritized support for Ontario's health care heroes.

Through the COVID-19 fall preparedness plan, we're investing \$52.5 million to recruit, retain and support over 3,700 more front-line health care workers and caregivers. This means adding 800 more nurses and 2,000 more personal support workers.

The plan also makes available \$15.2 billion over three years to support Ontario's front-line health care heroes and protect the people of Ontario from COVID-19. This includes supporting 141 hospitals and health care facilities and 626 long-term-care homes since the beginning of the pandemic.

Speaker, I'd also like to highlight the historic action our government has taken to accelerate training for personal support workers. Now more than ever, we need critical front-line workers in the health care sector, especially in long-term care.

We are investing over \$115 million to train up to 8,200 new personal support workers for high-demand jobs in Ontario's health and long-term-care sector. This is another important step toward our goal of hiring enough personal support workers to provide a nation-leading average of four hours of direct daily care to long-term-care residents. In collaboration with Colleges Ontario, all 24 publicly assisted colleges will offer this innovative, fully funded program starting April 2021.

We're also making vital investments in education. Our government has been unwavering in our commitment to support students, education workers and families through these tumultuous times. That's why we're providing \$7 million to increase access to mental health and addiction services for post-secondary students. This investment will provide more supports on campus and virtually to address the needs of vulnerable and diverse groups, such as Indigenous and LGBTQ2S+ students and students with disabilities.

Although transmission of COVID-19 in schools has been low, we continue to make additional investments to keep students and staff safe.

With support from phase 2 of the federal Safe Return to Class Fund, we're improving air quality and ventilation in schools, supporting online learning, promoting student mental health and hiring additional staff.

Speaker, we have also made great strides in post-secondary education. Starting in the 2020-21 academic year, we have expanded eligibility for the Ontario Student Assistance Program, OSAP. This extends OSAP to

eligible programs in Indigenous institutes to ensure Indigenous learners have access to culturally responsive and high-quality post-secondary education that will prepare them to meet local labour market needs.

We've also made impactful contributions to the post-secondary education sector through our investments in a Virtual Learning Strategy. The Virtual Learning Strategy will position Ontario as a global leader in post-secondary education. It will enable the province to serve as a test bed for digital innovation in educational technology. The supports under this strategy will also benefit international students who want to study from their home to have access to a world-class Ontario education.

Speaker, as we continue to increase supports for our educators and health care sector heroes, we need to remember that these are just two groups in our community of front-line workers.

We're partnering with Ontario through the Ontario Together Fund.

In collaboration with McMaster University and University of Toronto, we are carrying out research, development and testing of the next generation of personal protective equipment. These projects will help improve technology and better protect front-line workers.

The impact has been ongoing for almost a year, and while this has taken a toll on us, our first responders and public safety personnel have been on the front lines each and every day. We need to take care of the people who have taken care of us. That's why we have taken steps to improve mental health supports for first responders and public safety personnel. We have established collaborative tables to identify supports, treatment and recovery options to better support the well-being of policing, fire, corrections and paramedic services personnel.

Speaker, over the last year, the world has changed. Here in Ontario, we're continuing to make essential investments in the way we provide programs and services to support the people and businesses of this great province. The passing of this supply bill would formalize these investments.

Again, this bill is not about approving new spending; it's about providing legislative approval for the spending to which the government has already committed.

I encourage all members to support this important piece of legislation.

Once again, I thank you for the opportunity, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to participate in the debate today on this legislation that is before us, the Supply Act.

I want to echo some of the comments that were made this morning by my colleague the member for Waterloo. She talked about the gaps in this government's fiscal plan, the gaps in addressing the real needs and priorities of the people of Ontario throughout this last year.

In particular, I want to focus, in the short time I have, on paid sick days. Certainly, that has been recognized by mayors, city councils, medical officers of health, worker advocates and small business owners as perhaps the most

glaring omission in this government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We've heard frequently from the other side of the House that Ontario doesn't need a made-in-Ontario program of paid sick days, that Ontario workers have access to the federal CRSB. Yes, that is true. If they have earned \$5,000 in the year previous and if they have been off sick for at least 50% of their regular workweek, they can take an unpaid leave of absence from their employer, then they can apply to the federal program and wait to find out if they qualify, and then they can wait to see that money arrive in their bank account. They have to wait up to several weeks if they don't have a bank account and need to have a cheque in the mail. This does not work for many, many workers in the province of Ontario. They live paycheque to paycheque. They can't take the risk of taking an unpaid leave from their job and hoping that the federal recovery sickness benefit comes through.

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That's why other jurisdictions, like the United States, for a full seven months last year, from March to December, implemented an employer-paid program of paid sick days, and those costs were reimbursed by the federal government. That's the only way to ensure that workers have seamless access to the support they need in order to be able to make the decision to stay home.

Everyone in this province wants to do the responsible thing. They want to keep their co-workers safe. They want to keep their customers safe, their clients safe. They want to keep their families safe when they go home. They want to keep their communities safe when they go out shopping. But they can't do that if they are forced to take a cut in pay in order to stay home if they are sick.

There is no duplication between a federal program and a provincial program—in the US, which I just mentioned, they had a federal program in place from March to December. At the same time, 13 US states also have a state-level program of paid sick days. They've got 23 cities or counties that also have a local program of paid sick days. In all cases, the paid sick days are delivered by their employer.

This government has continually refused to accept its responsibility to implement a paid sick day program, as everybody else in the province is calling for. We have given them lots of opportunities to support employer-delivered paid sick days. There was my private member's bill, the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act. They had the opportunity to support that legislation when it was debated in February and when the vote took place on that bill, on March 1. There have been numerous unanimous consent motions that the official opposition has brought forward to give this government another opportunity to recognize the essential nature of paid sick days in dealing with COVID-19. There was the opposition day motion that we debated in this chamber earlier this week, which was brought forward by the leader of the official opposition. That was yet another missed opportunity for this government to listen to the voices of public health experts, to listen the mayors and the municipal councils, who are looking to this

government for the investment that is needed to support workers.

Instead, what we have heard from the Premier, from the very day that the federal program of paid sick days was first proposed—the Premier said, "I don't support it." The Premier made very clear that he didn't believe workers deserve any paid sick days, whether it's federal or provincial. We know that, of course, because one of the first things this government did was to eliminate the two paid sick days that Ontario workers used to have. More troubling, we heard the Premier say that he doesn't believe that investing in workers in this province is necessary.

Speaker, I can tell you that on this side of the House, we support workers; we support public health experts; we support mayors and local councillors; we support unions, who understand that workers need access to employer-delivered paid sick days in order to stay home when they are sick.

Numerous editorials have been written, in places like the Globe and Mail, which is not a bastion of progressive thinking; let me tell you that, Speaker—even columnists, editorial writers at the Globe and Mail, at the Toronto Star, at many, many media outlets, understand why paid sick days are so necessary. They're listening to the experts. They see why this is something that is good for the government to invest in, and no one can understand why this Premier and this government have failed to recognize that—unless it's ideology, and I suspect that's what it is. They don't want to support workers in the way that they deserve to be supported. They don't care about small businesses, and we saw that in their failure to provide the support that small businesses need.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I'm pleased to rise today, in my role as parliamentary assistant to the President of the Treasury Board, to speak with respect to the Supply Act for the 2020-21 fiscal year.

As I said on Monday, to date, our government has shown that we will do whatever it takes to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The decisions we're making, including unprecedented investments to support our economy, have ensured that we can continue to provide support to the people and to the businesses of Ontario through this difficult time.

Speaker, small businesses are the backbone of our economy and our province. In 2019, they employed 2.4 million Ontarians and made up 98% of all businesses in this province. They are the heart of our community. But as we know, many have struggled with the impact of the public health measures we had to take to stop the spread of this virus. We all have seen examples of this in our communities. Retailers have closed their doors to shift to doing business curbside. Service providers have reconfigured to operate in virtual environments. Restaurants have redesigned their menus and added options for takeout and delivery. However, we have also seen incredible resilience and acts of kindness from our small business owners, despite struggling themselves.

Our hospitality sector has been amongst the hardest-hit for COVID-19, but our local restaurants and convention halls have also been amongst the most generous and most creative in giving back and supporting our most vulnerable. Many have helped to prepare and deliver food to our front-line health care workers and our most vulnerable. And our distilleries responded by switching production to hand sanitizer earlier last year, when it was in short supply.

Speaker, small businesses across the province have done all this and more to keep serving the people of Ontario during this challenging time. That is why we have introduced historic funding programs like the Ontario Small Business Support Grant, which is the largest-ever small business support initiative anywhere in Canada. The government is providing property tax and energy cost rebates to businesses for the entire length of the time that they have been required to temporarily close or to significantly restrict services to protect public health. In addition, the government is also offering \$60 million through the main street relief grant for personal protective equipment.

We have supported local restaurants through the Supporting Local Restaurants Act. This important piece of legislation will continue to reduce food delivery fees for restaurants in areas where indoor dining is prohibited. This act has given small and independent restaurants, in particular, a chance to successfully pivot to delivery and takeout, while making payroll and meeting their financial obligations.

With the extensive supports we're making available to our small businesses, we're making it known that they do not walk on this challenging journey alone. And we are continuing to make these investments to support businesses, families and our economy.

In fact, through the Re-Connect festivals and events program, Ontario has invested \$7 million in 87 innovative local and virtual events and initiatives. This program is providing virtual supports for our tourism sector during COVID-19. Some events that have benefited from this program include the Hot Docs Podcast Festival, an online ticketed event showcasing popular podcasts—as well, the Royal Agricultural Virtual Experience, spring edition, has been revamped for an online audience, including a showcase of the best in Canadian agriculture, food and equine sport.

We provided \$4.1 million to train 373 new personal support workers to fill in-demand jobs and support long-term-care homes, including the new home now under construction in Mississauga–Lakeshore, with 640 new long-term-care beds.

1540

We launched the \$5-million Ontario Onwards Acceleration Fund to support a number of innovative projects to support the people of Ontario, including our work to offer a secure and convenient digital ID by the end of 2021.

We have also launched the COVID Alert app. Developed in partnership between the Ontario Digital Service, Shopify and the federal government, it gives Ontario a secure “digital defence” against COVID-19. It's

free, easy to use and private. The app notifies you if you have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. With over 6.3 million downloads to date, it is a made-in-Ontario success story.

The programs I've talked about today are just some of the many initiatives of our government to help people and businesses navigate these unprecedented times.

The passage of the supply bill, which we're considering here today, would provide legislative approval for spending to which the government has already committed. Again, this bill is not about approving any new spending.

I urge all members to support the passage of the Supply Act so that spending on these critical public services can be authorized for the 2020-21 fiscal year.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? Further debate?

Pursuant to standing order 67, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Bethlenfalvy has moved second reading of Bill 261, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021.

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, unless I receive a deferral slip—and here is the deferral slip. I'll read this:

“To the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario,

“Pursuant to standing order 30(h), I request that the vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 261, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021, be deferred until deferred votes on Thursday, March 11, 2021”—signed by the chief government whip, Mr. Coe.

Second reading vote deferred.

SUPPORTING BROADBAND AND INFRASTRUCTURE EXPANSION ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SOUTENANT L'EXPANSION DE L'INTERNET ET DES INFRASTRUCTURES

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 9, 2021, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 257, An Act to enact the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021 and to make other amendments in respect of infrastructure and land use planning matters / *Projet de loi 257, Loi édictant la Loi de 2021 sur la réalisation accélérée de projets d'Internet à haut débit et apportant d'autres modifications en ce qui concerne les infrastructures et des questions d'aménagement du territoire.*

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It is my pleasure to rise on behalf of the residents of Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas to speak to this bill, the Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act.

We know that broadband is important infrastructure, particularly for folks in rural and northern Ontario who have long been denied access to good or essential broadband services. We hear from our MPPs in the north how terrible the broadband service is. So we understand that this is an important issue to people in Ontario who don't have access to broadband.

Here in the south, we take that for granted. I think it's shocking for us to realize that there are parts of Ontario, particularly northern Ontario and rural areas, where there are no broadband services. These disparities have been made even more clear to us during the pandemic, when we see people using their Internet so often for Zoom calls and for schooling that has now gone online. So it is a top priority for rural and northern Ontario and for Indigenous communities.

What we would like to have seen with this bill is that it actually state a purpose or a goal of targeting rural communities, of addressing disparities in northern Ontario and Indigenous communities. It's not stated in the bill. That would have been helpful, if that was in fact the actual goal. In particular, an equity lens when it comes to these essential services, when it comes to Indigenous communities, would be quite helpful.

Surprise, surprise—with this bill, yet again, the government is slipping in a completely unrelated schedule, schedule 3. This schedule 3 has caused, rightfully, outrage across the province because it's not only an assault on good planning, on the planning principles in the province of Ontario, and an assault on environmental laws, but it's a fundamental assault on how we write laws—or rewrite laws, in the case of this bill—in the province of Ontario. It's an affront to what we would consider fair and due process. Retroactively changing laws in this province—the government is doing it with the stroke of a pen, at their whim—is not something that anybody would have expected from a democratically elected government in the province of Ontario. I do have to wonder how the Minister of Infrastructure feels about this. Finally, she gets to put forward a bill, only to have it sullied by the inclusion of schedule 3. Again, this clause has absolutely nothing to do with broadband expansion. It is clearly intended to block an ongoing lawsuit against the government over its recent issuing of MZOs which are enabling the ongoing destruction of wetlands and natural lands across the province—particularly, in this case, Duffins Creek.

We have all come to know that Duffins Creek is a provincially significant wetland in Pickering. We now know that they are destroying a wetland to build a warehouse for Amazon on top of that. It boggles the mind that we would destroy a provincially significant wetland to build a warehouse. Currently, this development is prohibited under the provincial planning statement.

Let's be clear: Schedule 3 retroactively makes what is an unlawful minister's zoning order lawful. You just go

back and rewrite the law, change the rules of the game to benefit the government. In this case, it's clear that this was to block an ongoing lawsuit when it comes to the MZO at Duffins Creek.

CBC and other news outlets have reported on what they call the secret memo that shows that schedule 3 was added to Bill 257 specifically to stop the Duffins Creek lawsuit, because that lawsuit was shown to have had merit and there was a good likelihood that that lawsuit would be won because this was an unlawful MZO.

Changing a law retroactively, without consultation, and burying it in a bill that has nothing to do with the MZOs, just builds on the public perception that this government will stop at nothing for development, for development insiders and for donors. It's a growing outrage, and the evidence is clear—there's a clear factual connection between MZOs and donors to the PC Party. So, really, development at all costs—even if that is to pave over wetlands, carve up the greenbelt, endanger our source water and threaten our dwindling agricultural lands.

We lose 175 acres of farmland a day—five farms a day—in the province. It is shocking that this government would not be looking to protect those things—but instead, putting in this bill a schedule that will just advance that.

Mr. Speaker, Easter is coming up. Many of us have a tradition at Easter where we hide eggs around the house, to the delight of our children. They have to go find these hidden eggs. But this here is no Cadbury Easter egg. What the government has put in here is a Fabergé egg—the gold and jewel-encrusted eggs that were so loved by the Russian czars, the Romanovs. It didn't actually end that well for the Romanovs, but that's a history lesson for another day. The only people who will delight in these hidden little baubles are the developers and the donors to the PC Party—certainly not our children and grandchildren, because schedule 3 in this bill is a retroactive rewriting of laws that will hasten the destruction of the natural heritage that is ours to protect. We should be the stewards of that, to pass it on to the next generation. Indigenous communities talk about seven generations—that's who we should be protecting it for. But it would appear that this government is hell-bent on destroying that in one generation—actually, in four years.

1550

We see by their actions that this government doesn't care about climate change.

You have no credible climate change plan. We do have litter day, but we don't have a credible climate change plan. You don't care about the environment, and clearly you don't care about the future of our kids and our grandkids.

Mr. Speaker, there is in the province of Ontario the Environmental Bill of Rights. This bill provides Ontarians with essential protections, and the government has clear responsibilities to the people of the province of Ontario. And yet, since this government took office, they have repeatedly and egregiously violated this legislation—shamelessly, egregiously. I checked the thesaurus; there

are many words I could have said here. They have violated this legislation over and over again.

In fact, there is a letter on the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks's desk right now from me asking for an explanation as to why this government is continuing to violate Ontarians' environmental rights. In part, the letter reads:

"Dear Minister Yurek"—it starts off nicely.

"I'm writing with deep concern regarding this government's introduction of Bill 257 schedule 3 as well as regulation 159/21," which is the conservation authority, and we'll get back to that. "In your very first act in office, your government cancelled cap-and-trade without first consulting as required. The courts recognized this was a violation of the Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR). With this new legislation this government is continuing to undermine Ontarians' environmental rights.

"The Auditor General has already made a determination, that this government and in particular the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks both failed to meet its requirements under Ontario's Environmental Bill of Rights and that overall compliance with the EBR has worsened" under this government.

"Bill 197, mentioned in the Auditor General report, is now subject to multiple court challenges. More recently, the Canadian Environmental Law Association has raised concern that the absence of public comment on the Environmental Registry of Ontario for schedules 6 and 10 of" Bill 197 "is another violation of Ontario's environmental rights.

"Now your government has ... introduced Bill 257 specifically to retroactively change the law in an unrelated bill which will" have the effect of nullifying another ongoing court challenge over the minister's zoning order issued for Duffins Creek.

"The pushback is not contained to the courts. Tens of thousands of Ontarians spoke out against the changes in schedule 6 of Bill 229 and your entire Greenbelt Council resigned over the legislation. Citizens in Stratford successfully pushed back against an MZO that would have destroyed local farmland."

At Duffins Creek, we had hundreds of people gathering to protest just this past weekend. Clearly, Ontarians feel that this is their last option to make their concerns heard.

"Simply put, the Environmental Bill of Rights enshrines Ontarians' rights to comment on and be notified of proposals that impact the environment. Yet repeated backroom deliberations and harmful legislation have undermined and eroded these rights."

I signed it "Respectfully"—because we have to end it nicely; right, Mr. Speaker?

I would like to make clear that the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks's mandate includes protecting Ontarians' air, land and water and enforcing compliance with environmental laws. So I have to question: How does this minister consider this continual violation and rewriting of laws to sell off natural heritage to be consistent with this mandate? It is not just a violation of environmental rights; it's a violation of what we would consider as due process, as fair play when it comes to

access to justice—rewriting laws retroactively in the province of Ontario.

Now this government is forcing the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority to issue permits for the filling-in of Duffins Creek, and it needs to be said that the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority has said they are doing this under duress. "Under duress" is a legal protection; it's a legal term. The definition from the Oxford English Dictionary says "duress" is "unlawful pressure exerted on a person to coerce that person to perform an act that he or she ordinarily would not perform." So you need to understand that the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority has been strong-armed by this government to do something that goes against their nature, that goes against what their mandate is, which is to protect wetlands in the province of Ontario.

I can only imagine that this government is maybe feeling the heat, because the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has revoked the MZO in Stratford. I have to say, Ontario's official opposition NDP send our congratulations to the folks in Stratford. We were proud to stand alongside you, and we're thrilled that your victory will protect this land for your children and all of our children and grandchildren. This proposed plan posed serious environmental concerns, and the very fact that there was no public consultation with the local community shows how determined this government is to push through development at all costs.

When it comes to MZOs, why is this government not listening to local community groups and municipalities? They're closest to their communities, and they should be the ones making decisions in consultation with local people and local environmental advocates—not being made in a corner office somewhere in this building. We expect democratic accountability from our elected government, not MZOs forced on them by a Premier with an apparent goal of benefiting his developer connections, friends and PC Party donors.

I would say that Ontarians are equally outraged that the Premier is pushing everything aside and plowing ahead with the development in Duffins Creek, despite the outcry, despite the lawsuits, despite people pleading that putting an Amazon warehouse on a protected wetland is not the done thing—and really with no consultation, particularly with Indigenous peoples, when it comes to that area.

I have two questions, Mr. Speaker: What will the government do next to rewrite laws or environmental protections? And equally important is this question: Cui bono? That means, "Who benefits?" That's the important question here in the province of Ontario.

It needs to be noted that the finance minister, MPP Bethlenfalvy, is the MPP for Pickering-Uxbridge, which includes the lands subject to the Duffins Creek MZO, and this MZO will directly benefit a powerful developer whose owners have donated thousands to the PC Party and to the finance minister himself. That is a matter of public record. It is unfathomable to me that the finance minister appears to be more focused on helping out these developers and donors in his riding, instead of doing what we would expect him to be doing, which is to be working on a budget

that addresses the needs of everyday Ontarians—dealing with families who are struggling through the pandemic, offering people things like paid sick days, addressing the crisis that still exists in long-term care, trying to come up with a vaccine rollout that isn't a confusing mess. Those are some of the things that they should be focusing on, rather than issuing MZO that override environmental protections.

In my riding, this government issued an MZO that was not asked for. The city of Hamilton councillors did not ask for it, and it was imposed on the city of Hamilton. The province of Ontario had a plan to make sure that those lands were given to Mohawk College, because Mohawk College had a plan to expand and grow, including, very particularly and very importantly, a building called Century Manor. Century Manor is an historic heritage building that people have been trying to save for years. Mohawk College included the preservation and the reusing of Century Manor in this plan.

Interjections.

1600

Ms. Sandy Shaw: If the MPP for Flamborough–Glanbrook was willing, rather than shout across the aisle, to explain to the people of the city what the plans are for this MZO—because I think they're particularly concerned that on these lovely escarpment lands, including Mohawk College and Century Manor, there will be a plan to offer this to a developer to build luxury condos, because they would have a beautiful view over the escarpment. I think the member for Flamborough–Glanbrook should explain exactly what the purpose and the intention is for the use of these lands. We had a perfectly good plan to use those lands to expand Mohawk College and preserve a heritage building, and this government came in and blew that plan up with an MZO.

So, really, what's next? An MZO can be issued to do anything with the schedule in this bill.

I've talked in this House very often about Cootes Paradise. Cootes Paradise is also a provincially significant wetland and a protected wetland. Unfortunately, we had a spill; 24 billion litres spilled into Cootes Paradise. But to this day, it is still a beautiful spot and it is beloved by the community. My question would be: What's to stop this government from issuing an MZO to build a warehouse on Cootes Paradise? Nothing. There is nothing. There is no difference in building a warehouse on Cootes Paradise than there is for the people of Duffins Creek, because they love their protected wetlands just as the people of Hamilton love their protected wetlands. This schedule and this bill will take all those protections away.

It's evident that this government is prepared to rewrite laws, and rewrite laws retroactively. Does anyone understand the sense of how heavy-handed this is—that they can change the rules in the middle of the game; that this government can rewrite laws in the province of Ontario that actually benefit them or are to their liking, at their whim?

While this bill is about broadband—and that's an important bill—I just think there's a lesson here, that the

ministers should surely keep an eye out. Unfortunately, this bill has been completely overtaken by this schedule. Honestly, it's like when you go to the airport and they tell you to watch your bags—“Do you know who packed your bags? Do you know what's in your bags?”—because somebody, when you weren't looking, could have slipped a little contraband into your bag. I'm pretty sure that the Minister of Infrastructure didn't expect that her broadband bill would contain this bomb in it that will, in fact, nullify the impact of broadband. Instead, everyone is going to be focused on a government that has no shame when it comes to rewriting laws in the province of Ontario and undermining all of our environmental protections.

It's a shameful day here in the province of Ontario.

I say to the people of Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas: We are here protecting things that matter to you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Mr. Mike Harris: I've been listening intently to the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas here this afternoon, and I didn't really hear her talk a whole lot about how she represents a bit of a rural riding, I think—a little bit similar to mine—where there's an urban centre and then she has some outlying communities that might have some trouble accessing the Internet. I'd just like to hear why she doesn't want the people in the rural areas of her riding to have better access to Internet. That's what this bill does—it provides better access to everyone across the province of Ontario. I want to know why she seems to want to exclude the people in her riding.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Yes, absolutely, put the word “rural” in the bill. That would help to assure the people in rural communities in my riding that you actually mean them when you're putting forth this bill and you are not using this bill to ensure that there's broadband to some of the developments that you're planning in other areas of the community. So if you really care about rural, put it in the bill.

If you really care about rural, you will make sure that your planning doesn't continue to erode our precious farmlands that we're losing at an exorbitant rate. You have a government that wants to put a highway through precious farmland.

So, yes, we care about agricultural lands, we care about our rural communities, and we actually would have put that in the bill, to make sure it does what it says it's supposed to do.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you to the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas. I enjoyed your comments today. They were really helpful and informative, as always.

People in my community of Davenport are very upset about this legislation for many of the reasons discussed here. I'm hearing from folks across Ontario, from Conservative ridings, who are deeply concerned.

I feel like we are seeing a mad rush by this government, in the middle of a pandemic, to strip our laws of any of the

teeth that exist to protect wetlands and other important places.

You asked a very important question: Who benefits?

Do you see any coincidence between this nugget in this bill that's supposedly about broadband and the government's increase in how much wealthy donors can donate, buried in another piece of unrelated legislation?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you for that question.

We talked about this—and really, doubling the amount of donations that can be made to a political party is part and parcel of a government that's changing laws and bending laws that benefit insiders, donors and developers. There is nothing here that is benefiting everyday Ontarians.

We would advise the government to spend their time really focused on what matters to the people of Ontario—because it is painfully obvious; people can draw a conclusion between donations, developers, MZOs and an increase in party donations. It's patently clear what this government is up to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Will Bouma: It's a pleasure to rise in the House today to discuss this issue with the member from Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas.

I'm a little bit confused. It seems like just yesterday we were talking about the necessity of taking over CRTC guidelines in an opposition motion to set Internet pricing. Today we have the opportunity for the opposition to support our government's action to expand broadband across Ontario for everyone. I'm just curious what the member would say—why are they not choosing to support enabling legislation that will actually do what they have been asking us to do?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: The member from Brantford—Brant will know very well that he represents a rural community. I have many conversations with farmers, with people who represent farmers, with the OFA, and they're concerned about broadband and access to broadband in rural communities—absolutely. Again, if you really want to ensure that that's where this goes, put the word “rural” here in your bill, because it's missing from the bill. It's just another political promise. I would also say that the same folks are concerned about the changes you are making that are impacting flooding. It's not just broadband infrastructure that rural communities are missing; it's roads, it's bridges, it's good schools. There's a lot that this government needs to do to address agricultural and rural communities, starting in your own riding.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: If this government really cared about northern Ontarians, they would keep their promise and invest in the Northlander. But let me move on.

My question to my colleague is, what's it like having to continuously vote on legislation with some elements of it that might be supportable but ultimately it having secret, hidden changes to laws that are often odious and certainly

self-serving, and then to have to field questions about it like they don't know what they're doing?

1610

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much to the member for the question.

“Odious” is one of the words that came up when I checked my thesaurus, so, yes, thank you for that word. It's really demoralizing.

We see what this government is up to, and now the people of Ontario are cottoning on to their strategy.

By putting these poison pills into all of these bills, they're not only doing a disservice to ministers, like the Minister of Infrastructure who put forward this bill that is now completely sabotaged by this schedule—they're not only doing a disservice to themselves and their own ministers; they're doing a disservice to the people of the province of Ontario.

The people of Ontario don't expect a government to act in such a—how can I come up with a parliamentary word?

Interjection: Questionable.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: —questionable way. Why aren't they straightforward and frank—and put forward bills that just do what they are purporting them to do and not try to pull a fast one on the people of the province of Ontario?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a pleasure to rise today.

Whether the bill has the word “rural” in it—I think it's up to each and every member to tell their residents about it. And I think if anybody sees “broadband,” they're going to know that it's talking about the Internet. We know that in the rural areas in my riding and your ridings and many ridings across Ontario, we need an expansion of broadband.

I would like to know why the members across the aisle don't support the expansion of broadband into each and every member's riding—especially the member's riding, which is basically rural.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: What we don't support is a schedule in a bill that makes such an undemocratic change to what people expect when it comes to their access to justice and using power wisely and well. You are rewriting the laws in this province to benefit yourselves, and that is what we do not support.

Our member from Timiskaming put forward a bill, the Broadband is an Essential Service Act, Bill 226. Now, there's a bill that actually makes commitments, uses the words “rural” and “northern” and “agriculture,” and asks for there to be progress on a bill. It's not a bill that is a fancy political promise with no commitments. That would be a bill that you should be putting forward—or just support Bill 226 from the member from Timiskaming. That would be a step forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Miss Monique Taylor: I listened intently to the member's 20 minutes on this very important debate.

If you talk to anybody around the province right now, particularly in the north, one of the largest problems that people are facing is broadband. They're having Internet

issues. They can't get Internet. It's costing too much. Kids have to go to school virtually. People are working virtually.

We heard from the member from Nickel Belt when she laid out her bill and the cost of Internet, going over just how much one simple meeting cost her family.

To see this schedule 3 put into this bill that people were really looking forward to is so disappointing.

I ask the member, how many stakeholders has she heard from who are just so unhappy about this poison pill in this bill?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: People are shocked. I guess in some way we've become used to this government; just when we think it can't get any worse, it seems to get worse. People understand that this government is using the pandemic as a cover to ram through development, ram through changes that don't benefit the people of Ontario, like broadband. I'm hearing people saying how outrageous this government is; they see what they're up to. Broadband is an important service, and people want that, but they don't want it served up with a side of poison pill. Like the member from Hamilton Mountain has said, they want it straight. They want broadband, and they don't want to have to suck up what this government is sneaking into this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's always an honour to rise in the House.

Today, I rise to speak to Bill 257. On March 4, when I saw this bill introduced, I was actually pretty excited, because I'd spent all summer hearing about the need for broadband, and I happily voted for a bill to make broadband an essential service. I voted for a motion about supporting rural and remote broadband. I thought maybe we'd have a bill that everyone in the House could get behind to get broadband to rural and remote communities.

Then I read schedule 3, and I thought, "Oh, we have a bill about broadband, and tucked into it is an effort to facilitate the environmental destruction of the Duffins Creek wetland." I couldn't believe it. And now, today, we learn that its destruction is to facilitate an Amazon warehouse. I'm thinking of the small business owners all across Ontario trying to compete online with Amazon, needing better broadband, knowing that in the same bill is a schedule to facilitate environmental destruction for an Amazon warehouse, which they'll have to compete with.

How many times is the government going to change what they are doing when it comes to the MZO issued on October 30, 2020, to facilitate this development? They did the MZO, and then in December, they came out with a bill, and tucked into that bill is an attack on conservation authorities' ability to protect us from flooding. Then, when the TRCA said, "We'll fulfill our obligation to protect people from flooding," the government came back with amendments that are going to actually force conservation authorities to issue development permits even when the science tells them not to, when the evidence tells them not to, and they're going to put people and property at risk. As

a matter of fact, last week the minister directed the TRCA to do that, and they have to do it by Friday of this week. I don't know if you've read the staff report they put out on that, Speaker, but it clearly highlights the environmental destruction of this.

Then, when groups asked for an injunction to stop this destruction, the government, on March 4, came up with a broadband bill that basically makes it illegal for people to seek a judicial review to make sure the government complies with its own laws—the provincial policy statement.

Speaker, what lengths is the government going to go to to facilitate the destruction of wetlands for an Amazon warehouse, and why?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Time for questions.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Listening to the member from Guelph and his support for broadband infrastructure, I just want to talk about—he has a great agricultural community in his riding, and they're doing a lot of innovative stuff at the university there. But a lot of the things that farmers rely on—we've talked about it in this House before—was the Internet of Things and how they're moving to technology, and they obviously need access to broadband.

What does the member see, with the riding that he represents, in terms of those prospects for those farmers and their future when it comes to technological updates to the farming techniques and being able to access broadband, and how that will change their techniques, their future and the future of farming jobs?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: One of the reasons I think broadband should be an essential service—and I wish the government would vote for legislation that would declare it an essential service so we make sure everyone in this province has access to it—is because I know it will be a game changer for farming and for farmers. There are parts of this bill that certainly are good in that respect.

But I can tell you, Speaker, I've had organizations like the Ontario Farmland Trust, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the National Farmers Union—all kinds of farm organizations reaching out to me with concerns about the way in which this government is attacking conservation authorities, the way in which Highway 413 is going to pave over farmland.

I spoke at a protest in Pickering on Saturday, and I was shocked that there were people from Guelph who had actually travelled that far because they care so much about protecting wetlands and they know how important it is for everybody in our province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I want to know why you think the government is putting forth legislation on broadband Internet and putting in legislation to allow their developer and donor friends to bypass environmental laws.

I also want to know: Don't you marvel, with the line of questioning we're hearing this afternoon, at how it is possible they're able to ask these questions and keep a straight face at the same time?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I should have said that I appreciate the member's question earlier, and I appreciate this member's question as well. I always like the give-and-take here in the Legislature.

Here's the bottom line: The government says that they are only issuing MZOs when there's local support for it. Well, the Duffins Creek wetland borders Pickering and Ajax. Ajax has come out against this. All kinds of citizens' groups in Pickering and Ajax have come out against this.

1620

People are saying that we have a provincial policy statement for a reason. We protect wetlands for a reason: because they protect us.

So if we're going to pave over wetlands, we're going to put infrastructure at risk—both GO and 401 infrastructure. We'd see that area at risk. We're going to put houses, businesses, public institutions at risk of flooding. They're spending \$1 billion right now in Toronto to undo the damage to the lower Don River. Meanwhile, this government wants to do the same—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Further questions?

Mr. Mike Harris: A neighbouring riding to mine is the member from Guelph's riding. We share quite a bit of farmland, actually, between our ridings and we've always had some great conversations about that. I've had a lot of opportunities to speak with a lot of the organizations the member just mentioned, including the OFA, and the Waterloo-Wellington folks who represent a more localized area of that. The biggest thing that they have brought up over the last little while is access to broadband and to natural gas, and our government is delivering on both of those things.

I'd like to hear, without the rhetoric, a bit more about what this member thinks broadband is going to be able to do for the people who are bordering in between our ridings and how it's going to allow those farms to better move into the future and take part in a virtual economy.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Do you know what I'm going to say right now, Speaker? There's an opportunity here for us to work together on broadband. I think everybody in this Legislature wants to see an expansion of broadband. We hear it from farmers all the time, so I agree with the member. We absolutely need to deliver broadband to rural and remote communities.

I'm asking the members opposite to do a very simple thing: Remove schedule 3 from this bill. If it's so important, let's debate it somewhere else so we can get behind broadband together without forcing people to take a stand on environmental destruction, like they are asking people to do.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member from Barrie-Innisfil.

I rise this afternoon to speak about the Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act. COVID-19 has made reliable broadband even more critical for families and individuals—to work from home, learn

online and access essential services. If passed, this legislation would allow for a new, innovative approach that would ensure infrastructure is built faster and in a more cost-effective way. These changes will help connect more communities to reliable, high-speed Internet sooner.

Residents in rural communities such as Lynden and Freelon in my riding of Flamborough-Glanbrook suffer through slow Internet service or having no Internet service at all. I'm sure we have all heard from constituents about the challenges of working from home, learning from a distance and connecting with family and friends during this pandemic. I've heard from many residents in my riding over the past year who complain that their children are falling behind while learning remotely, because they simply can't get reliable broadband.

Our government is taking decisive action right now to get unserved and underserved communities connected faster. Ontarians simply can't wait any longer. We simply cannot wait for the federal government to step up and fund broadband properly. Delivery of broadband service is the federal government's responsibility. We've stepped up because the time for talking is over; the time for action is now.

I'm sure many would agree that no infrastructure project is more important to the people of Ontario than broadband. Access to broadband is vital for households and businesses to participate in the 21st-century digital economy. Ontarians deserve fast, reliable and affordable broadband service.

Through its agency, the CRTC, the federal government oversees Internet, phone, television and broadband service rates. Our government continues to call on the federal government to do the right thing and properly fund broadband service in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, to date, there has been no response. Instead, our government has stepped up to the plate with our 2019 broadband and cellular action plan that includes a historic investment of nearly \$1 billion over six years. We have taken the initiative to fill the gap by funding a number of programs, including starting our own province-wide broadband program, called ICON, to find ways to deliver what is a federal responsibility. That plan is already having a positive impact by improving connectivity across the province.

This investment also includes doubling our funding to \$300 million for our Improving Connectivity for Ontario Program, which we launched last summer. We have invited for-profit organizations, Indigenous communities, municipalities and not-for-profit organizations who can demonstrate experience in building, owning and/or operating broadband or cellular infrastructure in Canada to apply.

Representing a riding that is largely rural, I understand the issues and frustrations around unreliable and poor broadband service. We are helping to bring high-speed broadband to homes and businesses in southwestern Ontario by investing in the Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology, or SWIFT, program. Construction is already under way in some of those communities, and residents are

already seeing improved broadband service. This past August, the first customers received Internet through this project. SWIFT is on target to bring Internet access to up to 60,000 residents and businesses.

Connecting residents to a fast, reliable and affordable broadband service is a top priority for this government. Broadband connectivity is fundamental to economic recovery and the shift to the future digital economy. COVID-19 has only magnified the digital divide that has put many without dependable connectivity at a disadvantage.

As the province recovers from the pandemic, our government is taking action to remove barriers to help build better infrastructure faster. We have consulted with municipalities on how to reduce barriers to implementing linear infrastructure projects such as transit, roads, waste and stormwater projects that support our economic recovery.

Mr. Speaker, if passed, the legislation would give the Minister of Infrastructure the authority to compel municipalities to provide timely access to municipal rights of way. As well, authority would be given to compel utility services to provide timely access to their infrastructure to expedite the delivery of provincial priority projects. The proposed legislation would grant the minister the authority to penalize utilities that fail to comply with ministerial orders to conduct work to assist in the deployment of priority projects. But administrative penalties are meant only as a last resort.

Our government proposes to reduce costs to broadband providers that attach broadband wire lines to hydro utility poles. This would allow timely access to poles and to municipal rights of way to install broadband on municipal land. By taking this step, it will speed up Ontario's broadband expansion, it will increase our competitiveness, it will connect our unserved and underserved communities and it will make life more efficient and convenient for individuals, for families and for workers. These initiatives will get our infrastructure working better for all of the people of Ontario.

As many as 700,000 households and businesses in Ontario do not have access to adequate broadband service, or they have no Internet connection at all. You can imagine how frustrating that can be, especially during the past year, when the Internet was the only option available to connect some people to families, their workplace and school. These proposed measures will help communities connect to reliable broadband sooner so people can work from home, learn online, connect with families and friends and access vital services.

These proposed measures build on our government's broadband improvement initiatives. Everyone in this province deserves access to reliable high-speed broadband. Broadband is not only needed to engage in our ever-growing digital economy and lifestyle; in many cases, it's even more critical. For many people, the only way they could see their doctor this past year was through a computer screen.

1630

This legislation, if passed, would amend the Ontario Energy Board Act to give it regulation-making authority. The authority would be used to make it easier for telecommunications service providers to use existing electricity assets such as hydro poles, as well as municipal rights of way, to expand access to broadband while at the same time reducing costs. This authority could also require utility companies to consider possible joint use of hydro utility poles during the planning process. This initiative would save time and money on future projects.

Mr. Speaker, our government clearly understands the urgent need to be connected in this rapidly expanding digital economy. We need to be connected to work, run a business, buy products, learn online, access health care and do online banking. Through this proposed legislation, we will work with our partners in communities across the province to help build infrastructure faster and in a more cost-effective way.

Our government is committed to working with our private and municipal partners, and others, to accelerate broadband delivery to benefit individuals, families and workers. This also sends a clear signal that our government is determined to expand broadband connectivity to underserved communities right across Ontario. Our initiatives will help get as many people as possible connected to the Internet as quickly as possible.

Since being elected, our government has invested more than \$45 billion in infrastructure, and over the next decade, we are investing \$143 billion in the province's infrastructure. That includes strategic investments in broadband connectivity. If this past year has proven anything, it's that access to reliable broadband is more important than ever before. With these regulatory measures, additional enforcement powers and our significant investment in broadband projects, our government is demonstrating that we would use every tool at our disposal to get as many people connected to the Internet as quickly as possible.

What this legislation does is send a clear signal that our government is committed to expanding connectivity to every community across Ontario. These initiatives are needed now. Our economic recovery depends on it.

I would now like to hand it over to the member from Barrie–Innisfil.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Continuing along the same vein, since she has shared her time, I recognize the member from Barrie–Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I'm pleased to rise today to speak about the Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act.

Reliable roads, bridges, cellphone accessibility and Internet connection are important to the people in our province and they are a key economic driver in our province. That's why, from day one, our government has made infrastructure a marquee part of our mandate. From day one, our government has invested more than \$45 billion in infrastructure. Over the next decade, we are investing \$143 billion in Ontario's infrastructure,

including strategic investments in broadband connectivity, transit, highways, schools and hospitals.

Life in the 21st century requires access to fast, reliable Internet in every home. The pandemic has made it clear that we have to act more quickly. Today, access to broadband Internet is more than just a nice-to-have; it's an economic imperative.

In everything we do, Speaker, we put the people first, people like Glenn and Cheryl Todd. Let me tell you about Cheryl and Glenn Todd, who are residents of Innisfil. They said to me, "As rural customers, we've suffered for many years through the pain of dial-up service." They said, "Yes, dial-up, but unlimited data, which is almost useless as the speed barely allows you to connect and stay connected." Dial-up eventually was phased out for this couple, and Bell had offered them a faster service. However, Speaker, when I was speaking to them, they had told me that the faster service came at a cost of about \$400 to improve the speed. While they were able to afford this cost, they were very fortunate to be able to do that. They were able to have better download speeds, and they actually sent me a screenshot of their speed tests. They said they went from a speed of—wait for it, Speaker—4.82 megabits per second to 169 megabits per second. For them, a substantial difference, but still, those who do a speed test on their Internet know that's still not fast enough. It's not fast enough for doing things like they would like to do, like watch Netflix, for example.

They've been in Innisfil for about 30 years, and frankly, they know they have fibre optics buried across the road from where their house is, so for them, it's perplexing as to why it has been taking so long to get Internet. So they're really thrilled that this is actually going to be a step in the right direction, and they see this as not so much for them—because, of course, they are now retired and they don't have young kids; they're empty nesters, Glenn and Cheryl—but they said that this is great for the next generation of people who have to do their homework at home and for those who have to work at home. And so, Speaker, the Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act is not just any bill; it's a bill that really represents people, and the face of people and what they undergo every day, people like Glenn and Cheryl Todd.

We've been here before in Canada, striving to make the next generation better off than the one before it and connecting our communities in new and innovative ways. Connecting Canadians from coast to coast to coast has always been a part of nation-building in Canada, as exemplified on July 1, 1867, which brought with it Confederation, and with it the development of the railway that revolutionized transportation in Canada and was integral to the very act of nation-building. Railways opened opportunities—jobs, new markets and tying nations together from coast to coast—while at the same time creating a demand for resources and technology. The construction of transcontinental railways such as the Canadian Pacific Railway opened up settlement in the west and played an important role in the expansion of Confederation and immigration.

Like the railway, the telephone also brought Canada together and contributed to nation-building. It was on July 26, 1874, when Alexander Graham Bell disclosed his idea for the telephone to his father in none other than Brantford, Ontario, a very telling and exciting Canadian moment of nation-building. By July 31, 1932, the Governor General of Canada, the Earl of Bessborough, inaugurated the Trans-Canada Telephone System, providing coast-to-coast telephone services over all Canadian lines—again, nation-building for Canada. By 1990, Canada had the world's largest contiguous cellular network.

So now we're here today, Speaker, with the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021. If passed, it will help accelerate broadband infrastructure deployment by providing the Minister of Infrastructure with the authority to reduce barriers on provincially significant projects, including the ability to ensure municipalities and utility companies provide timely access to their infrastructure, including municipal rights-of-way and hydro utility poles—when, of course, appropriate.

This bill will also support an approach to reduce the time it takes to repair electricity infrastructure, such as hydro utility poles for new wireline attachment for provincially significant projects. All of us know when we see that truck at the end of our neighbourhood, and our Internet is down, and they've got to go up and fix it—sometimes it takes hours, but we know with this particular change that this will be a much quicker and faster turnaround time, which means so much for rural communities all across Ontario that before had to wait hours for re-connectivity. That's hours that they miss on the job. That's hours they miss in schooling. That's hours they might miss watching their favourite show with their loved one, the only quality time they get in the day, because they might be working a shift at a hospital or a long-term-care home.

Again, this bill also ensures that owners of underground infrastructure provide locations of those infrastructure projects within 10 business days, so that we can get projects off the ground and we can initiate what's being called an Ontario One Call system, which will allow Internet service providers to be much quicker at laying down the groundwork for broadband infrastructure.

This legislation, if passed, would also amend the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998, to provide the Ontario government with regulation-making authority regarding the development of, access to or use of electricity infrastructure for non-electric purposes, including to reduce or fix the annual rental charge that telecommunications service providers must pay to attach their wireless devices to these hydro utility poles. Of course, it also will establish a performance standard and timelines for how utility companies must respond to attachment requests.

Speaker, a lot of these changes that we're talking about today really talk about how our government recognizes how important rural broadband access is for individuals, families and businesses, and work will continue on this front. For example, back in July, something that I've been working on with Team Simcoe—the Attorney General and MPP for Barrie–Springwater–Oro-Medonte; we've got

our MPP for Simcoe North; and of course we have our MPP from Parry Sound–Muskoka as well. All of us in July were able to make a really exciting announcement on behalf of Ernie Hardeman, our Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. We were able to announce major steps in expanding broadband Internet in Simcoe county, with a request for proposals by Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology, also known as SWIFT. It was a very exciting day for us, because it was part of our government’s commitment to expand access to broadband Internet in rural areas. That investment, in itself, for that particular expansion, was \$27.9 million.

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Thanks, of course, to the expansion of SWIFT across rural Ontario, families and businesses across Simcoe county will be able to access the high-quality Internet connections they need to fully participate and grow our local economy. The funding that we announced that day will also unlock the ability for businesses in Innisfil to succeed, as well as other parts of Simcoe county.

Without a doubt, this was very much needed. In fact, one of the SWIFT board members and the chair of the Rural Ontario Municipal Association, also known as ROMA, Allan Thompson, also applauded us for this significant announcement. But it wasn’t just him who applauded us for this significant announcement. It was also Pastor Howard Courtney. He has been in Innisfil for about 40 years, Speaker, and he knows many of those 40 years that he has spent there—he needs reliable Internet to provide some of the great programming his church provides, whether it’s mental health or access to the food bank, and they do a really interesting clothing drive, reutilizing our textiles, which is so important so they don’t end up in the landfill. He was very thrilled to see the fact that we’re making progress to more broadband, and he also wanted to particularly thank me and the government. He thinks this is an amazing step forward for that community.

Also, Barb Baguley: She’s the former mayor of Innisfil, and she’s a very hard-working Rotarian. She said that for years they had been living with dial-up and very slow Internet. They could not even watch YouTube videos or download any documents of significant size. While she was a member of town council, she used to have to drive from her house to town hall 15 minutes away to download agendas and supportive documents for their meetings. Of course, she now has slightly faster Internet at home, but she says that it is costly because there is not that access. She says, “If I had students trying to do” homework “in our home,” it would not actually happen. So this is a big deal for her.

Our current mayor of Innisfil is also very thrilled to see our reliable access to Internet that we are debating here today. It’s not just her; we’ve got people in the small business community. I talked to Sarah Taylor of Taylor Media Promotions, also known as TMP. She has many clients from different areas of the community that are going to benefit from this announcement as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It’s time for questions.

Mr. John Vanthof: I listened intently to both presentations, and both presentations focused on rural broadband: full agreement that broadband issues need to be addressed in this province. Both mentioned agriculture, and again, agriculture—fully agree. But the one thing I don’t understand—I understand why you want to wedge the official opposition, but all three major agricultural organizations have come out firmly against ministerial zoning orders. So why are you wedging them? You claim to support them, yet you’re making them hold their noses while they have the potential of losing their land and losing how they farm, because they depend on planning as well, and ministerial zoning orders throw planning up in the air.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Response? I recognize the member from Barrie–Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Planning as a tool is often done at the municipal level, which is a great opportunity for me to actually be able to read the mayor of Innisfil’s quote on this particular piece of legislation. Her response to this bill is, “Access to reliable Internet has long been an issue in Innisfil. In fact, it is a key component of our strategic plan to ensure our community is connected. We have been working hard to strengthen our digital connectivity by encouraging high-speed Internet service and community WiFi for some time now, but it is more important now than ever before. With everything turning digital overnight due to COVID-19, residents who do not have reliable access to Internet are being left behind. Our community has shared the social, economic and health impacts that are suffering as a result, even like accessing high-speed Internet or other essential services, such as water and electricity.

“The Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act will help our community stay connected and ensure that all of our residents can work, learn and communicate on an equal playing field.”

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Will Bouma: I’m pleased to be able to ask a question of my colleague from Barrie–Innisfil on this important piece of legislation.

I’m somewhat mystified, because we’ve heard the opposition, the independent Green Party member talk about what’s good about this bill, and it strikes me as odd that they are reaching for just about any reason to not support common-sense legislation in this House.

This is what I can’t figure out, because I don’t know what to tell the rural members of my riding, the constituents who reach out to me and say, “Why wouldn’t the opposition support this bill?” I was wondering if you had any ideas on what you’re going to say to your constituents about why the opposition—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member for Niagara Falls will come to order.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member for Barrie–Innisfil for response.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you, Speaker—
Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Niagara Falls will come to order, second time.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you for that question, to the member from Brant. Congratulations on being the home of Alexander Graham Bell, who I mentioned in my speech, and, of course, Wayne Gretzky. May his dad rest in peace, and my condolences.

He talked about why the opposition isn't supporting access to broadband. We struggle provincially—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock. Look, there are a number of sidebars going on right now. I pity you if you happen to be sitting close to the Speaker, because I can hear it, which then makes it very difficult for me to hear members on either side when it comes to debate or when it comes to responding or asking questions. So I'm going to ask that we tone it right down so that I can hear the response and you can hear the response, too. Thank you very much.

Please continue.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you, Speaker. It's a shame that the NDP oppose this particular bill that expands broadband and connectivity throughout Ontario and the next phase of nation-building in this province. Every step of the way, the NDP continue to find ways to stand in the way of delivering much-needed and long-awaited infrastructure in Ontario.

Ontarians can't wait any longer. They need connectivity now. We started laying the groundwork when we were first elected, but COVID-19 has an extra sense of urgency.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question is for the MPP for Flamborough–Glanbrook. Duffins Creek is a beloved wetland, just as is Cootes Paradise in Hamilton. It borders on the Royal Botanical Gardens. Currently, it is unlawful to build on a wetland, but schedule 3 of this bill will now make sure that MZOs that are issued will allow building on provincially protected wetlands.

My question to the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook is, what actual environmental law, an actual right that's enshrined in law, not just the minister's whim—what is there to protect Cootes Paradise from a deep-pocketed developer who thinks that Cootes Paradise might be a nice place to build condos or build a warehouse?

Ms. Donna Skelly: I wish the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas was as concerned about cleaning up Cootes Paradise, which has 24 billion litres of raw sewage that was dumped in over the past four years. I never hear outrage about that, but I hear this ridiculous suggestion that there is going to be an MZO to develop out in Cootes Paradise.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition continually argues against MZOs. I would like to know if the opposition would like to send a letter to the city of Hamilton, my city, and perhaps argue against the MZO that they requested. In

fact, I'd like to read from the mayor of Hamilton, who said, "Ensuring low-income and vulnerable residents have good quality and stable housing is a key priority for the city of Hamilton. We are pleased our provincial partners have issued a minister's zoning order for 350 King Street East to help meet the Rapid Housing Initiative timelines for federal government funding.... This collaboration between our provincial and federal partners will help advance initiatives under way to support the housing needs"—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Further questions?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I wanted to thank my colleagues for their very informative speech today. I guess my question to my colleagues, for either of them, is, since the members of the opposition seem to think that ministerial zoning orders are such a big, bad, scary, negative thing, maybe in the context of the broadband act, could you describe a little bit the powers that the minister has to streamline broadband to improve access and reliability of broadband? Maybe speak a little bit to that streamlining, because I think it's important for Ontarians to realize that a lot of what we are doing is essentially getting rid of that duplication and getting rid of extra costs in order to ensure that we have reliable Internet for rural and other areas.

1650

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I thank the member for the question. It shows why it's so important on the provincial level to step up to the plate and do something about the need for access to broadband. They needed foundation for the infrastructure, as we wait for our federal partners to continue to come to the table every step of the way to join us for funding—we'll fund everything that we can, but of course we continue to urge them. So if they're watching today, please continue to meet us at the table when it comes to funding broadband across Canada, and support us on the nation building that needs to continue.

The member had also talked about ways that we're streamlining broadband access. I think it's great to see the different ways that we're going to be able to streamline broadband access through this bill, things like using hydro poles, something that's very familiar to people who live in rural Ontario. We see them everywhere. There's lots of access to them. Now we're sort of reducing a lot of that red tape to be able to use them for Internet as well. There are little things like underground infrastructure. I know many of us, we go to announcements and there's a lot of announcements that don't happen underground for those ribbon-cuttings, but that kind of stuff is so important to get Internet off the ground.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Again, my question is to the MPP for Flamborough–Glanbrook. I'd like to say that the people of Hamilton, your constituents and my constituents, don't think it's ridiculous to want to protect Cootes Paradise. I would like to add that you were a city councillor during the time that the 24 billion litres of sewage was spilling into Cootes Paradise, and this government knew precisely on the same day as the city of

Hamilton did that that leak had happened. So there's an obligation on this ministry as well.

My question is around Century Manor and the MZO that your government issued that was not requested by the city of Hamilton, that spoiled the plan that they had to expand Mohawk College, to protect Century Manor and make sure that those escarpment lands were available to the people of the city of Hamilton. Can you commit now that you will protect Century Manor, that you won't demolish Century Manor and that you will make sure that those lands are there, available for the people of the city of Hamilton?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Mr. Speaker, again, I'd like to share the comments that I'm getting and perhaps remind all members from Hamilton that it was the city of Hamilton that reached out to our government asking for a municipal zoning order. It was the city of Hamilton—in fact, Mr. Speaker, all ministerial zoning orders that have been issued in the province of Ontario on non-government-owned land have been at the request of municipalities.

This ministerial zoning order, which was issued last Friday, I was very proud to say is for affordable housing. It will help the city meet a timeline to receive federal funding.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order.

Miss Monique Taylor: Full of it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Hamilton Mountain will withdraw.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'll withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Mr. Speaker, I'm looking forward to spending 20 minutes addressing this issue this afternoon. It's always a pleasure to rise, and to speak to Bill 257 today. I want to first talk about access to Internet services, but I'm going to end with a major concern that we have with this bill.

But I'd like to address the Internet access piece first because I think it's important, and I believe this is an area where we can find compromise and work together. I've heard for the last almost two and a half years how we don't want to work with the parties here. This is one where I think if they took out schedule 3, we could all work together.

I believe requiring Internet access has become an issue quickly in the last decade, but COVID-19 has shown us that access to Internet is an essential service. That's what's not in the bill, but it should be. You can't argue about that. It is an essential service that should be made universally available to everyone who lives in this province and in this country. It should be available from coast to coast to coast.

My colleague has a bill as well on this issue, and I think he outlined it a lot better than what's in this bill; just saying. That might be a question you were going to ask me, but I already answered it.

We know that kids are going to school online, and a lot of workplaces are now fully functional online. What we don't know is how much of this will be continued when we finally defeat COVID. What we do know is that we won't go back to the way things were. We know that. Now that employers have seen that people can work remotely and still get their jobs done, economists are telling us that working from home is going to become the norm for a lot of workplaces. So if you want to be able to have access to the best jobs you can find, you're going to need Internet.

This may come as a shock to you, but this is actually an issue that is faced in southern Ontario as well. When my colleague the deputy House leader for the official opposition was speaking to his bill—Bill 226, I believe it is—he talked about how surprised he was that Picton had a dead spot. And he's right. Many people think of southern Ontario and they think they can get the best Internet anywhere, but that's not the case.

Mr. Speaker, many people don't know this, but my riding has a large rural population. There are definitely parts of Niagara Falls where Internet access is a problem. I'm sure a lot of people didn't know that. But in rural areas of my riding like Stevensville, Crystal Beach and Niagara-on-the-Lake, people are still struggling for access to high-quality Internet. Now, I must commend the towns of Fort Erie and Niagara-on-the-Lake. They've done a wonderful job of trying to make access to WiFi easy for their residents. There are some parks in Fort Erie where they can go and get WiFi. That's good. It's a great initiative for them. But it's up to the province to ensure people can have access to Internet in their homes. That means that the residents of Stevensville, if they're now working from home, must have access to the Internet they need to do their jobs from their homes.

Mr. Speaker, right there is why this must be deemed an essential service, and again I'll say that's not in the bill. I know this bill doesn't go far enough, but I hope this government will take a look at my colleague's bill, Bill 226, because that's a bill that can really begin to address this problem in the north, but also a problem that may not seem as visible in the south.

With housing prices as unreasonable as they are, it means that people are moving to rural areas, like down in my area. A lot of people are moving to Ridgeway, Crystal Beach and Stevensville. There's no reason that they should either go without Internet in these areas or they should be gouged.

There's another huge portion of that that really shows why this issue needs to be addressed immediately, and that's education. I don't think it comes as a surprise to anyone here in this House that I believe this government has dropped the ball on keeping kids safe in schools during this pandemic. We've had more kids learning from home and using the Internet, and for longer periods of time because this government refused to invest in our schools. They refused to spend the money necessary to cap class sizes at 15 per classroom, to buy better PPE, HVAC system upgrades, and ensure teachers have the resources

they need to keep schools safe for our kids and, in my case, kids and grandkids.

What has been the result of this? Kids learning from home. Mr. Speaker, we know for a fact that how children will do in their lives is based on the education they receive in their school. Well, because Ontario doesn't have equal access to Internet, I worry that kids will fall further and further behind their peers because of this issue we're debating today. We know that kids from more well-off households are likelier to have access to quality high-speed Internet. I don't think anybody could argue that. This means they miss less class than the kids whose parents either can't access Internet or can't afford it. That's a big issue: affordability. That fact in and of itself should be a good enough reason to deem access to Internet essential, because I believe it is essential today.

Mr. Speaker, you could avoid some of these issues before they occur. I think everyone knows that a transition to online learning is not easy, and we're going to have some bumps on the road. But on December 22, when the province went into another shutdown, OSSTF put out a statement that the Ford government didn't consult even them. Think about that: They didn't even talk to the teachers. How can you make a shift to e-learning and not even talk to the teachers?

1700

Yes, we can fix the Internet, but the government also has some easier and faster fixes that they should be implementing right now. The government needs to address this. They also need to listen to the teachers and work with the teachers. There is no one who knows what's better for these kids than their teachers. Their voices must be heard, and even more important, they must be consulted.

Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons they must be heard is because their voices are important to a bill like this. For the last three months, they've been raising Internet issues with the ministry. The ministry is barely listening. I don't know why.

Listen to the response the ministry gave teachers in the London area in July: "School boards are required to make provisions and adaptations for those students who are unable to learn remotely due to connectivity issues to ensure" continued learning. That was it. Teachers came to the minister and said, "You have the power. You have the funding. We need to address connectivity issues," and the ministry said, "Too bad. Get the school board to figure it out." It's wrong.

You know who suffers when the ministry passes the buck? It's the students. Again, I'll say that my daughter is still in school, but my grandkids are in school as well. That's the reality of where we are when it comes to Internet access in the province of Ontario. It's unequal, and until it's fixed equally for every student so that every kid has the same opportunity, well, then, they need to invest to get our schools open.

Mr. Speaker, when I look at this bill, I do see an area where we can work with this government. I think our caucus agrees. This is an issue that must be addressed for rural residents, and we're happy to see that. We're happy

to work with you to identify some of the issues in the north and the south that this bill could address immediately. I think if this bill was specific to the Internet access, you might even see some broad partisan support.

However, there's one part of this bill that makes absolutely no sense and I think it's going to be very difficult to support, and that is the government's retroactivity of protecting the use of MZOs. Schedule 3 of this bill does exactly that. For no reason at all, buried in this bill is a clause that ensures this government is exempt from having to follow the province's provincial planning rules, and ultimately protects them legally.

For those at home, MZOs are the nuclear option of planning powers. They were expanded by provisions buried in this government's recent budget omnibus bill that allow it to use a minister's zoning order, MZO, to force conservation authorities to permit development on wetlands and other environmentally sensitive areas where development is normally not allowed. Essentially, they end the discussion at the local level and let this government just pave over whatever they want.

MZOs allow the government to immediately authorize development, bypassing normal planning processes—and this is important, even, I think, to your riding, Mr. Speaker—public consultation and environmental reviews. They are supposed to be used rarely—so they have been used in the past, but rarely—but under Premier Ford's government, they have become commonplace. In fact, during the pandemic, the Premier has quietly passed more than twice the number of MZOs than the previous Liberal government passed during its entire last 10 years—more than the last 10 years, during a pandemic. If folks want to see this in action, they can look to Duffins Creek in Pickering.

I want to say, because I mentioned it already, about my kids and my grandkids—and this is for everybody here—that we only have one environment. If we don't protect our water, none of us are going to be alive. If we don't protect the air we breathe, our kids and our grandkids will probably die. It may take a few years, but it's going to happen. So I don't understand why, when we're talking about broadband, we put in a poison pill like this that's going to affect me a little bit, but it's going to affect my kids and my grandkids—and not just mine, by the way; Speaker, it's going to affect yours, our colleagues' across the road and everybody's here.

Before I move on to the community groups—I've got to look at my time—my understanding is that this is being done for a company called Amazon, a company that, on another bill, just got their WSIB rates reduced. During Christmas, they had all their employees working overtime, during COVID-19, when they had outbreaks, and now they want to pave over significant wetlands.

Do you know what Amazon is? Does anybody know? Help me out. Anybody? You guys like to yell at me; go ahead and yell. I don't mind.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It's an American company.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's a rich American corporation. We're selling out our environment to a rich corporation. Because I've got a lot of time and I don't lead that much

of an exciting life, I decided to look up what their profits were. I thought that was fair. Did you know that in 2019, that rich American corporation—do you know what they made? Speaker, yell it out. I don't mind. They made \$11 billion.

Miss Monique Taylor: That was 2019.

Mr. Wayne Gates: That was 2019.

Do you want to hear what they made in 2020? They made \$22 billion.

And do you know who the richest man in the world is?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Jeff Bezos.

Mr. Wayne Gates: The chairman of their corporation.

We want to destroy our wetlands for that? I'm sorry; it makes absolutely no sense to me.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Does anyone in your party ever—

Mr. Wayne Gates: I can't hear you; I'm sorry. My hearing is not great.

Over 100 community groups are opposed to building on the wetlands there. First Nation groups oppose the ripping-up of their wetlands there. The city of Ajax opposes this project. And yet, this government has used MZO to ram through a project on protected wetlands.

Mr. Speaker, I can talk to my own area; I don't mind doing that. I think that's fair and reasonable—and, quite frankly, accurate; I think that's important. In Niagara, we know this well. We know the importance of having people with power on conservation boards who understand wetlands, who understand that wetlands stop floods in our community. They filter the water that we drink. How are these bad? They act as our lungs as they take the water and purify it. They are homes to endangered species of animals and plants that are almost extinct in this country.

Niagara saw first-hand what happens when developers are given access to these sensitive wetlands. Now you're seeing that at Duffins Creek, where this government is using MZO to ignore the voices of their community. Well, those voices will not be ignored, and they're going to keep pushing until the protections are restored.

The argument I heard today from the Premier—I listened to question period, because I wasn't in the House. I listened to question period because I lead a relatively boring life, and I was interested. Do we need jobs? Yes, of course we need jobs. But should we destroy our environment, an environment we can't get back, to create jobs? With that type of thinking, my friends—and this might be a little off the subject; you might tell me it is.

Take a look at what happened with our vaccines, when we didn't manufacture our own vaccines and we had to beg China. We begged our supposed best friend, the Americans, and what did they say? "No. Why don't you make the vaccines yourselves?" Why? "We're going to make sure Americans have vaccines." We should have done the same thing. We shouldn't have privatized it and sold it off in the late 1980s. It's the same thing here, my friends. If we're going to get rid of five farms a day, if we're going to pave over our wetlands and we're going to get rid of our food supply—because that's what's going to happen—then what are we going to do? We're going to call up China and ask them for food?

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That's what's going on when you attack your environment. I'm sorry; it makes no sense. I don't know how you sleep at night when you bring these forward; I really don't—because I care about my kids and my grandkids. I want to make sure that they have clean drinking water and air to breathe; that they can enjoy homegrown, local products.

I'm sure a lot of you guys on the other side go to my Facebook. Go to my Facebook. I talk about supporting local workers, local farmers, buying local fruits and vegetables and wine. Well, if you get rid of all our wetlands, that's not going to happen.

I'm going to tell you a true story about Houston. Go and check this out. Houston thought the same thing as this government did: "We've got to build more homes. We've got to have jobs for people." Do you know what they did? They got rid of all their wetlands. They paved over the wetlands. And do you know what happened to them? They had a terrible storm—and guess where all that water went. Does anybody know? It went up. It had nowhere to go because they got rid of all their wetlands. It cost them billions and billions of dollars.

Why would you do that? Why are we doing that for a rich American corporation that made \$22 billion last year and, quite frankly, doesn't treat their workers very well either—that's a whole other story.

We need jobs, but this isn't the way to go. There's a better way. We don't have to choose between jobs and the environment, but you have to have the courage to see that. The first step is halting these MZO and listening to these communities, especially our First Nations of that territory.

Mr. Speaker, believe it or not, it gets even worse. Our research has found that most of the beneficiaries of our MZO are friends or donors of Premier Doug Ford and that Conservative Party.

One of the reasons our region and towns see so many visitors a year is precisely because we have built our community in harmony with our natural environment. Once it's paved over or turned into a high-rise, you never get it back. I mean every word I say.

During the election, the Premier was caught telling rich developers that they'd be able to rip up the greenbelt.

I've got lots more to talk about and, unfortunately, I'm not going to get to it. I don't want to start a whole other thing, other than, if I look at Niagara-on-the-Lake and how beautiful Niagara is—one of the reasons why it's so beautiful is because we protect its heritage and we protect its environment and we don't allow them to pave over our wetlands.

But I want to say to the government—this is what I said to the Liberal government when they said they were going to privatize hydro; I said it to the Premier at that time. I said, "If you privatize Hydro One in the next election, you're going to need a van because that's how many people are going to get elected." If they keep going after the environment, they're going to need a van—because that's exactly where they're going, because there's nothing more important to the residents in this country, in

this province and in the world than protecting our environment.

Thank you very much. I appreciate the time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I always appreciate the comments of the member from Niagara Falls. As he knows, I always ask him about Niagara Falls and I ask him about Niagara-on-the-Lake. I'm going to be asking him about Stevensville the next time I see him.

In fact, I'm going to ask you about Stevensville right now. It's not really a tourist town—probably a great area, farm country.

You mentioned farmers, and I just throw this out there—as your way of supporting farmers and access to broadband and recognizing just how important it is to enable farmers to be able to do business online, to make deals, to keep in touch with their customers, to share ideas, data and information, to file documents.

My question is, how can we work better together to help farmers—even calculate yield on grain—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. To the member from Niagara Falls for a response.

Mr. Wayne Gates: To my colleague on the other side: Yes, I do appreciate that whenever he sees me, he asks how Niagara-on-the-Lake is doing. I know he enjoys coming to Niagara. I've seen him down there a number of times. I'm not saying he enjoys the wine either; I'm just saying that he enjoys Niagara.

On Stevensville: What I'm talking about here is that this is an opportunity. Yes, we can disagree all we want, but this is an opportunity in this bill that this should be essential—that we could work together on this and make the bill exactly what we need.

We could take a look at my colleague's Bill 226, maybe combine the two bills, and say, "How do we get broadband so it's an essential service right across the province of Ontario?" Quite frankly, we need it right across the country.

I'm not disagreeing that we need this. What we don't need, quite frankly—and the words I want to use I can't use, because you've already got mad at me once, so I won't use those words. But the reality is, you don't need schedule 3 in this bill. Get rid of schedule 3. Let's have the debate on our environment.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I really want to thank the member from Niagara Falls for his comments today on this piece of legislation.

As I've been sharing with my community, one of the things about this bill is that it has this piece on broadband infrastructure, which is all the members opposite want to talk about. But what they don't want to talk about, what they want to sweep under the rug, in a sense, is the poison pill, schedule 3, which is really all about expanding the government's ability to use MZO's.

I really appreciated what the member said when he mentioned that if we don't protect the air, if we don't protect the water, if we don't protect our environment,

there's no going back. It's why we in the NDP created the Environmental Bill of Rights in the first place—to protect those, not for us, but for the future.

If I could ask the member from Niagara Falls, with communities and municipalities opposed, with agricultural organizations opposed, with First Nations opposed, with prominent Conservatives—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. To the member from Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I think that question is easy. I really appreciate the fact that you listed all the people who are opposed to schedule 3. It's important for my colleague to raise it, other than me, so you guys hear it more than once. That's the issue here: It's schedule 3.

Who is going to benefit? I think it's very simple: Amazon is going to benefit. The rich developers that want to get to our greenbelt, want to get to our wetlands—they're going to develop. I'll be honest; I haven't looked at who donates to who. I can tell you that my average donation is \$29, because that's all my buddies can really dish out. But my understanding is that the developer gave \$5,000 to the PC Party. So I think that developers, their rich friends—who's not going to is First Nations.

Thank you very much for that question. I appreciate you telling who's opposed to it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: The member talked about his riding, and he talked about wine.

My husband and I do visit your area. We support the Shaw Festival every year. We even supported the Shaw Festival online this year.

One thing about Niagara, of course, is grape growing. There are a few things that are terrible for grapevines: neglect, of course; drying out from high drought; but also overwatering, too much water for the grape vines. That would actually kill the entire wine field. When you're talking to your wine makers—when they started to grow wine there, there's obviously some water-taking that is involved in that. So that's one part of it, in terms of: What are you telling the folks at the winery? Should they now take out all their wineries and uproot all those vines and move somewhere else because they can't have too much water?

The other thing is, Bell is now also doing a pilot there where they're using the Internet of Things to transform Henry of Pelham. So they're going to need good Internet connection to help with the production of Canadian wineries and sell them across—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Can I have order, please? I find it very difficult to hear any speaker when there are sidebars going on.

Back to the member from Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate that.

I'll apologize to my colleague. Because I'm not sitting at my proper desk, I don't have headphones to put in, so I didn't really hear a lot of her question—other than she talked about Niagara and the wine industry.

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In a study that was put out by Brock University, they said that if the average temperature rises anywhere between three and four degrees, the entire Niagara region would lose its farmlands because of the environment. That is a big concern in Niagara. That was a study—not by me—by the students at Niagara College. I don't know if that answered your question. I apologize if it didn't—but I do know that study exists. It's a big concern for the fruit growers and the wine industry, although wines tend to like—we had really good grapes this year to build the wines. They do like the heat a little more than some of the other stuff that we grow in Niagara.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Gurratan Singh: The bill put forward by the Conservatives is another example of them once again valuing the haves over the have-nots. Their priorities are totally out of whack. They're focusing on building warehouses for Amazon, not on helping communities like Brampton or Mississauga that are COVID-19 hot spots. Out of the 325 pharmacies that are going to be providing vaccines this Friday, not one is located in Mississauga or Brampton. This makes no sense. Brampton is a COVID-19 hot spot and it deserves that kind of support.

My question to my friend is this: Why are the priorities from this Conservative government so out of whack?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I know that you've raised that issue a number of times in the House, and I know that your area didn't get the vaccines they needed, just like Niagara didn't, quite frankly.

I want to make sure I read something on this before I forget and run out of time: “‘Stop Bill 257’ has already become a rallying cry for the environmental organizations and community groups opposed to schedule 3 and an expansion of the MZO powers. It is extremely difficult for any party to support it with schedule 3 in it.”

I want to say clearly—because I think you only get one more question—we're not opposed to Internet and broadband. What we're opposed to, very clearly, is schedule 3, period. I'm not going to ever support a bill that's going to hurt our environment and, quite frankly, hurt my kids', my grandkids' and their kids' and their grandkids' future by destroying wetlands in the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Stan Cho: I'm starting to see a pattern here in the NDP playbook. When it comes to WSIB premium reductions, it wasn't just for Amazon; it was for all small businesses in Ontario. But they distracted from the main issue. When we cut the EHT, a tax on jobs, for all businesses in Ontario, they distracted; they went to a different issue. When we cut property taxes by reducing the BET, once again, the NDP didn't focus on the actual tax cut; they focused on another issue. They voted against every single measure to support small businesses in this entire province, throughout the entire pandemic. And here, we have it again.

The question is simple: Will the member support our infrastructure investments into broadband or not? Yes or no?

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's kind of nice when that particular colleague stands up and asks a question, because it's almost like a recording. He almost says the same thing every time he asks a question. I'm not saying anything negative about it—to me, it's like a recording.

What I'm going to tell you very clearly—and I'll repeat it again because I've got 15 seconds—we are not opposed to broadband. We think it should be essential in the province of Ontario. My colleague already has a bill, Bill 226—but we are opposed to schedule 3 being put in as a poison pill—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Okay. Do we have it all out of our system now? I certainly hope so, because it's now time for further debate. I will recognize the member for Carleton, and I hope that I'm able to hear her. Everyone, take note.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues. I'm thrilled and happy to rise for the second reading of Bill 257. Now, more than ever, we need to build better infrastructure faster, laying the foundation for growth, renewal and long-term economic delivery. We need an Ontario-made plan to build infrastructure cost-effectively, to create good jobs and to connect communities to what matters most.

Our proposed legislation comes at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has shone a glaring spotlight on the digital divide. To my colleague on the opposite side of the House who asked us why we're focusing on broadband when we should be focusing on COVID, my response is that we are not a one-trick pony. We are a government that has a wide agenda, and part of that agenda is making sure that all needs are met. Improving infrastructure is just one of the many needs that need to be met, not just across Ontario but especially in my riding of Carleton, where access to reliable broadband has been a challenge.

Today, as many as 700,000 households across Ontario lack access to reliable broadband, and that includes households in my riding of Carleton. That's hundreds of thousands of people who are struggling to work, learn or connect remotely from home; hundreds of thousands of families struggling to access vital resources like virtual health care or to connect with loved ones and friends through video calls without constantly dropping out; not to mention local businesses across Ontario, family farms in North Gower or Richmond or Vernon or Metcalfe, bakeries, bed and breakfasts—all of these small, local, independently owned businesses that need reliable broadband to source supplies and to connect with their customers—and not just them, Speaker, but the entrepreneurs, millennials, Gen Zs, those entrepreneurs who need connectivity to get products and services to the global market.

In today's 21st-century digital world, those who lack access to reliable Internet only continue to fall further behind. That's why we're proposing to take bold action through these legislative changes. That's why we are focusing on bringing forward this bill, and that is why we are talking about broadband and connectivity today, because this is just one piece of the puzzle that plays into the broader picture of supporting Ontarians through this global pandemic.

The proposed act would, if passed, help connect communities to reliable high-speed Internet sooner by accelerating the deployment of provincially significant broadband infrastructure. To connect communities to broadband, telecommunications service providers often need to run broadband cables over long distances. These cables are usually buried in the ground or attached in the air to hydro poles.

Frequently, telecommunications service providers pay annual fees to attach these cables to hydro poles owned by utility companies. It sounds simple enough, but the reality is that Ontario has the highest hydro utility pole attachment rates in Canada. These costs are a real financial barrier to expanding broadband to unserved and underserved communities in our province, and that includes communities in my riding of Carleton. There are other barriers too, such as potential delays in accessing those same poles and municipal rights of way to install broadband on municipal land. If passed, our proposed legislation would provide the ability to reduce these barriers.

Through this legislation, our government is introducing the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021. If passed, this act would help accelerate broadband infrastructure deployment by providing the Minister of Infrastructure with the authority to reduce barriers for provincially significant projects. This would include the ability to ensure municipalities and utility companies provide timely access to their infrastructure, such as municipal rights of way and hydro utility poles. The legislation, if passed, would also allow the government to help reduce the time it takes to prepare electricity infrastructure, such as hydro utility poles, for new wireline attachments on provincially significant projects, because, as we all know, in today's digital economy, time is money. It would help finally accelerate what has been a slow and oftentimes cumbersome process whenever a new attachment request is made.

Our proposed Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act, if passed, would also amend the Ontario Energy Board Act and it would provide the Ontario government with the regulation-making authority to reduce barriers regarding the development of and access to and use of electricity infrastructure by third parties. This would include the authority to reduce or fix the annual charge that telecommunications companies must pay to attach their wirelines to hydro utility poles.

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The amendments would also provide the authority to require utility companies to consider possible joint use of hydro utility poles during their planning process and require transparency around when and where hydro utility poles are scheduled for replacement or refurbishment.

This would help to save time and money in the future as telecommunications service providers seek to enter new communities. Mr. Speaker, this innovative new approach builds on previous commitments our government made in our 2019 broadband and cellular action plan to remove barriers.

Why is this a priority? Why now? Going back to what the member said and what the member's comments were about why we're focusing on this, this is why this legislation is a priority: It's a priority because this affects the livelihoods and well-being of mothers and fathers, students and seniors, businesses and workers in my riding of Carleton, across the city of Ottawa and across the province of Ontario. We are talking about our family, our friends, our neighbours—some of whom just live down the road from us, often past an invisible line that divides those who have access to broadband and those who do not. They're individuals and families who are being left out of the 21st-century digital economy.

Mr. Speaker, broadband is one of the top priorities in my riding of Carleton. Oftentimes, when people ask me what some of the top issues or top areas of concern are or one of the top things that constituents speak to me about, broadband is always at the top of that list. Even during the pandemic, broadband has still been at the top of the list. If anything, it's only become even clearer, even more relevant, because now more than ever, people are relying on reliable broadband. They are relying on that expanded broadband infrastructure so that they can do what they need to do, so that they can have Internet connectivity, so that they can run their business, so that they can learn virtually, so that they can access family and friends.

Could you imagine, Mr. Speaker, seniors who have been in isolation because of the pandemic, who have been waiting to get their vaccines? Finally, thank God, we've had a steady supply of vaccines coming in from the federal government. I can only hope, knock on wood, that it will continue and will not be stopped. But while these seniors are waiting, while these vulnerable people are waiting for their vaccines, they have been isolated. Oftentimes accessing their families through Zoom, through those video calls, has been their way of dealing with isolation.

So my question is, why wouldn't anyone want this to be a priority? Why is the opposition questioning us when this is a priority? Does the opposition not want seniors to be able to access their family and friends? Does the opposition not want students to be able to learn and have reliable broadband and Internet access so they can actually learn from home? Do the members of the opposition not want businesses to be able to run virtually so that they can continue selling their products and services? Do members of the opposition not want people to be able to access those online products and services through reliable Internet? That might not be an issue in more urban areas, like where the member is from, but that is certainly an issue in Carleton, Mr. Speaker. It is a priority, and that's why I'm so proud that I'm speaking to this.

Interjections.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: It's interesting that members of the opposition are heckling me right now, because that's

not an insult to me, but what they are saying is that the people of Carleton, their voices don't matter, their opinions don't matter. By heckling me, they're heckling the people in Richmond and North Gower and Kars and Vernon and Metcalfe and Ashton and everywhere in between. They are heckling them, saying that their requests and their need for better and more reliable Internet is not something that the opposition takes seriously. Shame on them for that, Mr. Speaker.

As someone who lives in and represents a rural Ontario riding—because let me be very clear: While my riding of Carleton is within the urban boundary of the city of Ottawa, it is still a very rural riding. I live in a rural part of Carleton. I live in a part of Carleton where I'm not connected to city water. I have a well. I have a septic tank. I don't even have access to natural gas; I have propane. And that's within the city of Ottawa. There is a huge, huge proportion of people in Carleton who live in a rural area. I will continue to say that despite being in an urban boundary, Carleton is rural. The needs of rural Ottawa people need to be met, and that includes the riding of Carleton.

I chose to move to a rural area of Carleton because I wanted to understand and to personally experience many of these frustrations. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that when I first moved to my home in rural Carleton, I didn't have reliable Internet. I didn't even have reliable cellphone access. At best, I would get two bars on my personal phone, maybe two and a half or three bars on my work phone. And even then, it wasn't that good. Even my Internet access, even though I was supposed to be getting gigabits of speed, at best I was getting 2.5 megabits of download speed, which in today's reality is—you can't function off of 2.5 megabits. Oftentimes, I couldn't even access Internet in my own home.

Thankfully, since then, there have been a few infrastructure projects in Carleton—because like I mentioned, this is a huge priority for me—and we've had improvement in broadband; we've had improvement in cellular connectivity. Now I can say, thankfully, I don't have any dead zones in my home anymore, or not very often. I now usually have four bars, which is actually really good, and I'm happy with that, and my Internet connectivity has improved so I'm actually getting closer to the advertised gigabit speed that I should be getting.

But it's still an issue, and it's still a problem. That's why this legislation is so important, because this is exactly what we need in rural Carleton to encourage companies like Rogers and Bell and others to invest in infrastructure. Why should we reinvent the wheel when we already have the infrastructure in place? There's no need to reinvent the wheel here. We already have the poles. All we need to do is hook up the line. So let's go ahead and do that. I'm so glad that through this legislation, we are streamlining that process.

As I mentioned, this proposed legislation, if passed, would help connect communities like mine, communities like those in Carleton. It would help connect them to reliable broadband sooner by accelerating the deployment

of infrastructure. As Premier Ford said, no infrastructure project is more important to the people of Ontario than broadband. And I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, no infrastructure project is more important to the people of Carleton than broadband. There is no infrastructure project that could change people's lives more than broadband.

This is an issue that I focus on quite often. It's one of my top four priorities. Public education has been another one, and I'm proud to say that today I had a media advisory and a news announcement with Minister Lecce discussing the public high school in Stittsville. One of my goals was to build more public schools and build more schools in my riding, and I'm so proud that within only two years of being elected, I've managed to secure funding to build four brand new schools in Carleton, which is the most of any MPP in Ontario.

Interjections.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Thank you. One is a public high school in Stittsville—that's the first public high school in a community of over 30,000 people—and the other one is a public high school in Riverside South, again the first public high school in a community of over 20,000 people.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Wow. Good job.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Thank you. But all that to say, I have my priorities. Public education has been one of them, and I'm still working on hopefully getting more schools—it's one thing I will be unapologetically greedy about, so my apologies to my colleagues—but the other priority is broadband. That is another issue; that is something else that is really important to the people of my riding.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to pull up—this is an email that I actually received today from Rogers. Because broadband has been a priority for me, I have constantly been in talks with representatives from Rogers and Bell and all telecommunication industries to see what I can do to help facilitate improving broadband in Carleton and what I can do to encourage more broadband infrastructure in Carleton. We've always kept that line of communication open.

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I actually received this in an email today from Rogers. Rogers essentially announced today that it has expanded its low-cost high-speed Internet program, Connected for Success, to help further bridge the digital divide for hundreds of thousands more Canadians and Ontarians. The Connected for Success program first launched in 2013 in Ontario. With the announcement today, CFS will now be available to anyone in the Rogers Internet service area receiving income support through Ontario Works, disability benefits—the Ontario Disability Support Program—or seniors receiving guaranteed income support. Expansion includes new speed options to support evolving technology needs of Canadians and the multi-device needs of many families. To qualify, a customer applies through the CFS website.

Mr. Speaker, what's more important is that with this announcement, with this new initiative from one telecommunications company to provide low-cost and affordable Internet to people across the province of Ontario, you have to be able to access Rogers in order to

even get the program. That's why infrastructure is so important. Our role as a government is to make sure that we have infrastructure, that we have broadband, that we have access to Internet so that when these programs do come out, people in my riding of Carleton, seniors who are living on a guaranteed income, people on disability, people who are on Ontario Works can actually sign up. Because the worst thing is when you know you're eligible for a program, you go on the website and you put in your address, you put in the location to see if the services come to your area, and you get a notification that says, "We're sorry, you can't access that service in your area." Mr. Speaker, I don't ever want anyone to have to go through that.

That is why broadband is a priority. That is why Internet is a priority, because it is a necessity. In this reality, in this day and age, you need Internet. You need Internet to go on with your daily lives. You need Internet to access information, to remain connected, to learn about a free course, to get an education. Even if not that, even if you don't use the Internet for anything, at the very least, you need a cellphone. You need a cellphone to contact people. What we are doing is creating the market conditions to set up Ontarians for success.

Mr. Speaker, I see that I don't have too much time left, so I just want to highlight a few more things. By enacting these measures, we are helping to ensure every community in every region across the province, including my riding of Carleton, can more quickly participate in the modern digital economy and contribute to our economic recovery. This legislation, with the changes that we are proposing, is important to Ontario's future prosperity. It is important to the small business owner just outside of Ottawa, in Carleton, who wants to sell her products online. It's important to the resident in Kars who wants to apply for good jobs without worrying about whether their unreliable Internet will disqualify them. It's important to the family in Metcalfe, who would no longer have to sit outside on cold benches right next to their school for their student to be able to download coursework. It's important to the businesses that would no longer have to deal with the frustrations of a poor Internet connection that prevents them from marketing or selling their products.

Broadband is the key to our economic recovery and renewal. Broadband will help us create jobs and invest in the future of our province. So let's move forward together, Mr. Speaker. Let's ensure that we don't leave anyone behind in today's digital world. I hope that the members of the opposition will support us on this legislation to further improve the lives of the people of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Questions?

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank the member from Carleton for her remarks. I listened intently, and she did a very good job of describing the needs of people who need broadband, rural Ontario, and the first two sections of the bill. She mentioned how important it would be to millennials and generation Z—X, Z—anyway, a much younger generation than I am. Also, what's important to

them, I believe, is long-term planning for the environment, for agriculture. We have a provincial policy statement that actually does that. But ministerial zoning orders are the opposite of that; they're short-term, knee-jerk planning. Could the member explain why she didn't mention those or schedule 3 at all in her remarks?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: If the member is speaking to whether or not the minister can interfere when there hasn't been agreement between a municipality and a broadband provider or a hydro provider when they're looking to improve broadband and connectivity, the answer is, as part of streamlining this process, we are looking at—this is a last-resort measure. Basically, if the Internet provider or telecommunication provider has made reasonable and best efforts to come into a deal with either the municipality or the utilities provider and no agreement has been made, the minister can step in. Ultimately, as a province, it's our responsibility to look out for the people of Ontario. It's a last-resort measure, but I think it's necessary to have in there. Oftentimes, when people haven't been able to find a solution with the municipality, they come to me, and if my hands are tied, I can't help them. This legislation ensures that my hands are not tied when people in Carleton come to me, when they ask for help—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. The next question.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Could the member from Carleton, who just made an excellent presentation, describe how the legislation builds on the Ontario Rebuilding and Recovery Act—in particular, how it accelerates the building of key infrastructure projects to create jobs and lay the foundation for a strong economic recovery, which I know my constituents want?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I want to thank the member for his excellent question.

Mr. Speaker, our government understands that there's no infrastructure project more important to the people of Ontario and to the people of Carleton than broadband. This legislation demonstrates our commitment to connecting more communities more efficiently and will ensure that Ontario's priority broadband projects do not encounter unnecessary delays that will further delay connecting the people of Ontario. The legislative amendments, if passed, would provide government the authority to set various rules for utility pole access and municipal right-of-way access. The government intends to work with municipalities, the OEB, utilities and telecom service providers to develop the details of these rules related to accessing the utility poles and related electricity infrastructure in a manner that protects the interests of ratepayers.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Gurratan Singh: We are seeing very clear priorities from this Conservative government. They would rather provide MZOs for the development of the environment than focus on vaccinations of folks. Of the 325 pharmacies that are going to start vaccinations this Friday, none are located in Brampton, which is a COVID-

19 hot spot. This is wrong, it's unjustifiable and should not be—

Mr. Mike Harris: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Kitchener–Conestoga on a point of order.

Mr. Mike Harris: I'm not really sure what this has to do with the bill before us right now.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'm listening carefully, and I'm trusting that the member from Brampton East will tie his comments and question into what this bill is describing.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Speaker, as I started off my question—

Interjections: Broadband, broadband.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: —I explained the priorities of this government, which are MZOs over vaccinations, and I'm asking the government—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. Thank you very much.

I'm going to ask the government side to quiet down. I don't want to have to say, "Go ahead and make my day," because if I do, you'll know exactly what that means.

Back to the member: I apologize.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Clearly, Speaker, we see I struck a chord with this government, because it demonstrates that they'd rather focus on MZOs on providing spaces for Amazon, as opposed to focusing on the vaccination of communities that are at risk.

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My question to the member is, why are they so focused on providing big developers with the ability to build over green lands as opposed to helping folks who are in COVID-19 hot spots with their vaccinations?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I'm kind of concerned about the member's question. I was talking about broadband and access to broadband and access to reliable Internet. The member seems to be a little bit confused and wants to talk about vaccines. But if you want to talk about vaccines, let's go there.

Why is the member not speaking out against the federal government for not delivering vaccines when they were supposed to? The member knows full well that we had a stopgap. The member knows full well that we have administered as many vaccines as possible, and we are continuing to do that. We are giving out the vaccines as they come in.

But what the member doesn't understand is that we as a government have more than one priority. We as a government have a responsibility to service and help Ontarians in various aspects. That is why we have different ministries, and each ministry is responsible for something.

I think that's why the member is part of a party that will never be in government—because everyone knows they are a one-trick pony.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. *Interjection.*

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas will come to order. Okay? I have a long memory.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I have a long riding name.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Yes, you do—and I won't take that as challenging the Chair.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: No, I have sympathy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): That's just fine. But you understand my point.

To the member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you very much, Speaker.

I've had the opportunity over the last year to participate in many virtual meetings with the member from Carleton. She lives in a rural area—I know she was discussing that here today—and several times her Internet has failed her.

I'd like to hear from her what she thinks this bill is going to do for people who are trying to work from home, as we navigate COVID-19. As we move through the next year, when we get those vaccines in arms that we've been talking about here today and, hopefully, get people back to work, some may still want to work from home and some may still have to attend school from home. Maybe they're attending one of the universities in Ottawa. What is this going to mean for those people? And how is it going to allow them to go about their daily lives in a much more expedient manner?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Thank you to the member for that excellent question. My response is that the impacts of bringing reliable Internet and broadband to Carleton will be life-changing.

Mr. Speaker, I remember—I think it was back in the summer—we were speaking about farms, and it was actually the member opposite who, when I asked him when was the last time he went on a farm, responded with, "I love farms."

Well, if anyone has bothered to visit a farm in the past few years, they would know that a lot of farms, especially in my riding of Carleton, rely on Internet, rely on GPS technology to monitor their farms, to monitor their livestock. We actually have a poultry farm that is carbon neutral and it is run solely on solar power, and they follow along that farm through Internet.

Mr. Speaker, bringing reliable broadband will be life-changing, not just to the people of Carleton but also to the farms and farmers in Carleton.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions? The member from Humber River–Black Creek, you have 35 seconds.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Speaker, developers across this province have spaghetti stains on their shirts that will never come out, from the Premier's dinners. This government knows this, and they're playing it like the people of this province don't see what's happening here. Time and again, we're debating legislation that has sneaky stuff hidden in to help the richest developers, their mega donors, get more out of this.

Will the member remove schedule 3 out of this bill? Will she ask for that?

Mr. Mike Harris: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member on a point of order.

Mr. Mike Harris: This is the third or fourth time I believe this member has stood up and imputed motive in the House today. Quite frankly, I've had enough of it.

Miss Monique Taylor: You're not the Speaker—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. You're looking at me, and you're right. You're looking at the right person, because I am the Speaker.

I've listened carefully. I don't classify what he was saying as imputing motive. However, I will caution the member on inflammatory words or actions.

Unfortunately, the time for debate has ended on this, so now it's over to the opposition for further debate.

I recognize the member from Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I appreciate the opportunity to get up. I was to have 20 minutes; it looks like I'm going to have five now, based on the time on the clock. I'm sure the government side is really disappointed about that.

I'm going to get to the heart of it. The issue for us on this side of the House is schedule 3. As much as the government side don't want to talk about it and don't want to admit that this bill is an issue when it come to MZOs—or that we're off-topic—it is right in the bill. They wrote it right in the bill.

Earlier in the debate—I believe it was my colleague from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas—the member from Sarnia–Lambton got up and asked her a question about what she had said in debate. What was interesting is that he dismissed the fact that the government side is pegging this as important to rural communities—rural broadband. The member from HWAD pointed out that not once in this bill does it mention rural communities; not once does it mention agriculture. It doesn't mention anything that they're claiming it is about. And then he said—because this is what the government does. They try to abdicate responsibility, whether that's to the federal government, whether that is to us on this side of the House. They try to lay blame somewhere else. But the reality is, Speaker, the member for Sarnia–Lambton said, “It's our responsibility to tell the people of the province what's in the bill.” But they wrote the bill. They are the government. It's their legislation. It's their responsibility to talk about what's in the bill. It should be up to them to stand up and talk about everything in the bill, including the fact that they are opening the door for developers to pave over wetlands or agricultural lands. It's not up to us to defend their crummy policies. There's a reason why we're called the official opposition.

What we're saying on this side of the House is that we support broadband. We support rural and Indigenous communities having broadband. We don't—

Interjections.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: They're clapping over there—but we do not support schedule 3. Take schedule 3 out of it.

Pass Bill 226 from my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane if you really care about rural communities having broadband.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I don't hear them applauding for schedule 3.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I don't hear them applauding for schedule 3. They don't even want to talk about schedule 3.

Something interesting this government has talked about—this is my favourite, because they've actually agreed to allow development in the South Cameron woodlot in my community, in my riding, in a provincially significant wetland.

Interjection.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Well, the reason—the mayor did, and do you know why? Because he's a Conservative. And do you know what you did? You said, “Absolutely, go right ahead.” But you didn't talk to the community, because if you had talked to the community you would know—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Through the Speaker, please.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: —they don't support it. The community doesn't support it. And there's a reason why they don't support it, Speaker: because they value our environment. They value our naturalized spaces. They recognize that the homes that are already in that area around that wetland have had terrible flooding. We have had not one, but two massive, 100-year storms in our region that caused mass flooding, and those homes were affected. They know that anybody else who builds on that land—their new homes are going to flood, and it is not going to be this government that's going to protect them. This government is not going to go back to the builders and say, “Well, you knew it was wetlands. You shouldn't have built there,” because they gave them permission to do it. They took with one hand—all you have to do is look at where the donations are coming from—and they gave with another.

So, Speaker, it's not that we're against broadband—we aren't.

One of our members has tabled a bill. Support it. He brought it up before you did, but take—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. Unfortunately, the time for debate, since it's 6 o'clock, has now expired.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It is now time for private members' business.

Report continues in volume B.

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Standing Committee on General Government / Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Mike Schreiner
Jill Andrew, Robert Bailey
Guy Bourgouin, Stephen Crawford
Goldie Ghamari, Chris Glover
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Amarjot Sandhu, Mike Schreiner
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian
Aris Babikian, Gilles Bisson
Will Bouma, Lorne Coe
Wayne Gates, Robin Martin
Norman Miller, Rick Nicholls
Billy Pang, Amanda Simard
Marit Stiles
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Julia Douglas

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lucille Collard
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Parm Gill, Daryl Kramp
Natalia Kusendova, Suze Morrison
Lindsey Park, Guratan Singh
Nina Tangri, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
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Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité permanent de l'Assemblée législative

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Faisal Hassan, Logan Kanapathi
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Christina Maria Mitas, Sam Oosterhoff
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Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

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Stephen Crawford, Rudy Cuzzetto
France Gélinas, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Taras Natyshak
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Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Fraser
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Logan Kanapathi, Vincent Ke
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Billy Pang, Jeremy Roberts
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Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

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Jeff Burch, Amy Fee
Michael Gravelle, Joel Harden
Mike Harris, Christine Hogarth
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Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight / Comité spécial de la surveillance de la gestion des situations d'urgence

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Tom Rakocevic
Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
John Fraser, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Robin Martin
Sam Oosterhoff, Lindsey Park
Tom Rakocevic, Sara Singh
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