

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

No. 238

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

N^o 238

1st Session
42nd Parliament
Wednesday
24 March 2021

1^{re} session
42^e législature
Mercredi
24 mars 2021

Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott
Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Todd Decker

Hansard on the Internet

Hansard and other documents of the Legislative Assembly can be on your personal computer within hours after each sitting. The address is:

<https://www.ola.org/>

Index inquiries

Reference to a cumulative index of previous issues may be obtained by calling the Hansard Reporting Service indexing staff at 416-325-7400.

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

L'adresse pour faire paraître sur votre ordinateur personnel le Journal et d'autres documents de l'Assemblée législative en quelques heures seulement après la séance est :

Renseignements sur l'index

Adressez vos questions portant sur des numéros précédents du Journal des débats au personnel de l'index, qui vous fourniront des références aux pages dans l'index cumulatif, en composant le 416-325-7400.

House Publications and Language Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 1180-2987

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Wednesday 24 March 2021 / Mercredi 24 mars 2021

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2021, Bill 238, Mr. McNaughton / Loi de 2021 modifiant la Loi sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail, projet de loi 238, M. McNaughton

| | |
|--|-------|
| Mr. Stephen Crawford..... | 12173 |
| Mr. Guy Bourgouin | 12176 |
| Ms. Christine Hogarth..... | 12176 |
| Mr. Terence Kernaghan | 12176 |
| Mr. Lorne Coe..... | 12177 |
| Mr. Michael Mantha | 12177 |
| M. Guy Bourgouin | 12177 |
| Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto..... | 12180 |
| Ms. Suze Morrison..... | 12180 |
| Mr. Deepak Anand..... | 12180 |
| Mr. Gurratan Singh | 12181 |
| Mr. Terence Kernaghan | 12181 |
| Mr. Logan Kanapathi | 12181 |
| Ms. Peggy Sattler | 12181 |
| Third reading debate deemed adjourned..... | 12182 |

Order of business

| | |
|--------------------------|-------|
| Hon. Paul Calandra | 12183 |
| Motion agreed to | 12183 |

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

Sheraton Ottawa Hotel

| | |
|----------------------|-------|
| Mr. Joel Harden..... | 12183 |
|----------------------|-------|

Pre-budget consultations

| | |
|------------------------|-------|
| Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto..... | 12183 |
|------------------------|-------|

COVID-19 immunization

| | |
|--------------------------|-------|
| Mr. Michael Mantha | 12183 |
|--------------------------|-------|

Natale Bozzo

| | |
|----------------------------|-------|
| Ms. Christine Hogarth..... | 12184 |
|----------------------------|-------|

Hospital funding

| | |
|--------------------------|-------|
| Mr. Gurratan Singh | 12184 |
|--------------------------|-------|

Long-term care

| | |
|---------------------|-------|
| Mr. Parm Gill | 12184 |
|---------------------|-------|

COVID-19 response

| | |
|----------------------|-------|
| Mr. Roman Baber..... | 12184 |
|----------------------|-------|

Tamil community

| | |
|---------------------------|-------|
| Mr. Logan Kanapathi | 12185 |
|---------------------------|-------|

Mental health and addiction services

| | |
|-----------------------|-------|
| Ms. Marit Stiles..... | 12185 |
|-----------------------|-------|

Racism

| | |
|---------------------|-------|
| Mr. Vincent Ke..... | 12185 |
|---------------------|-------|

QUESTION PERIOD / PÉRIODE DE QUESTIONS

COVID-19 immunization

| | |
|------------------------------|-------|
| Ms. Sara Singh | 12186 |
| Hon. Christine Elliott | 12186 |

COVID-19 response

| | |
|------------------------------|-------|
| Mr. John Vanthof | 12186 |
| Hon. Paul Calandra | 12187 |
| Hon. Christine Elliott | 12187 |

COVID-19 immunization

| | |
|------------------------------|-------|
| Miss Monique Taylor | 12187 |
| Hon. Christine Elliott | 12187 |

Long-term care

| | |
|------------------------------|-------|
| Ms. Christine Hogarth | 12188 |
| Hon. Merrilee Fullerton..... | 12188 |

COVID-19 immunization

| | |
|------------------------------|-------|
| Mr. Jamie West | 12189 |
| Hon. Christine Elliott | 12189 |
| Mme France Gélinas | 12189 |

COVID-19 immunization

| | |
|------------------------------|-------|
| Mr. Stephen Blais..... | 12189 |
| Hon. Christine Elliott | 12190 |
| Mr. John Fraser | 12190 |

Small business

| | |
|------------------------------------|-------|
| Ms. Christine Hogarth | 12190 |
| Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria | 12190 |

Indigenous children and youth

| | |
|--------------------------|-------|
| Mr. Sol Mamakwa..... | 12191 |
| Hon. Paul Calandra | 12191 |

Highway construction

| | |
|------------------------------|-------|
| Mr. Stephen Blais..... | 12191 |
| Hon. Caroline Mulroney | 12192 |

COVID-19 response

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Ms. Christine Hogarth | 12192 |
| Ms. Andrea Khanjin | 12192 |

Arts and cultural funding

| | |
|------------------------|-------|
| Ms. Jessica Bell..... | 12193 |
| Hon. Lisa MacLeod..... | 12193 |

Highway construction

| | |
|------------------------------|-------|
| Mr. John Fraser | 12193 |
| Hon. Caroline Mulroney | 12194 |

| | |
|--|-------|
| COVID-19 immunization / Immunisation contre la COVID-19 | |
| Mr. Guy Bourgouin..... | 12194 |
| Hon. Christine Elliott | 12194 |
| COVID-19 response | |
| Mr. Roman Baber..... | 12195 |
| Hon. Christine Elliott | 12195 |
| Public health | |
| Mr. Percy Hatfield..... | 12195 |
| Hon. Christine Elliott | 12196 |

**REPORTS BY COMMITTEES /
RAPPORTS DE COMITÉS**

| | |
|--|-------|
| Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight | |
| Ms. Christine Hogarth..... | 12196 |
| Report presented | 12196 |
| Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills | |
| Mr. Logan Kanapathi | 12196 |
| Report adopted | 12196 |
| Standing Committee on Social Policy | |
| Mr. Jeff Burch..... | 12196 |
| Report adopted | 12196 |

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS /
DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI**

| | |
|---|-------|
| 2353043 Ontario Inc. Act, 2021, Bill Pr44, Mr. Kanapathi | |
| First reading agreed to..... | 12196 |

| | |
|---|-------|
| Waterpower Day Act, 2021, Bill 268, Mr. Mantha / Loi de 2021 sur la Journée de l'énergie hydraulique, projet de loi 268, M. Mantha | |
| First reading agreed to..... | 12196 |
| Mr. Michael Mantha..... | 12197 |

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

| | |
|--------------------------|-------|
| Long-term care | |
| Mme France Gélinas | 12197 |

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

| | |
|--|-------|
| 2021 Ontario budget / Budget de l'Ontario de 2021 | |
| Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy | 12197 |
| Debate adjourned | 12204 |

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS /
DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI**

| | |
|--|-------|
| Protecting the People of Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2021, Bill 269, Mr. Bethlenfalvy / Loi de 2021 visant à protéger la population ontarienne (mesures budgétaires), projet de loi 269, M. Bethlenfalvy | |
| First reading agreed to..... | 12204 |

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Wednesday 24 March 2021

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Mercredi 24 mars 2021

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

**WORKPLACE SAFETY
AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT
ACT, 2021**

**LOI DE 2021 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE
ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE
LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL**

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 23, 2021, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 238, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 238, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail.

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: As always, it's a pleasure to open up the proceedings today here in the Legislature and to represent my riding of Oakville.

Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to speak about the third reading of Bill 238, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2021.

I would first like to thank my colleague the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development for the work he has done throughout this entire pandemic in supporting workers, announcing critical investments to help our province's recovery. It was also a pleasure to host the minister just last week in the riding of Oakville in delivering PPE to a lot of charitable institutions in the riding.

Ontario is ensuring that workplaces are safe during these unprecedented times. We are also getting ahead to fill in the skilled trades gap that Ontario has been experiencing and will experience in the future. Our government is supporting apprentices to enhance their skills and find well-paying jobs.

Locally, in my riding, Ford Motor Co. of Canada and Sheridan College, this previous summer, were provided funding to help workers and students upgrade skills for automotive and manufacturing jobs.

Similarly, our government has redesigned the Second Career program with a \$59-million investment to help people develop skills for in-demand jobs.

I would now like to discuss the details of the proposed legislation in Bill 238. If passed, Bill 238 would provide new, additional measures to help businesses deal with the unprecedented economic impact of COVID-19.

Our proposed legislation responds to an unanticipated and artificial rise in the earnings ceiling under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.

The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, or WSIB as it's commonly referred to, is an arm's-length agency of the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development. Its purpose is to protect Ontario's families, workers and employers by providing wage loss benefits. Benefits and services are also available to families of the workers covered who are fatally injured as a result of work.

Speaker, it's important to note that the WSIB is funded by premiums paid by employers. The WSIB covers over five million workers in more than 300,000 workplaces in the province of Ontario.

Because of the pandemic, thousands of businesses have been hit hard by a rise in unexpected premiums. Let me take some time to explain why this has actually happened. Over the last year, COVID-related job losses have resulted in an increase in Ontario's average industrial wage. We know that employment in service and sales occupations in Ontario was down 18% in January 2021 compared to the previous year. That's a loss of over 328,000 jobs, according to Statistics Canada. Employment in the accommodation and food sectors was down 35% in February 2021 versus the year prior. So this industry has borne the brunt of this pandemic.

Speaker, you may be wondering why, during a pandemic, the average wage in Ontario or the hourly rate of pay has actually increased. It is because when a greater number of lower-paid workers lose their jobs compared to high earners, the average industrial wage rises. As we have seen, the pandemic has affected all businesses and workers, but it has affected the lower-income earners, including a high percentage of youth, who have disproportionately lost their jobs.

To provide some perspective on this, the average wage normally increases by about 2% to 3% each year. This year, the average wage rose by 7.8%. While a 7.8% increase appears to be amazing on the surface, it is an artificial rise brought about because of the pandemic and the reasons I just mentioned. This is a drastic rise in a very short period of time and it creates real implications for Ontario businesses, which now face a potential hike in their WSIB premiums.

The reason why we can get technical is because of how premiums are calculated for small businesses. When

calculating the premiums paid by employers, the board, or the WSIB, uses a process called the “earnings ceiling,” or “maximum insurable earnings.” This ceiling figure is a cap, a maximum annual wage that premium costs are, in part, based on. According to a formula the WSIB uses, which is set out in the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, the earnings ceiling is 175% of the average industrial wage in Ontario as of July 1 each year, as reported by Statistics Canada. To put it simply, the higher the wage, the premiums move hand in hand for some businesses by becoming higher.

I would like to note that the WSIB is working hard to ease the strain on businesses, and they have taken several measures to do so. For example, the WSIB froze premium rates in 2021 at the same levels that were paid in 2020. Unfortunately, this freeze does not protect employers affected by an increase in the maximum insurable earnings or earnings ceiling. That’s because the increase in the maximum insurable earnings affects the total premiums employers pay and it is separate from the premium rate they are assessed by the WSIB.

Businesses with higher-wage workers, such as those in the construction sector and skilled trades, face a potential yet significant increase in their total WSIB premiums in 2021. This increase would not be a result of WSIB claims or their safety record. That’s why the proposed legislation is needed.

To recap, premium calculations are subject to the earnings ceiling, and the earnings ceiling is going up because of the unique circumstances due to COVID-19. When the earnings ceiling goes up, the premiums can increase for some businesses despite the board’s freeze on individual rates.

We need to protect businesses from these unexpected, significant cost increases, especially during these challenging times. That is why we are proposing to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act by inserting a specific lower maximum insurable earnings cap for 2021.

To further illustrate this need, the WSIB maximum insurable earnings ceiling for 2020 was \$95,400. The board estimates that approximately 200,000 workers had earnings above the 2020 maximum. We are proposing to set an earnings ceiling of \$97,308 for 2021. That is a 2% increase, rather than a 7.8% increase. The 2% increase represents the typical annual raise in the average industrial wage instead of the much higher hike we’ve seen this last July.

0910

If passed, Bill 238 would prevent employers with workers at or above the earnings ceiling cap from seeing a sudden significant rise in their WSIB premiums. Our legislative proposals, if passed, would be applicable as of January 1, 2021. This change is needed now more than ever. Small businesses cannot afford an unexpected and unplanned spike in their WSIB premiums, and their workers can’t either—period.

Small businesses are in need of cost savings, not costs that will continue to inflict further damage on their financial positions. We have sadly seen many businesses

close, and we cannot sit idle while new costs can force even more businesses to close or jobs to be lost. Importantly, if passed, these changes would provide stability for businesses and protect much-needed jobs in all of our ridings, including my riding of Oakville. Oakville is fortunate to have diverse businesses, and I am pleased to be speaking in support of this bill to support them. I have mentioned this proposed bill to business owners in Oakville, and they are fully in support. They are grateful for the work our government is doing to help their businesses in this very difficult time.

As the minister mentioned, it’s important to point out that this proposed approach would have no impact on the benefits paid to injured workers. Let me repeat that: no impact on the benefits paid to injured workers. This is because we are proposing changes to the earnings ceiling calculation for premiums, not the earnings ceiling for worker benefits. That means the proposed changes would not affect the 7.8% increase in the earnings cap for the calculation of worker benefits.

A significant number of workers whose income is at the maximum earnings level have been on the front line during this pandemic. They are firefighters, registered nurses, skilled trades construction workers and automotive workers. We know these front-line heroes have provided an invaluable service during this pandemic. They should continue to be fairly compensated for work-related injuries and occupational diseases. No one is arguing against this.

Bill 238 would also provide for regulation-making authority to specify a lower insurable earnings ceiling in 2022 if the average industrial wage rises unexpectedly again. While we certainly hope this will not be needed, this pandemic has taught all of us to be prepared for the unexpected. This pandemic has taught us the importance of flexibility and the need for proper planning.

In the meantime, businesses deserve and need the financial relief our proposed adjustment will bring in 2021. In helping them remain solvent, we’re also helping keep workers on the job and assisting in the economic recovery of this province. The proposed modest increase in the maximum insurable earnings would help to ensure continued financial sustainability of the workplace compensation system.

Speaker, Bill 238 is a good example of how our government continues to work alongside the WSIB to support businesses who need it most and ensure workers are protected with a job during these very difficult times. This is a point I believe everybody in the House can support, and I certainly want the members opposite to show that they are supporting workers and businesses that employ them and vote in favour of this legislation.

Leaves of absence and termination and severance under the Employment Standards Act is something I’d like to talk about now. During the pandemic, public health measures have been needed to protect lives and control the spread of this virus. These measures have been in place now for almost a year. As I noted earlier, many businesses have temporarily laid off or reduced hours for their employees. Last year, we had the highest unemployment

rate since 1994. That's why our government made a regulatory change to the Employment Standards Act so that non-unionized employees who have had their hours temporarily reduced or eliminated because of reasons related to COVID-19 will be deemed to be on infectious disease emergency leave instead of being laid off. This change has benefited employers as well. It was and is a lifeline to help many of them stay afloat. Our deemed infectious disease emergency leave helps ensure employers impacted by the pandemic aren't terminating employees because their temporary layoff periods expire.

Speaker, terminations are generally triggered when temporary layoffs exceed the length of time under the Employment Standards Act. This can result in costly payouts, which for many businesses, especially smaller ones, could make the difference between survival and closure.

To give an example: A restaurant with 30 staff—of which there are many in all of our ridings, including my riding of Oakville—could be liable for termination payments of up to \$100,000. That's on top of everything else they've had to deal with during this pandemic. We know employers are suffering, so we took immediate action to help ensure termination and severance obligations were not creating an added burden on businesses. Helping businesses to remain solvent has helped employees as well. It means workers will have jobs to come back to when COVID disappears.

Our regulatory change has also helped workers stay employed with legal protections, and they may also be eligible for federal emergency income support programs. In short, the goal is to prevent temporary reductions in workers' hours due to the pandemic from being permanent. This change protects thousands of workers and it makes a real difference for our economy and working people in this province.

I'm also proud to say that the government has extended these regulatory protections under the Employment Standards Act to July 3, 2021.

The regulatory changes I've just described apply only to non-unionized employees. That is because we believe employers and trade unions are able to negotiate solutions that are best for them and their particular circumstances. The regular rules regarding the layoffs have continued to apply to unionized employees.

Last year, one requirement under the Employment Standards Act proved to be a challenge for certain sectors, including hotels and tourism. The ESA requires that termination and severance entitlements will be placed in a trust when an employee has been laid off 35 weeks and chooses to keep their right to be recalled. To deal with temporary layoffs that began in March of last year that were close to reaching this 35-week mark, we took immediate action.

The hospitality, tourism, convention and trade show industries have been hit tremendously hard by this pandemic. This trust obligation under the ESA could have impacted them heavily. That's because paying termination and severance monies into a trust could drain the financial

resources of these employers and lead to permanent closures. This is the reason we created a temporary provision for these important sectors.

Given the unique challenges of the tourism and hospitality industries that are facing COVID-19, we've provided employers and unions in these sectors the option to agree to use these funds to help keep their businesses open. That's the ultimate goal at the end of the day. This special industry regulation gives employers and unions in these sectors the option to agree to use these funds to help keep their businesses open. That's the ultimate goal at the end of the day.

This special industry regulation gives employers and unions in these sectors the ability to negotiate alternative arrangements when it comes to recall rights and paying monies into a trust. They could, for instance, agree that the employer pay only 50% of the termination and severance pay into a trust. If the employer and union can't come to an agreement, the regular rules will apply. This new special rule is optional. The regulatory changes apply effective December 17, 2020, and expire on December 17 of this year.

I would also like to highlight that these changes were informed by conversations with industries heavily impacted by this pandemic. We continue to listen and advocate for Ontario businesses and workers as we work to recover and strengthen these sectors.

Speaker, I would also like to highlight again another example of the ministry's engagement with stakeholders in the health and safety sector. In November 2019, our government announced a new voluntary program that rewards employers who are champions of workplace health and safety. That program is called Supporting Ontario's Safe Employers. It's entirely unique in Canada.

Once recognized under the program, employers may be eligible for up to \$600,000 in WSIB premium rebates under WSIB programs. Any WSIB rebates would be determined by the WSIB under related programs and distributed over a three-year period that began in January 2020. It incentivizes safe work practices and conditions, and that helps everyone, businesses and workers alike. We created this program because it promotes a safety culture in our workplaces and encourages organizations to go the extra mile for their safety measures. Most importantly, it helps reduce workplace injuries and saves lives.

0920

As we recognize Ontario's safest employers, we must also encourage all employers to do better and improve their safety practices. That's why our government launched an initiative at the same time that the WSIB launched their new Health and Safety Excellence program, which was briefly mentioned by the minister. This program encourages businesses without an existing program to develop one by rewarding safe employers with non-financial incentives. Under the Health and Safety Excellence program, businesses with less ability to impact their WSIB rates will receive a 2% rebate for each workplace safety topic where they have addressed and completed instruction. Businesses with a greater ability to impact their

receipts receive a 1.4% rebate for each safety topic they train their workers on. These businesses will see greater reductions in their premium rates as their health and safety experience ratings improve. Understanding the challenges small businesses face, the WSIB offers them a minimum rebate of \$1,000 per completed safety topic.

Our support does not end there. Businesses can also receive recognition badges to display on their website, an email signature and advertisements to show their commitment to workplace health and safety. These badges also show up on their business profile and on the WSIB's website when people search for safety statistics. These programs are one example of our government's commitment to developing a culture of health and safety that protects workers on the job and strengthens our economy.

Speaker, to conclude, with the limited time I have left, I will repeat my call for the members here in this Legislature to support Bill 238, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2021. Small businesses need to be protected from these sudden, unexpected increases in their WSIB premiums. Last year, our government worked to create a financial package that included a WSIB deferred premiums payment period for six months, between March and August 2020. This gave employers \$1.9 billion in relief from premium payments. On top of this, WSIB premiums have been reduced by over \$2 billion since 2018. By helping small businesses reduce costs now, we will protect workers and help businesses remain solvent and strong for the future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It's now time for questions and response.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: I was listening to his allocation—son allocation, en français. We heard at the committee the injured workers' group talk about how presumptive WSIB coverage would be important, and yet, at committee, your government voted against. When Bill 191 was brought to the House, again your government voted against.

We heard at the committee that there is a surplus. In fact, the minister was boasting of the surplus that the WSIB has. My question to you: If we have a surplus, why not support workers? As you say, we are there to support workers, to help workers. Why did you vote against Bill 191 and also motions that we brought at committee?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member. I appreciate the question, as always. I was at the committee as well, so I was certainly partaking in that. I think the most important factor that the folks here in the Legislature as well as watching on TV should be aware of is that this bill protects workers. It protects employers, obviously, by capping fees at 22%. Businesses have been tremendously impacted in a very negative way. We don't need to discuss that; we all know that. But it's also ensuring that the payments from the WSIB that go to injured workers during this difficult time are not capped at 2%. They're actually going to be 7.8%.

Our government has been committed to helping workers through this difficult time, so we did not cap the fees that are being paid out from the WSIB to injured workers.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions? The member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's nice to be here and nice to see you.

In my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, the COVID-19 pandemic has hit low-wage earners the hardest. Many of them lost their jobs in the retail and hospitality sectors. But at the start of this pandemic, our government continued to support businesses in Ontario, and I know we've received a lot of thanks for that.

My question to the member is, why does this bill need to be implemented now, considering that we are almost a full year into this pandemic?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore—a very good question. In terms of why this bill needs to be now, it's because it is affecting workers and businesses at this very moment. This will be retroactive to January of this year. If the WSIB premiums were increased by 7.8% on businesses—and I stress that this is all businesses. That is a lot of small businesses. There are 200,000 workers who would actually be affected by this, so that's a lot of money for small businesses.

Businesses are being affected now, and there is an after-effect. We're not out of this pandemic. Businesses need our help at this very moment. This will take effect immediately for all these businesses here in the province of Ontario and help save them a little bit of money. I know our government has done a lot on many different fronts in terms of supporting businesses. This is just one measure that's needed. It's one tool in the tool box.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Oakville for his presentation. In his discussion, he indicated that this bill would reward good employers and would protect workers. But if you look at the legislation itself, it's right in front of you: Workers are only mentioned once within the legislation.

If this government truly wants to reform the WSIB, it should take care of the process known as deeming, or the creation of phantom jobs. I have spoken with a great deal of injured workers within my riding. I would like to thank the member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay for indicating this government's lack of support for bills such as Bill 191 and the amendments the NDP have brought forward.

There are no workplaces without workers. Why are protections for workers left out of this bill?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member opposite. I want to stress that this bill is for the benefit of everybody in the province of Ontario, but particularly employers and employees of small and medium-sized businesses that pay WSIB. Injured workers who are unfortunately injured during this very difficult time will receive additional benefits. They are going to receive benefits up to 7.8%. They are not being capped. Yet businesses are only being required to put 2% in. That's going to help businesses. If we have a strong and healthy business environment, I think that's good for the economy and it's good for the province as a whole.

We are committed to both employers and workers. I certainly hope the opposition will support this legislation, because we heard at the committee how critical this legislation is for everybody involved.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: What an excellent presentation from the member from Oakville—an excellent presentation overall.

Speaker, you will know that the WSIB provides coverage for five million workers in the province, and that's in approximately 300,000 workplaces. Could my colleague please explain how the WSIB is able to afford this extensive coverage if the premiums paid by employers do not rise as well?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member from Whitby—a good question as well. The WSIB, if I can explain it to everybody, is basically an insurance program for injured workers here in the province of Ontario. Workers who get injured on the job may become disabled or be out of work temporarily or permanently. The WSIB supports them in that process. As a result, employers—in every pay for every worker, they put a percentage of their pay into this insurance program.

Over the years, we have had more assets in there that have built up over time, which allowed us that flexibility to be able to pay out injured workers right now, during this difficult time. If anyone is off due to an injury at work, they will receive the industrial average wage plus 7.8% from last year. That increase will be paid because they have excess capital in the reserve, and employers are only going to have to pay 2%.

It's good for workers and good for employers.

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

0930

Mr. Michael Mantha: The member just brought the point forward that there is a nice buildup of a monetary chest that could help workers. There is no need at this point in time to cut, to reduce.

Where this government could be helping small businesses, as well—and I would encourage the member to talk to some of the ministers—is to look at the small business loan grants, which would help these small businesses. The loan grant program is going to be ending at the end of this month. We should be looking at maybe extending it in order to help them, because there have been huge backlogs and difficulties accessing that program.

But here was an opportunity, within the context of this bill, to really help. There were some concrete amendments that were put from the opposition to the government. The government voted down these amendments—one was presumptive legislation; the other one was ending deeming. These are real actions that could have helped workers. Why would this government not look at or even bring in these so many needed opportunities to help workers across this province?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thanks to the member opposite. Of course, today is budget day, so we'll wait and

see what happens in the budget for small businesses. We're looking forward to that. We think that there's going to be some great news in there for businesses, and workers as well.

Having said that, I was on the committee myself, and I can tell you, one of the things I heard several times, over and over again, was that why people were supporting this bill is—do you know why? This is a simple bill. It was brought in as a necessity because of COVID. This isn't some complex bill that we had thought about two years ago or three years ago; it was a direct result of COVID, something we had to do very, very quickly, get on our feet, make things happen, support businesses and workers—and people really appreciate that. I think workers and businesses appreciate that.

So again, we'll be focused on protecting workers and businesses, and stay tuned for the budget today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Unfortunately, there isn't enough time for additional questions and responses, so it is now time for further debate.

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: C'est toujours un plaisir de parler sur la troisième lecture du projet de loi 238, puis aussi de représenter le monde de Mushkegowuk–Baie James.

I'm also pleased to rise to speak to defend the rights of injured workers. There are so many problems with this bill that I would not know where to start—but, actually, Mr. Speaker, I do. The Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2021, does nothing to ensure the rights for fair compensation for injured workers. All this bill does is turn WSIB on its head.

The bill has two sections—a new section 88.1 that caps the maximum amount of average earnings for the purposes of determining employers' premiums, and a new subsection 167(1) that would grant the Minister of Labour the power to compel the WSIB to provide information—which, by the way, is already in the act.

During the committee hearings on this bill, my colleagues from Niagara Falls and Spadina–Fort York and I introduced a series of motions to amend the WSIB act, to ensure that it reflects the rationale of the WSIA: to support and to provide aid to injured workers in Ontario. A number of amendments were in line with what our friends from the Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups have been demanding for years and years. Also, let me tell you that if the Minister of Labour would have even a minute intent to listen to workers, he should have listened to our friends from the Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups.

Monsieur le Président, vous savez que durant le comité, comme j'ai dit en anglais, mes collègues de Niagara Falls et de Spadina–Fort York mes moi-même avons amené plusieurs amendements, pour faire certain que les amendements reflètent ce qui était le but de la compensation, le fameux « WSIA act ». On a fait de nombreux amendements pour refléter ce que nos amis du Network, les travailleurs des groupes qui représentent les travailleurs blessés en Ontario, qui font—ça fait des années et des années qu'ils demandent au gouvernement d'adresser leurs besoins. Si vraiment le ministre, comme il dit, est là pour travailler pour les représenter, les travailleurs, il aurait dû au moins écouter ce que ce groupe-

là lui disait : quels étaient leurs besoins pour représenter des travailleurs blessés en Ontario.

Well, let me explain the amendments we brought forward. The first amendment was a new section to clearly state the purpose of the WSIA. This would have been an important and long-overdue correction to the WSIA. It would add to the act, and I quote the motion, “The paramount purpose of this act is to protect the rights of injured workers,” de protéger les droits des travailleurs blessés. If that’s not the purpose of the WSIA, then please tell me why it isn’t.

But over the course of the past years and with the introduction of Bill 238, the Minister of Labour and his Conservative colleagues have made it pretty clear that this is not their paramount purpose. To add insult to injury, in continuing to open up the act with Bill 238, they are devaluing the workplace insurance system in the province and finding ways for big, deep-pocketed businesses to cut costs.

The next motion we tabled at the committee last week was about the introduction of presumptive WSIB coverage to any workers who may have contracted COVID-19 in the workplace. This is pure common sense and a concrete measure to provide a line to the hard-working people in Ontario. It also follows the line of Bill 191, presumptive coverage for COVID-19, since if a worker tests positive, the disease is presumed to be an occupational disease that occurs due to the nature of the worker’s work. We just need to read and see what’s been happening in the Amazons of this world to understand that in a global pandemic, workers in places like Amazon warehouses, and front-line workers overall, are at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19.

Monsieur le Président, laissez-moi vous donner des exemples sur « presumptive coverage ». Il ne faut pas oublier que la compensation de WSIB a été refusée à près de 2 000 personnes qui ont demandé d’être protégées pour la COVID-19.

Je peux vous dire que chez nous, on a vécu une crise d’éclosion à Extensicare, où on a eu 19—des PSWs, des « nurses », du staff—qui ont poigné la COVID. Je vais vous donner un exemple. J’ai eu une personne—puis la personne qui nous a appelés avait tellement peur de représailles qu’il ne voulait pas que j’utilise son nom. Il avait peur d’avoir des conséquences—pas drôle. On vit des situations de crise. Il m’appelle, puis il pleure au téléphone en disant, « Guy, on n’est plus capable. On est brûlé. Il y a un manque de staff, il nous manque de “nurses”. »

Il y en a une qui a dit : « Écoute, je travaille “part-time,” mais là, je travaille vraiment à plein temps. Je ne sais plus quoi faire. Ça fait des années. Ça fait plus de 30 ans que je travaille comme garde. Je n’ai jamais vu des situations de même. Guy, je ne suis plus capable. Je suis obligée de lâcher mon travail parce que je suis après à avoir de grosses conditions mentales. Ça m’affecte non seulement dans mon travail; c’est rendu que ça affecte ma vie personnelle. » Ça, ça veut dire qu’elle ne peut pas appliquer, qu’elle tomberait dans les 2 000 si elle appliquait.

C’est pour ça que c’est important d’avoir du « presumptive coverage » pour représenter ces—là, on vous a entendus encore, 1 000 fois. Combien de fois qu’on vous a entendus de l’autre bord de la Chambre dire : « Ce sont des héros. Il faut les protéger. Il faut leur donner le support »? Ça, c’en était un, un support direct, d’avoir approuvé le projet de loi 191. C’était un exemple concret que le gouvernement aurait pu faire pour aider cette personne-là en particulier, ou les 2 000 qui ont appliqué pour la compensation et qui ont été refusés, monsieur le Président. Ça, c’est de l’ouvrage concret qu’on aurait pu faire ensemble. Est-ce que c’est à cause que c’est venu de notre côté que le projet de loi n’était pas bon?

0940

On était en comité. On aurait pu le modifier pour que ça fasse l’affaire à tout le monde, puis de vraiment travailler ensemble pour aider et protéger ces héros-là, comme on dit, ou aider la personne, cette pauvre femme-là qui m’a appelé, qui pleurait, qui était dans une situation mentale où il était rendu que ça affectait sa vie personnelle. Puis on est ici, puis ils nous disent : « Bien, non, on protège ces héros-là. On est là pour représenter ces travailleurs-là. » Mais quand on a des projets de loi concrets qui peuvent les aider, on vote contre. Ou quand on a des motions comme celles dont je parle, on vote contre.

Je m’excuse, mais pour moi, ce n’est pas ainsi que ça marche—non plus pour le monde à Mushkegowuk, puis non plus pour le reste de la province—où les personnes ont besoin d’aide, comme celles-là, puis qu’on vote contre des motions ou qu’on vote contre des projets de loi qui pourraient aider la situation.

Again, this amendment, like my colleague’s Bill 191, would have provided that any worker who contracted COVID-19 in an essential or health care workplace, or who has any physical and mental health injuries relating to the virus, would be presumed to have suffered that injury in the workplace and would be eligible for benefits—exactement ce qu’on vient de dire qu’on aurait pu faire avec les motions et par avoir passé le projet de loi 191.

I cannot count the number of times members from the other side of the aisle have spoken about how front-line workers are heroes, about their risks, their hard work, their mental health. But what have they done for them? Why have they not supported the member from Niagara’s Bill 191?

Pourquoi, monsieur le Président? Pourquoi d’un bord dit-on qu’ils sont des héros? Pourquoi d’un bord dit-on qu’on est obligé de protéger leur santé mentale? Pourquoi? Mais quand le temps arrive de faire des actions concrètes, des motions concrètes, on continue à voter contre. « Mais on travaille ensemble ». Je m’excuse, mais « travailler ensemble » c’est régler des problèmes dont la province a besoin. Arrêtons de jouer de la politique et réglons les problèmes de santé mentale, ce dont le monde a besoin.

Do the members from the government side think that COVID-19 is not a concern for essential workers?

The third amendment we introduced was to put an end to the practice of deeming. Again, this was in line with

another bill by my colleague from Niagara Falls, Bill 119, which has been in legislative purgatory for months now.

Here's another question for the Conservative members of this House: Why has the government stalled the passing of Bill 119?

For those who don't quite understand deeming, let me explain to you with an example.

Pour quelqu'un qui se blesse puis qui a des conditions permanentes, il ne faut pas oublier que quand vous regardez—disons, je vais prendre un exemple de mon comté de Mushkegowuk qui est tellement vaste : une personne se fait « deemer » et dire : « Écoute, tu as des conditions permanentes. Tu ne peux plus faire ton travail habituel. Tu ne peux plus être un millwright »—pour utiliser un exemple—« mais tu peux aller aux pompistes, ou tu peux aller être une personne qui peut travailler dans un stock room et aider avec des pièces. Tu peux aller faire ça. »

Ce que la situation présente, c'est que, bien souvent, il y a un travail, des jobs, qu'ils appellent des « SEB » en anglais dans le jargon du WSIB, et la personne va être « deemée », on va lui prendre ce travail-là de pompiste, qui paie beaucoup moins que pour un homme de métier. Mais ils ne prennent pas en considération la distance que la personne vit de là. Disons que le seul travail est à Timmins, qui est à près de deux heures de Kapuskasing. La personne demeure à Kapuskasing, elle est « deemée » que ça c'est le travail, puis la personne dit : « Bien, écoute, je ne peux pas déménager aller travailler là. Je ne peux pas voyager deux heures par jour pour aller travailler. C'est la seule place où ce travail-là se trouve. »

La compensation dit : « Écoute, ce n'est pas notre faute. On te l'a indiqué, on t'a entraîné, on t'a fait ça. Ce qui fait qu'on « deem » que c'est ton travail et tu t'en vas là. Ça, ce n'est pas notre problème. Il y a de l'ouvrage pour toi, mon cher monsieur. »

Cette personne-là, elle fait quoi, là? Ce qui fait qu'elle dit : « Non, je ne coopère pas. Je ne peux pas faire ça. »

« Pas de problème, monsieur. On paie la différence, 85 % de la différence avec ton travail où tu t'es blessé, qui était de millwright, et la différence de pompiste. On va payer 85 %, jusqu'à temps que tu arrives au maximum ou que tu reviennes à ton travail de blessé. » C'est 85 % de son salaire. C'est ce qu'on paie, puis si tu ne veux pas coopérer, c'est : « We are deeming you. » Ça, c'est une réalité qui se passe dans la compensation. Je peux vous le dire, parce que j'en ai fait pendant 21 ans—peut-être pas de la compensation, mais je l'ai fait pour une dizaine d'années, pour savoir ce que mes membres passent à travers. Ça, c'est un exemple qui arrive au jour le jour à toutes les fois, puis le monde, ils sont obligés de contester.

Quand je vous ai demandé la question, puis je vous disais, « Pourquoi est-ce qu'on ne l'améliore pas? On a eu du surplus. » Il y a du gros surplus. Mais non, on va donner, encore, on va geler la portion de l'employeur. Mais on ne veut pas régler ce problème de « deeming » pour les—puis vous l'avez entendu. Vous étiez sur le comité, comme moi. Puis, Injured Workers, les groupes

qui représentaient les Injured Workers, qu'est-ce qu'ils nous ont dit? « Fix deeming. Deeming is a huge problem. » We have surpluses. We can fix that. Why aren't we fixing it? Because that is a huge problem.

What do they have to do? They are living under poverty. Ils vivent sous la pauvreté, parce qu'ils n'ont rien qu'un pourcentage, puis c'est un manque. Il ne faut pas oublier que dans nos régions, il faut calculer aussi les routes. Elles sont assez en piètre condition. On n'a rien qu'à voir toutes les routes, comment elles ont été fermées cet hiver. Mais ça, c'est une réalité dont personne ne parle. On a essayé de vous l'expliquer, puis les Injured Workers, ça fait des années qu'ils demandent de régler le problème de « deeming ».

All in all, these three motions intended to do exactly what the WSIB is expected to do: a legislation that stands for injured workers first. You probably know the end of the story. The Conservative members of the committee voted down all the amendments without even having the intention to debate them.

Monsieur le Président, si on ne prend pas soin des travailleuses et des travailleurs blessés en milieu du travail, on perd tout. On parle d'un principe d'éthique. C'est une situation de précarité et de vulnérabilité à laquelle les travailleuses et les travailleurs blessés font face. Les gens qui pensent travailler, et gagner leur vie comme tout le monde—à vivre en situation de pauvreté, en détresse. Ils méritent une loi et une commission de la sécurité professionnelle et de l'assurance contre les accidents au travail qui est là pour les travailleurs.

Mais on parle aussi d'une question économique. Les travailleurs blessés, s'ils ne reçoivent pas la couverture, l'aide nécessaire, passeront d'être des gens de métier, d'être le moteur de notre économie, à des gens qui ont été laissés de côté, des travailleurs qui, en grande proportion, restent sans emploi, démoralisés par leur situation, des gens qui aimeraient avoir un coup de pouce temporaire pour ensuite pouvoir retourner au milieu de travail, pour se sentir utiles pour eux, leurs proches et pour nous tous.

Instead, Mr. Speaker, what we have in front of us today is a Conservative government that's just like the previous Liberal one, that's siding with deep-pocketed friends who are trying to deplete and erode WSIB by lowering employers' premiums while injured workers are denied claims and end up in poverty, forced to turn to Ontario Works or ODSP for benefits. Instead of having their employers aid them to get back on their feet, workers end up in poverty, begging for OW or ODSP benefits.

I've said it, and Injured Workers, when they testified, they said—I asked the question to one group, “Where did the surplus come from?” J'ai demandé au groupe qui était là pour témoigner : « D'où est-ce que ces surplus-là viennent? » And what was the answer? C'était quoi la réponse? “On the backs of injured workers”: That was their response. On ne devrait pas se vanter de ça. Il n'y a pas un gouvernement qui devrait se vanter des surplus sur le dos des travailleurs blessés. There's no government that should brag about surpluses on the backs of injured workers.

0950

Let me ask a couple of questions. Is that what the Minister of Labour considers “job protection” and the “protection of workers”? Is a race to the bottom what the Minister of Labour considers “protecting our workers”? Is this what the Minister of Labour considers “putting into action initiatives to help protect the safety and well-being of workers,” as he said last month during the second reading of this bill?

Worker protection is about the three amendments we sought to introduce. It is about my colleague from Niagara Falls’s bill to end the practice of deeming and introduce the language of presumptive coverage. It’s about legislating paid sick days, as introduced by my colleague from London West in her Bill 239.

What the Minister of Labour does not seem to understand, what the Premier does not seem to understand when he speaks of paid sick days as “double-dipping” or “a waste of taxpayers’ money,” is that the federal money that they are relying on is a temporary measure.

What my colleague from London West presented is provincial legislation that would offer provincial paid sick days, not a temporary Band-Aid nor the mere two paid sick days that the previous Liberal government offered and that the Premier got rid of. Worker protection is about standing with workers. This government has not, does not and will not stand with workers.

If the minister and the members opposite are telling me that they are doing this for small businesses, for the mom-and-pop shops, they need to explain to me in what world can small businesses afford \$97,308 in salaries.

There are many current barriers when it comes to requesting and obtaining information. The WSIB is supposed to be an arm’s-length agency from the province and it cannot be treated as an information agency for the Minister of Labour or for well-connected businesses of the Premier.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It is now time for questions and response.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I have been listening to the member across very closely. The member opposite knows that if we do not support businesses during this critical time during COVID-19, the hard-working people of Ontario will have no jobs to return to. Can the member explain why he wants to create more unemployment and less jobs in the province of Ontario?

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Thank you for the question. It’s not about creating more or less employment. It’s about helping injured workers. It’s about addressing their concerns. It’s about fixing presumptive language. It’s about giving them what they deserve. They didn’t ask to get injured at work.

We have surpluses. Instead of helping some employers, we should be helping these injured workers. That’s what the WSIB was created for. It used to be called the Workmen’s Compensation Board; in fact, your government changed it to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. But the intent of WSIB, or WCB, was to protect injured workers, giving them a life that they can

live, not live in poverty, not be deemed something that they can’t do or will not able to do or will have to travel two hours to work. That was not—

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

Ms. Suze Morrison: I want to thank my colleague the member for Mushkegowuk–James Bay for his presentation. It was excellent.

Since coming into this place, I share your frustration with the committee process. I often reflect on the motto of this place, which is, “Hear the other side.” I find it frustrating when we go into committee, and this government consistently votes down every single one of our amendments that we put forward, even when they’re good amendments, they are great amendments. It seems to be more about not giving the opposition an inch than working to make your legislation better.

Can you talk a little bit more about the frustrations that you experienced in the committee process in trying to put forward the amendments that you did and why they were voted down by the government?

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Thanks for the question. It is frustrating. It is frustrating that every amendment you bring forward, they vote down, when they speak about helping injured workers. When we’re there, they say, “Oh, no. We’re there to understand. We understand the crisis. You’re heroes. You’re heroes. We understand the mental health stress that you’re going through.” Yet, when we bring amendments to address that, they vote them down. Why? If you’re truly for the injured workers, if you’re truly for the heroes, if you’re truly there for what you say you are there for, then why vote down these amendments that would fix these issues? I ask you, why did you vote against Bill 191?

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: Mr. Speaker, as you know, small business is the largest employer. I know many of these workers who have started their own business—54% of employers, with 70% of the employees—have less than four employees.

This proposed bill clearly provides a win-win for both employees and employers. I’m sure there are many family businesses from the honourable member’s riding that would greatly appreciate the support provided by the provincial government. I want to ask the member, do you support this proposed legislation, which will support these residents from your riding?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Écoute, je n’apporterais pas un projet de loi qui a une illusion d’aider les travailleurs. Arrêtez de jouer avec les mots. Stop playing with words; this is not helping.

We have an opportunity. We put three amendments forward that would truly help—truly help—the injured workers in my riding and in all Ontario ridings, including your riding, and yet you voted them down. Presumptive: You voted it down. Deeming: You voted it down. You heard from these injured workers themselves, and you voted it down.

So, sorry, we are not going to support it. If you really want us to support it, put the amendments in, and we will gladly support it.

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

Mr. Gurratan Singh: I want to thank my colleague for a very, very thoughtful and very well-put-together speech this morning.

We have been hearing continually about this idea of deeming, and how destructive and hurtful deeming can be to injured workers. My question to the member is if you can expand on this idea of deeming, this practice of deeming, and how devastating it is to the lives of injured workers.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: The injured workers who testified—and any people who represent injured workers—will tell you that deeming is the worst. This is what needs to be fixed. This is not new; you hear it in your offices, too.

Nobody wants to live in poverty. Nobody asks to get injured at work. They want to live their life in dignity. They want to go to work. But when you're deemed in a job that you cannot do and then you have to apply for OW or ODSP just to make ends meet, when you didn't ask for this to happen, do you know what also settles in? Depression and all the other mental health conditions that surround the fact that they feel not productive anymore. They feel that they're not supported.

The WSIB was there to protect them. It was supposed to be there to help them, if they do get injured, through some work that they can do. But once you're deemed in this, and then you find out that, unfortunately, you get only 85%, like I explained in my situation or some of the situations I lived, I think it's wrong; it's a disservice to the injured workers.

We had an opportunity to fix this and they voted against it.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay. He talked about how this government is fond of words, but not as fond of actions, and it's to their actions we must pay attention. They have added insult to injury with Bill 238 by opening this act and not making the necessary changes by further devaluing the WSIB system. It speaks to this government's profound disrespect for workers. By voting down all the amendments to end the practice of deeming and all the things that would have protected workers, it really speaks to their values.

1000

To the member: Why do you think that this government has deliberately chosen not to include actual improvements to the WSIB system for injured workers?

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: I thank my colleague. Good question. Why? Why haven't they? It's a question that we have been asking this government for a while now, with still no response, and always saying, "We didn't touch their benefits. We left them the same." They have been

saying it's not working, that it's not helping them. If you speak to any group that helps injured workers, they'll tell you that we need to eliminate deeming. They know it. It's not that they haven't been lobbied to do it, but yet they won't. They talk a good talk, but when it comes to acting, it doesn't reflect what they're saying.

To your question: because they don't believe. They're not there to help workers. They're there to help their friends.

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

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to the colleague from the opposite side. We understand that small businesses are struggling. I could tell my personal story, Mr. Speaker. In Markham, there are thousands of small businesses in my riding struggling to get back to normal, get time to sustain their business.

I ask the member opposite: If you don't support the businesses during this crucial time, this difficult time, hard-working people of Ontario will have no job to return to. Can the member from the opposite side please explain why they want to create more unemployment and job loss in Ontario? Are you supporting the—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Back to the member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay for a final response.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Ça me fait rire quand ils me posent des questions comme ça. Voire qu'on est ici pour créer plus de personnes sans emploi—ce n'est pas ça, pantoute. Au contraire, on veut créer plus d'emplois. Au contraire, on veut en supporter plus.

On vous a proposé d'aider les petites et moyennes entreprises. Qu'est-ce que vous avez fait? Vous avez fait la même affaire que vous avez faite dans les comités : vous avez voté contre. On vous a mis, à multiples reprises, des propositions pour aider les petites et moyennes entreprises. Qu'est-ce que vous avez fait? Vous avez voté contre.

Je n'ai pas besoin de la morale d'un député de l'autre côté pour nous dire qu'il protège—

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is a pleasure to rise today on behalf of the people I represent in London West to participate in this third reading debate on Bill 238, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act.

This bill is coming back to the House for third reading after having been introduced for second reading the day that MPPs returned to the Legislature, following the second province-wide lockdown as a result of COVID-19. Given the very limited time that is available for the government to bring forward legislation on its legislative agenda, one would have expected that the government would bring forward a bill that would recognize the challenges that workers in this province have faced over the last year as a result of COVID-19, and in particular the challenges related to workplace safety.

From the very beginning of the pandemic, all of us heard desperate pleas from health care workers in our communities who were being asked to reuse N95 masks,

who were faced with a workplace where N95 masks were kept locked up and rationed when they were given to nurses in our hospitals. We know of workplaces where there was no PPE—there was no personal protective equipment—in order to protect workers in the workplace.

After months of the risks that workers faced in this province, one would have expected that the first duty, the first responsibility of government in returning to the Legislature, would have been to bring forward legislation that recognized those health and safety risks that workers had faced, that recognized the thousands of workers—15,000 workers, Speaker, have applied for WSIB since the COVID-19 pandemic began because of work-related COVID exposure.

So it would be reasonable, I think, on behalf of the working people across Ontario to expect that the government would bring forward a bill that addresses workplace safety, a bill that addresses WSIB. One would have expected a bill that reflected, that responded to the concerns of workers. Unfortunately, that is not anything at all that we see in Bill 238. Bill 238 is an entirely one-sided bill. It speaks only to the concerns of businesses, and frankly, a very, very, very small fraction of businesses are covered by the provisions of this bill.

I want to refer to the input that was provided to the legislative committee that studied this bill earlier in March by the Injured Workers Community Legal Clinic that was presenting to the committee on behalf of the Ontario Legal Clinics' Workers' Compensation Network. They pointed out that what this bill does is it lowers the number of employers who have to pay above the average industrial wage premiums. Really, what that does is, it benefits employers who pay workers above \$97,308.

We have to think: Who are those businesses? Who are those businesses who pay workers more than \$97,000 a year that will really benefit from this bill? It's not small businesses, Speaker. It's not the local main street small businesses that are struggling in all of our communities, who often employ very small numbers of workers, who employ many workers who have been there for years, who are anchors of our communities. Those are not the businesses who have large payrolls of workers earning more than \$97,000.

The Injured Workers Community Legal Clinic points out that "There is no problem here that is being addressed by Bill 238 ... that requires the Legislature's attention." Why are we worried about businesses that are paying workers over \$97,000 a year, about reducing their WSIB premiums, when we have a situation in this province where the average premium rates have already gone down by almost 50%—47.1%. Premiums have gone down by \$2 billion since 2018 across this province.

This legislation addresses a problem which really isn't a problem for the vast majority of businesses in Ontario, and it ignores a problem that does exist for so many workers in the province who have not been able to get the support that they deserve for workplace injuries.

1010

We know that there have been almost 2,000 claims to WSIB denied, claims that have been submitted by workers

who have been exposed to COVID-19 in the workplace. Again going back to the presentation that was given to the committee by the Injured Workers Community Legal Clinic, they point out that many of those claims are from health care workers. They are from those essential heroes, those front-line workers who were there for us when we needed them most. There are currently 385 claims that have been denied for workers in nursing and residential care facilities. There are 382 claims that have been denied for hospital workers. There are 106 claims that have been denied for ambulatory health care workers. Those are claims that have been denied. There are almost 100 additional claims that are pending and may well be denied.

We should have been looking not just at how to reduce the costs for big businesses that are paying workers more than \$97,000; we should have been looking at how to address the health and safety needs of these front-line heroes who have been exposed to COVID-19 in their workplace. One of the key measures that would have addressed that concern would have been presumptive coverage for COVID-19. That is what my colleague the member for Niagara Falls has fought for so passionately. That was the bill that he introduced when we first got back to the Legislature some time ago, at the beginning of this pandemic, because on this side of the House, we understand the urgency and the obligation that we have to address the actual needs of workers in this province.

I have heard from health care workers in my community, from nurses who are told that if they get a call from the health unit directing them to self-isolate because of possible COVID exposure, they have to do so by taking a leave of absence from their work. They can't access sick days even though they are working on the front lines of the health care system in the hospital. If they get that call from the health unit, they can't access those paid sick days from work, and so what happens is they have to take a leave of absence from their work. They may be able to apply for the federal sickness benefit; however, that pays \$450 after tax. That's below the poverty line. So in order to self-isolate after they get this direction from the health unit, they have to basically cut their pay in half for two weeks.

That is not the way that we responsibly address public health priorities in our province. We want health care workers to be able to self-isolate if they get the call from public health that they may have been exposed to COVID-19. We want to recognize that that COVID-19 exposure may have been contracted in the workplace, which is why the presumptive coverage is so important. We don't want them to have to risk not being able to make their mortgage payment at the end of the month if they have to take the federal sickness benefits. We want them to be able to access continuous, uninterrupted sickness benefits that don't require a significant reduction in the amount of their salary. But this government doesn't seem to—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. I apologize for having to interrupt the member for London West. Unfortunately, the time for debate on your topic has ceased right now, but you will have more time when the bill is called once again here in the Legislature.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the starting time for afternoon routine.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Mr. Calandra is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the starting time for the afternoon routine. Agreed? Agreed.

Back to the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 9(a), when the House recesses following question period today, it reconvenes at 1 p.m. to commence afternoon routine.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Mr. Calandra moves that, notwithstanding standing order 9(a), when the House recesses following question period today, it reconvenes at 1 p.m. to commence afternoon routine. Is it the pleasure of the House that this motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SHERATON OTTAWA HOTEL

Mr. Joel Harden: Lately, we're used to hearing stories about economic hardship, businesses without customers and workers without jobs, but what I'm not used to hearing about in Ottawa are examples of employers who are using this moment to throw workers under the bus. Unfortunately, that is what's happening at the Ottawa Sheraton hotel.

This week, without a letter, without a phone call, without an email, management told workers in this hotel that they were terminated—70 family-supporting jobs, jobs that send kids to school and allowed people to retire in dignity, gone. The union was trying to extend recall rights in this workplace, so workers could come back once the pandemic was over and tourism was up and running again, but the offshore company that manages this hotel has decided to treat workers in this place as if they're disposable.

Well, I have a message for Keck Seng Investments: If you think you can throw workers at the Ottawa Sheraton hotel under the bus and face no consequences, you are wrong. Effective immediately, I am supporting the boycott called for at the Ottawa Sheraton hotel by the union in this workplace, UNITE HERE Local 260, and I am going to be contacting my friends in government, the union movement and other community organizations to stay away from your hotel until those recall issues are put back into place.

Those workers made your hotel successful. You owe them the respect to make sure they can continue making the Ottawa Sheraton hotel a success. Do the right thing, Keck Seng Investments. Do the right thing by your workers who make this hotel great.

PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Over the last month, I was honoured to host a virtual pre-budget consultation in Mississauga–Lakeshore. We heard an incredible range of ideas and priorities from community leaders who are dealing with the ongoing challenges of COVID-19 in health care and in long-term care.

We were joined by Bayshore HealthCare and ALBA Medical. We welcomed many small businesses, from Fired Up! to Stonehooker brewery, Hub Climbing and iCreate Art Studio, which told us about the devastating economic impact of COVID-19, but also shared constructive ideas to help ensure a safe reopening and a strong recovery.

Representatives from Heart House Hospice, Dorothy Ley Hospice and the Canadian Grief Alliance spoke about the unique challenges they're dealing with. The Mississauga Seniors' Council presented their ideas to make life easier, and my youth advisory council, including students from UTM, Ryerson and Guelph, spoke about their adapting to e-learning.

I would like to thank the Minister of Finance for joining us to listen to the people in Mississauga. As the member from Perth-Wellington said: The best ideas don't come from Queen's Park; they come from the people we represent. And that was certainly true again this year.

Again, I'd like to thank everyone who attended or even just made a submission online. I know that your feedback has been invaluable in helping to shape the 2021 Ontario budget, which will be heard more about later on today.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to thank the members who have reached out from Algoma–Manitoulin to me to raise their concerns in regard to the government's rollout of the vaccine. In many communities in northern Ontario, particularly in Algoma–Manitoulin, the information they're receiving from this provincial government does not match what is happening on the ground in northern communities. Vaccines are late coming to northern Ontario and very slow, coming out in dribs and drabs.

1020

Here's an inquiry that I got from a resident from Manitoulin Island. Her name is Pam: "I'm writing to you as I am very concerned about the length of time it's taking to vaccinate our population. Our island has a large seniors population, and with the long weekend of May coming, we are very concerned. We need far more vaccines here to get our aging population vaccinated."

There's another message that I received from John. John is from Elliot Lake. As you know, Speaker, Elliot Lake is comprised of many seniors. It's built on the seniors population. He says, "At this rate of vaccines that have been received, we're weeks away from completing the vaccination to our residents 80-plus, while southern Ontario people are starting to get the 75-plus."

This is the confusion that people are seeing across Algoma–Manitoulin. We're not getting the vaccines in

northern Ontario. We're not asking for more, but we're certainly asking for an equitable distribution of the vaccines so that northerners can get their fair share of vaccines.

NATALE BOZZO

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I rise this morning bearing sad news from the Mimico community in my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore. Natale Bozzo of SanRemo Bakery, a family-owned staple in our community for over 50 years, recently passed away from COVID-19 at the age of 75. Natale was a loving husband, dedicated father, supportive nonno and a true local champion.

Natale immigrated to Canada from Italy at the age of 15, when he began working at a bakery in Little Italy. He later opened SanRemo Bakery in 1969, alongside his brothers. Natale became the sole owner of SanRemo in the 1990s, and his sons, Rob, Nick and Eddie, have carried on the legacy. Although he retired, he could always be seen around the bakery, as it was his passion.

Natale was an incredible baker. He said the secret to baking was putting a pinch of love into everything, which comes as no surprise, as you can taste the love and dedication in every pastry or doughnut.

Natale was hard-working, resilient and resourceful. He created lifelong relationships with those who frequented the bakery. He is loved by all, but most importantly, he is loved by his family more than anything.

This is a devastating loss for both the family and the Mimico community. You could feel the passion and the loss when they all lined the streets around the bakery to say goodbye to this friend of our community and a presence that was larger than life.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Gurratan Singh: It's always a pleasure to rise in this House.

Brampton is a city of over 600,000 people, yet we only have one hospital, which is chronically overcrowded and underfunded. People in Brampton are genuinely afraid to attend the single hospital in our city. They are afraid of facing long wait times. They are afraid of being treated in the hallway. They're afraid of not getting the health care support that they need at their desperate time.

It's so bad in Brampton that a health care crisis was declared before COVID-19. At a time of crisis, you don't drag your feet; you act decisively to fix the issue. That's why the NDP is calling on the Conservative government to build another hospital in Brampton.

But now is not the time for half measures. At this point, Brampton needs a permanent solution to address our health care crisis. That's why the NDP is demanding that Brampton Civic gets properly funded, that Peel Memorial gets converted from a health centre into a full hospital and also that we build a third hospital in Brampton. Brampton does not deserve anything less than that, because Bramptonians deserve to live in a city where they're not

afraid to access health care. They deserve to live in a city where they're not afraid of being treated in a hallway.

Brampton has been left behind for far too long. Enough is enough. The Conservative government must act now to fix Brampton's health care crisis and ensure that people in Brampton can access health care in a dignified and respectful manner.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to announce that our community of Milton will be receiving 416 new long-term-care beds as part of our government's historic investment of \$933 million. Speaker, this is a tremendous announcement for our community of Milton. This is in addition to the 192 beds that have been previously announced for Milton. Now 224 new spaces for Mill Pond Manor—and 192 new spaces for Excellent Care. They will also offer services to the Muslim community in Milton.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House are delivering results each and every day.

That's 608 new long-term-care beds for Milton alone. Let's compare that to the embarrassing record of the previous Liberal government, who only built 611 new spaces in the entire province between the years of 2011 and 2018.

I'm proud to be part of a government that prioritizes our seniors and takes action to support them.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Roman Baber: Last Tuesday, the Premier said that there is no politician who would disagree with the medical officer of health because doing so would amount to tying a rope around your neck and going off a bridge. You see, the reason we're in lockdown is not science, but political science.

And there is no one who has been harmed more by Doug Ford's politics than Ontario's children. Children are traumatized after being home for months, against the advice of most doctors—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to interrupt the member and remind him that he has to refer to other members by either their ministerial title or their riding name. He can resume.

Mr. Roman Baber: There is no one who has been harmed more by the Premier's politics than Ontario's children. Children are traumatized after being home for months, against the advice of most doctors outside of public health. They are at almost no risk, and they rarely transmit COVID-19. But this government continues to inflict harm on our kids at school, where they are forced behind Plexiglas, gagged into silence during lunch, confined to a box drawn on asphalt and forced to wear masks outdoors. Where is the science? What science is leading to this cruelty?

After school, the trauma continues. Sports, athletics and dance are cancelled.

Parents tell me how their depressed kids are bursting with energy but take it out at the kitchen table. In addition to eating disorders, they've developed anxiety.

Shutting down kids' sports is terrible for kids' health and mental health. According to Dr. Watson of Wisconsin, there is truly no documented incidence of transmission between athletes.

Why not let kids practise slapshots or skating skills, or work on their dribbling and free throws, or dance in their own space? Why are you making up stuff in an attempt to distract from your failure to protect—

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

Mr. Roman Baber: Withdraw.

You are scaring children into being afraid of normal life, and you're ruining their health and mental health. Stop doing it. Let kids be kids again. Let them live again. Bring back sports and bring it back now, please.

TAMIL COMMUNITY

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I rise today with a heavy heart to make this statement.

After the British left Sri Lanka in 1948, the Sri Lankan Sinhalese chauvinistic government started their anti-democratic oppression with a series of pogroms, ethnic cleansing, colonization of Tamils' traditional homeland and genocide against Tamils. This led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Tamils and brutal massacres of innocent women and children. In response, the Tamil Eelam have resisted passively for years.

In 2009, in the final stage of war, Sri Lankan armed forces suppressed the Tamil resistance, massacring more than 147,000 people.

Sadly, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights council denied justice for the Tamil Eelam people by refusing to recognize the Tamil genocide.

On March 14, the Walk for Justice group trekked 85 kilometres from Barrie in cold weather, during this terrible pandemic, and reached Queen's Park on March 18, last week. They plead to the Canadian Prime Minister, the Secretary-General and the UN High Commissioner and UNHRC member countries to intervene and protect Tamils from the ongoing genocidal activities in Sri Lanka.

A UN report warns, "The failure of Sri Lanka to address past violations has significantly heightened the risk of human rights violations being repeated."

Mr. Speaker, over 300,000 Tamil Canadians who proudly call Ontario their home each have a story to tell about their loved ones. They have faith in us to take their voices to the federal government.

I humbly request that this House urge the federal government to refer Sri Lanka to the International Criminal Court, which can appoint a country-specific rapporteur for Sri Lanka to monitor and report to the international community.

1030

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure to stand here in the House on behalf of my community in the great riding of Davenport.

Unfortunately, about a week ago I had to write a letter to the Minister of Health about an issue that's very deeply concerning to my community. Years ago, members of the Portuguese-speaking community in the GTA came together with mental health providers to address the lack of mental health and addiction services in their language available throughout the GTA. A community mental health program was developed with a psychiatrist supervising and a bunch of clinicians. It has operated out of the University Health Network Toronto Western Hospital for many years now. It serves about 1,000 patients a year. Unfortunately, a couple of weeks ago, I learned that they're not taking referrals anymore. In fact, we believe this program is being shut down.

I wrote to the Minister of Health a week ago. I have yet to receive a response at all—no calls, no emails, no letters. People in the community are deeply concerned about this, and I will add that we have learned since then that the Spanish-speaking program and the Chinese-language program are also at risk. When will this Minister of Health step up and please protect this community? These are many of our front-line providers, people who are experiencing trauma and addiction and mental health issues. We need to make sure they receive these services in their language.

RACISM

Mr. Vincent Ke: I am deeply troubled by the recent trend of brutal assaults and senseless murders targeting Asian businesses and communities since the pandemic. Some people think horrific acts of racism happen only in the United States. The fact is, according to the Vancouver Police Department, the city has seen a 717% increase in anti-Asian hate crimes from 2019 to 2020. Speaker, people feel frustrated during the pandemic, but it's not the fault of the Chinese or Asian people that the first case happened to be in China.

On behalf of my constituents in Don Valley North, I call upon all Canadians to speak out and act against any form of racism. Those few who maliciously stir up hatred against the Asian community on social media must be held accountable for the rhetoric that fuels the flames of viral anti-Asian racism and creates division within our society.

Along with the disturbing incidents of racism, I also witnessed a spirit of encouragement and support for Asians experiencing racism and violence. I am confident that the Canadian spirit will shine through these dark times to inspire us to conquer hatred with kindness and to commit to peaceful unity for all Canadians.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Sara Singh: My question is for the Premier. Brampton continues to struggle with COVID outbreak after outbreak, but for some reason the government decided not to include Brampton in its pharmacy vaccine rollout pilot program. We've seen schools and workplaces shut down; we've seen sky-high cases and concerns about spreading variants in our community, but what we haven't seen is an equitable vaccine strategy that includes a plan to provide hot spots like Brampton the vital vaccines that they need.

Speaker, through you to the Premier: When will pharmacies in Brampton finally begin vaccinating folks in our city, and how much longer are we going to have to wait until you provide those much-needed vaccines?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Through you, Speaker: I can advise the member opposite that we have an equitable vaccine rollout plan. We have from the beginning. This was devised with the vaccine task force that was set up with a bioethicist involved in it and with a keen eye on how to distribute these vaccines equitably. They are being done so across all 34 public health units, primarily based on population but also based on specific factors such as whether there are hot spots in certain areas, whether there are specific areas that we need to pay more attention to and whether there are more shelters or other places where we know that there are going to be more breakouts. That has been developed, a plan for each and every public health unit, by the local medical officers of health, who know their areas best, working with Dr. Williams and the vaccine task force overall.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: Speaker, I can assure the minister that folks in Brampton definitely don't feel like this is an equitable vaccine strategy, as we continue being neglected and left behind by this government.

The Conservatives promised to take action to help us tackle the wildfire of COVID cases spreading across our region. The Premier said he'd bring in a firehose to help us put out the fire in Brampton, but he conveniently forgot to mention that it would actually take weeks for that fire truck to show up, and it may or may not even have water in it.

My question to the Premier is simple: If Brampton is really a priority for this government, why are they making us wait? And what is taking so long to get us the vaccines we need to stop the spread of COVID-19 in Brampton?

Hon. Christine Elliott: No part of Ontario is being left behind, including Peel. Peel is receiving the vaccines as we have them. As the member will know, we had a significant reduction in supply of the Pfizer vaccine during the months of February and early March. Those supplies are starting to come in, but as they are coming in, they are being distributed equitably among all the public health unit regions.

So I ask you, and I ask all of the members across on the other side, to please join our call to ask the federal government to do whatever they can to expedite the shipping of those vaccines to us so that we can get those needles in arms as quickly as possible.

Peel requires them. Every other part of Ontario requires them as well, and we are booking them as quickly as we receive those vaccines. They are going into people's arms straight away.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: Speaker, we have a prioritization issue here in the province of Ontario, where communities like Peel and cities like Brampton are being left out, and it is concerning to many people in our community. Brampton families and workers have been on the front lines of this crisis every single day for the last year. They've put their lives and their livelihoods at risk in hospitals, care homes, grocery stores and schools. They've faced risks in public transit and transportation, in warehouses and in our main street businesses across the city. Every single day that this government denies our community access to vaccines is another day that families in Brampton are put at risk, and workers are also put at risk.

Through you to the Premier, Speaker: You say that Brampton is a priority. Then why do you keep making us wait for vaccines in our community?

Hon. Christine Elliott: The simple answer is supply. We don't have the vast quantities of vaccines yet in order to be able to provide millions of vaccines to different parts of Ontario. The member has been here and has heard from several speakers, including in her own party, who also feel that their communities aren't receiving the same level of vaccines that they should receive.

We are certainly aware of the fact that we have not got those vast numbers of supplies yet, but as soon as we receive them—and we did receive a large supply from Pfizer several days ago; 466,000 and change—we are getting those shipped out to communities as quickly as we can to the people of Brampton, to the people of Peel and to the rest of the people of Ontario. This is something that is an absolute priority for us, to protect and care for the safety and well-being of all Ontarians, including all of the constituents in your riding.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is also to the Premier. It's not just Brampton that can't get the help it needs from the government, it's communities across Ontario. Yesterday, I asked the Premier why his office hadn't responded to repeated pleas from the mayor of Sarnia and why, at the same time, the member from that area seemed to be confusing people by applauding anti-lockdown protestors.

Speaker, my question, through you to the Premier: Why is it so hard? Why are communities having to struggle so hard to get the attention and to get the help they need from the province of Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I just wanted to say briefly, the member raises the comments from the member for Sarnia–Lambton. The member fully knows that his comments are disingenuous at best. The member for Sarnia–Lambton—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Please withdraw the unparliamentary comment.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Withdraw.

The member for Sarnia–Lambton specifically was advocating for restaurant patios to be open in his community, as this province made happen on Friday. At the same time, he in fact advocated and said to the people in his community that they should wear masks. In the exact same article that the member opposite referenced, the member for Sarnia–Lambton was talking about the public health measures that made the people of the province of Ontario safe and that they should continue to follow those measures. While he appreciated the fact that people have the right in this province to protest, he was very clear that people should wear their masks and follow public health measures, Mr. Speaker.

1040

The member opposite knows full well how hard the member for Sarnia–Lambton has worked, and I hope that he will reflect on that line of questioning, because he knows the member for Sarnia–Lambton quite well.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's not just Sarnia. As COVID and COVID variants cases surge in the north, Thunder Bay can hardly keep up with the outbreaks they're facing. The Premier in effect told the people of Thunder Bay they had to wait until he got the rest of the province under control. As we've heard, the rest of the province is having their own problems.

So if the provincial government is treating other areas that should be priorities and they're being so slow, how long can Thunder Bay expect to wait until they get the attention they deserve to control what is a crisis situation?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: We're certainly aware that Thunder Bay has been having significant difficulties, and assistance has been provided by the province. I can advise that there have been 30 provincial case and contact managers assigned to assist with finding people and making sure that they have the supports they need to be quarantined for the necessary period of time, to prevent further transmission in the community. We have now a situation where the number of cases with reported—that are returned within 24 hours, it was 90%. It's now 94.3% of COVID tests are returned within 48 hours, and 71.1% of tests are returned within 24 hours; also a significant increase.

But we know we also have granted \$2.7 million to the Thunder Bay hospital to add 30 more beds, and more assistance is going to be required. Dr. Williams is in contact with the local medical officer of health on a daily basis. If further assistance is required, further assistance will be given in order to assist Thunder Bay in getting this transmission under control and allowing them to move into another level of the framework.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: Sarnia, Thunder Bay, Peel, Toronto—families across the province and the municipalities in which they live are having a hard time getting the attention of the government. Quite frankly, they're confused, because it doesn't seem that everyone is having a hard time getting attention from the government. The government had time to get embroiled in an MZO controversy to help a specific developer. They had time to allow big box stores to open, while main street closes.

They had time for those things. Why does it seem that they don't have time to help the ordinary people who are struggling through COVID in many areas of this province?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Through you, Speaker, let me assure the member that the health and safety of all Ontarians is our primary concern. It's certainly my primary concern and all of my colleagues. That is what we are focused on. That is what we need to deal with, from testing to making sure that people are quarantined; if they have to be in hospital, making sure there's capacity in the hospital for them to be able to be admitted; but also in terms of making sure that people receive their vaccinations.

This is a very good news story, actually, Speaker, not the doom and gloom that is being projected by the other side. We have over 90% of long-term-care residents, caregivers and staff who have been vaccinated now. We have also been able to book 513,000 appointments on our system since our booking system and our call centre opened less than two weeks ago.

We are moving forward very quickly. Yesterday, we vaccinated 72,452 people. We can double that in very short order with the clinics, pharmacies and mass vaccination clinics that are going to be opening up.

So we are moving forward. We are treating everyone in Ontario the same. Everyone is a priority for us. We are not—

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

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is for the Premier. This week, thousands of Hamiltonians went online to try and book their vaccine, only to find that appointments were not available, thanks to a broken system.

They found that times weren't listed, clinic locations were missing or no second dose appointments were available. To make things worse, provincial officials had no idea that seniors weren't able to book their life-saving vaccine appointments. The Premier's only response was, "We'll look into it."

Problems like this should have been solved weeks ago. It's well past time to be looking into it; we need action now. We are months into the vaccine rollout. Why are we still not able to get people the vaccines that they need?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, we are getting people the vaccines that they need. This is a problem that has

arisen quite recently, but I think it's also important to remember that we have booked appointments for over 513,000 people. The system has not crashed, as it has in other areas.

This is a problem, I understand, for Hamilton. And we are working on it. We are committed to ensuring that every person who wants to receive a vaccine in Ontario will get one. We know that people are very anxious about this. We're asking for a very short period of time for us to get this under control and get this dealt with. We have dealt with several other situations. There have been several short-term problems along the way, but we have been able to resolve them very quickly, as we will for the residents of Hamilton.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: Back to the Premier: Hamiltonians are worried that with all the problems with the vaccine rollout, it will only be a matter of time before we have more outbreaks and more deaths in our city. Hamilton needs vaccines, but we're just not getting them from this government. We have fewer mass vaccine clinics than other cities. We have no pharmacies giving out vaccines. Our family doctors and mobile clinics are being short-changed.

My question is to the Premier. When will this government finally stop treating Hamilton like it is a second-class city and give our vaccine rollout the attention it needs and that Hamiltonians deserve?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Every part of Ontario is a priority for us. Brampton is. Hamilton is. All of the ridings that we all represent are priorities for us.

What we're talking about in Hamilton right now is a short-term temporary problem that is going to be resolved very soon. People will be able to make their appointments. We have made over 513,000 appointments since we started up just two weeks ago with our booking system, so the system clearly is working. Will there be a few problems along the way? Yes, there will. But we have a team that's working on that to get it resolved as quickly as possible.

As for the vaccine rollout in your particular area, that has been developed by your local medical officer of health for Hamilton, working in conjunction with Dr. Williams. So there will be mass vaccination clinics, there will be more vaccines granted to primary care offices, and it will be rolled out across pharmacies as well. There will be many avenues for people to receive their vaccines, and the system will be dealt with very shortly. But we have to remember the success that we've seen and the hundreds of thousands of vaccines—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. I'll remind members to make their comments through the Chair.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Christine Hogarth: My question is for the Minister of Long-Term Care. First of all, I want to thank

the minister for her announcement last week of 256 long-term-care beds for my riding to be built in Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

It is clear that the neglect of Ontario's long-term-care sector left the most vulnerable Ontarians at risk into this pandemic. Homes with ward rooms, some of them built to design standards from the 1970s, saw the virus spread because residents could not be cohorted.

Even before the pandemic, long-term-care homes had long wait-lists because previous governments did not keep up with the growing senior population. Between 2011 and 2018, the Liberals only increased Ontario's long-term-care spaces by 0.8%, while the population over 75 grew by over 20%. That capacity gap and those outdated homes have caused serious problems during this pandemic, and the need for long-term care is growing. Can the minister tell us what she is doing to fix these problems?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for the question and for her excellent work on behalf of her constituents. The member is right when she identifies the neglect of building new capacity and upgrading older spaces to modern design standards as a major problem we face.

Last week, I was pleased to announce 80 new long-term-care projects across the province, which will lead to an additional 7,510 new and 4,197 upgraded long-term-care spaces.

1050

Our government is investing \$933 million in these projects, on top of the \$1.75 billion already dedicated to the delivery of 30,000 new spaces over 10 years. Combined with previous allocations, this brings us up to 20,161 new and 15,918 upgraded spaces in progress. This is monumental.

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

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Thank you, Minister. This is amazing news for all our seniors across our province.

More than 40,000 people across this province were on the wait-list for long-term care as of December 2020, and the GTA experienced some of the longest wait-lists in the province. With the modernizing funding model announced last year, our government broke down historic barriers to development, tailoring funding to the type of municipalities: for example, large urban centres like Toronto. I know our government has been making progress towards our aggressive modernization agenda as we address long-standing issues with staffing, capacity and crowding and with the wait-list.

Can the minister tell the House what is the progress? What has that done for the constituents in my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Again, thank you to the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for the question. In Etobicoke–Lakeshore, the Chartwell White Eagle home is being allocated 200 new spaces and 56 upgraded spaces. This project will build a 256-bed home with a new building in Etobicoke.

Across the city of Toronto, these projects announced last week will lead to 1,233 new and 971 upgraded long-term-care spaces. In this tranche of allocations alone, our government will create more long-term-care spaces than the previous government did in seven years.

After decades of neglect, it's a Conservative government that will repair and rebuild long-term care. Our government is addressing staffing, our government is addressing older spaces to modern standards, and our government is building new spaces that have been needed for many, many years.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Jamie West: My question is for the Premier. Sudbury is getting hit hard in the third wave of COVID-19. As you can imagine, when the Premier announced last Friday that Ontario was lowering the age threshold for COVID-19 vaccines to 75 and that Ontario was expanding the pharmacy rollout, a lot of people in my city became very hopeful—people like Michelle. When Michelle Frost heard the Premier's announcement, she got really excited and tried booking an appointment for her mom and dad. Instead of an appointment, Michelle learned there are no announced pharmacy vaccine locations anywhere in northern Ontario. Instead of 75-year-olds getting vaccines, there are still 90-year-olds waiting for the vaccine.

On March 19, the Premier promised vaccines, and he didn't deliver. My question, Speaker, through you to the Premier, is the same question that Michelle and hundreds of people are calling my office to ask every single day: Where are the vaccines that the Premier promised?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member for the question. Well, the vaccines are coming in to us through the federal government, as the member will know. We had a reduction in the number of Pfizer vaccines that we were going to be receiving in the month of February. We have received some AstraZeneca, but we don't know when the next shipment is going to be coming in. It is all dependent on what we receive through the federal government. So we are working with the supplies that we have.

But I think it's also important to note that we have one vaccine rollout planned for the entire province, but that is being rolled out by each of the 34 public health units that are involved. Some of those units have been able to move quickly through the over-80-year-olds and are now able to work on the over-75-year-olds. But that is really dependent on the supplies we receive and the pace at which they're ready to move forward. Some of the smaller units are now able to work with younger age groups. Others are still dealing with the over-80-year-olds. But that's something that people will be advised by the local public health unit about when their turn is coming, based on supply and based on where they are in the final rollout of phase 1.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question, the member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Also to the Premier: Monique Weaver is 60 years old. She just got diagnosed with lung cancer. Her surgeon told her that she should get vaccinated before her surgery, but contrary to the Premier's statement, there is no one vaccinating 60-year-old people in northern Ontario.

The Premier has had many opportunities to clarify his statement, but he chose not to. His actions caused extreme confusion, stress, anxiety and anger to the people of my riding in Sudbury. The multiple challenges to everybody working so hard on the front line to make this work make it clear. Sudbury and district have been in the grey zone since March 12. We have outbreaks in our hospital, our homeless shelters, our long-term-care homes, our mines, our schools, our apartment buildings. It is everywhere, and 48% of this are the variants of concern.

Will the Premier today declare the Sudbury and district public health area a hot spot so that we can get the resources we need to make it through this pandemic?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I can certainly advise the member that we are watching the situation in Sudbury very carefully. We know that it is having a lot of difficulty with the variants of concern, as is the rest of the province. The variants of concern are now at the stage where they are the dominant strain, and that is what we have to deal with. So the race is really one against time, to prevent the variants of concern from continuing to soar, while getting as many needles into people's arms as possible.

The situation that you're describing is one that we are dealing with, where we know that we need to have more outlets for people to receive vaccinations. We have pharmacies distributing vaccines right now—AstraZeneca to people 60 and older because of the changes that they've made—and we recognize there are many areas that don't have pharmacies yet that are distributing those vaccines.

We are expecting to double the number of pharmacies across the entire province within the next few weeks, and then double that again within the next month, so that people across Ontario, in all parts of the province, will be able to receive the vaccines, through pharmacies, mass vaccination clinics, primary care offices, specialty clinics or mobile clinics. We know that we need to continue to advance that, and as soon as we receive the supplies, we will be advancing them in quantities across the province.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Premier. Mr. Speaker, this week over 3,000 seniors in Ottawa had their vaccination appointments fouled up because of an error in the provincial booking system. I'd like to share Carol's experience. Carol booked an appointment for her 82-year-old husband, who suffers from congestive heart failure. She had heard that the province had triple-booked appointments this week, but she had not herself received any correspondence or a request to rebook.

When she and her husband arrived at the YMCA, the lineup was around the building. After waiting a very long time, they finally got to the front and were told they

couldn't be helped unless they wanted to wait even longer—up to an hour. She and her husband were offered the opportunity to be herded onto a city bus to be transported across the city to wait even more at another location. At this point, her elderly husband didn't have the strength to continue, Mr. Speaker.

We were told that Ontarians waited longer for their online booking system because the government wanted to ensure it was problem-free. It is not problem-free. What does the Premier have to say to Carol?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member very much for the question. We are certainly very well aware of the situation that happened in Ottawa where, due to a human error in inputting into the system, there were a number of people who were double-booked over a period of one week. That is something that is not acceptable. The system has since been fixed.

But I would also advise the member that rather than just sending people a note saying get back online on the system again to rebook your appointment at another time, every one of those people that we were able to reach—well over 2,300 people, and messages were left for many, many more—were personally called by someone from the call centre and arrangements were made for their appointments to be rebooked at a time that was very close in time to their original date. So while I am very sorry that this was not the experience that your constituent had, I can advise that this was a matter that was dealt with in the best possible way that we could, with those personal calls being made and recognizing that people needed to have the appointments made as soon as possible.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And the supplementary question: the member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: As if that wasn't enough, for the last two days, seniors in Ottawa South—and actually in Ottawa Centre, Ottawa-Vanier, Orléans, Nepean and Kanata—have been unable to book their vaccine appointments. Our phones have been ringing off the hook with anxious, frustrated seniors.

Now, the government knew there was a problem but did absolutely nothing to communicate to people that there was one—through the website, through social media, through the daily back-patting news conferences—and it wasn't until yesterday, after a question, that the head of the task force said, “Yes, there's a minor glitch and we'll get it fixed tonight.” Well, it wasn't a minor glitch for hundreds and hundreds of seniors, and it's unclear as to whether it's fixed yet. If the Premier ran his business that way, he wouldn't have any customers, and in fact, he wouldn't have a business.

1100

Speaker, through you to the Premier: Would the Premier apologize to these seniors for not letting them know there was a problem and causing them unnecessary grief and anxiety about this issue?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: We know that people are anxious to obtain their appointments. They want to be able to reconnect with their families, to be able to go out. I know that many people, many of our seniors, have been at home for long periods of time. They're anxious to receive their vaccine, and we're anxious to get it to them.

However, I would say that our booking system has had its issues recently with the two areas, in Hamilton and in Ottawa. This was not something that we knew of well in advance. This is something that has arisen in the course of booking these appointments. But it is important to keep in mind that this is a temporary problem. It is being fixed. It will be fixed in very short order. But the reality is that this system has been remarkably robust, especially given the number of people, who are now 75 years and older, trying to call to book vaccines. There are many more 75-year-olds than there are 80-year-olds.

Our system has held up; it has not broken down. Will there be some glitches along the way? Yes, there will. But our team is on it. They are doing great work. They've booked over 515,000 appointments, so it must be working well in many areas. But I regret the situation that has happened in Hamilton and—

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

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Christine Hogarth: My question is for the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction. Since the pandemic began, small businesses in my riding of Etobicoke-Lakeshore have been doing their best to continue serving the community under the most challenging circumstances. I am pleased to say that last night my husband and I finally made it to a restaurant patio to have dinner at Mamma Martino's. It was so great to sit on that patio.

These businesses are the backbone of our province and have been some of the most significantly impacted by the public health measures. I know the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction has been working diligently to help these businesses.

Can the minister please tell this House what the government has been doing to support small businesses across Ontario? And can you share what we've been doing for those businesses which have been required to temporarily close or restrict their services based on the advice of medical advisers?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I want to thank the member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore for all of her advocacy in standing up for and finding ways to support small businesses in her riding.

Mr. Speaker, we know the challenges that small businesses have been going through during the past year. It's why we introduced the small business support grant, which provided a minimum of \$10,000 to up to \$20,000 for eligible small businesses that have been forced to close or significantly restrict their services. To be clear, this is the largest-ever investment for small businesses anywhere

in Canada. It also provides businesses with the flexibility to use the funds as they see fit, whether it's to top up wages, whether it's to pay for inventory.

To date, we have processed over 97,000 applications and paid out over \$1.3 billion to small businesses across the province. This is just one part of the plan to support small businesses, and this government will continue to listen to our small businesses and provide them with the much-needed support they need to get through these very challenging times.

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

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Thank you to the minister for taking such strong action to support our small businesses.

Small businesses in Toronto, like in my riding—Circulation Solutions and our Famous People Players, which are located right in Etobicoke–Lakeshore—are thankful to receive the support, and they thank our government. These businesses have often taken advantage of other supports that are available to assist them.

Can the minister please expand on what additional supports the government has made available to help small businesses, regardless of where they are and what stage of the framework they're in, as we all are in different stages across this province?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you to the member again for her question. Our government remains committed to helping small businesses of all sizes, from all sectors, to recover, rehire and rebuild stronger than ever. We introduced the largest investment to help businesses go digital: \$57 million. This was going to help them create an online presence and help them utilize digital marketing tools. We helped and introduced the Main Street Recovery Act, which provided over \$60 million to support businesses with their costs of PPE, with eligible businesses allowed to expense \$1,000. We put forward the property tax and energy rebates of up to 100% for businesses that have been impacted by the restrictions and in lockdown areas.

We understand that there are significant supports that still need to come to help these businesses, that we are committed to working with our businesses across the province to ensure that they can rebuild, rehire and emerge stronger than ever before.

INDIGENOUS CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: *Remarks in Oji-Cree.*

My question is to the Premier. Earlier this month, your government announced the abrupt closure of 26 youth justice centres. Ten of these were in northern Ontario, most with only First Nation clients. Children were torn from their sense of security and culturally appropriate services, which were working. Now children are being taken even farther from their homes, from their families and support networks.

Fiscal responsibility is important, but what this decision has done is put a price tag on health and the well-being of

children. How are you going to right this wrong and reinstate these youth services?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the question from the honourable member. As he knows and as he's rightly pointed out on a number of occasions, Indigenous youth are overrepresented in Ontario's youth justice system. It's why we are continuing to work directly with Indigenous communities and other partners to address this issue.

We currently fund a range of culturally responsive programs, including prevention in 45 community-based programs for Indigenous youth in or at risk of conflict with the law. We have also dedicated annualized funding for Indigenous organizations to deliver mental health and wellness services to justice-involved Indigenous youth services. That will begin later this year. We will continue to engage with our Indigenous partners to find best practices and culturally appropriate programming.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Speaker, as you know, northern Ontario is a very large geographic area. We need appropriate and equal access to services, especially for our children. Children need services closer to home.

It is unacceptable that Indigenous girls are now being sent to youth justice centres in cities known for human trafficking, far from family and social supports. This leaves these young Indigenous girls more alone and vulnerable to human trafficking in these urban centres. This is a fate none of us should be comfortable accepting. How is Ontario going to resolve this and stop failing young people?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, the honourable member is quite correct that this government inherited a number of programs and services that just were not meeting the needs of the people that they were supposed to service. The member opposite has raised, on a number of occasions, the historic—whether it was underfunding, whether it was programs that didn't work for the community. The minister has been working very closely with Aboriginal leaders, in particular, to ensure that the programs and services that we offer work for the community.

But I do agree with him. For many years, for 15 long years, these programs and services were underfunded by the previous Liberal government. We have started to change that by working closely with community leaders. Is there more work to do? Absolutely, there is, Mr. Speaker. You don't change 15 years of neglect overnight, and you don't do it without involving those who are most impacted by it. So we will continue to work closely not only with this member but with the community to ensure that programs service the people who need it most.

HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Highway 413 is a redundant and unnecessary highway that will cost taxpayers across

Ontario billions of dollars while it paves over wetlands, forests and farms. It will make it harder for us to adapt to climate change and it will impact the quality of life all Ontarians benefit from. Can you imagine an Ontario government willing to invest billions of dollars to make it harder for our children to enjoy the same quality of life we have today?

1110

The money the government wants to invest in Highway 413 could be redirected into education. It could be used to modernize our schools and expand connectivity and technology within the classroom, and it could be used to build the best schools in the country. Mr. Speaker, why won't the government pull the plug on Highway 413 now, recognize what's in the best interests of our children's future and redirect all of that money into schools?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: As I've informed the House, there is a very clear case for the GTA west corridor. By 2051, the population of the greater Toronto area will be almost 15 million people. Major highways in York and in Peel region are all forecasted to be over operating capacity by 2031, even with significant investments in transit, which our government is committed to doing. MTO's traffic modelling data shows that by the year 2041—in 20 years—the level of congestion in the greater Golden Horseshoe will be about double what it is today.

Mr. Speaker, our government is taking the time to get this right. We are collecting the data, the facts and the evidence to determine if this is the right project to go ahead with. The Liberals cancelled the GTA west corridor environmental assessment. They didn't release the land. We are committed to getting this right and doing what's right for the people of York, Halton and Peel regions.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: My supplementary is also for the minister. Conservatives in this country used to show leadership in education and in the environment: Bill Davis, with the expansion of publicly funded education; Brian Mulroney, with the fight against acid rain. Today we see a Conservative Party that denies climate change is real and another that's willing to invest billions of dollars to pave over farmlands, wetlands and precious greenbelt. It's a Conservative movement that bends over backward for bigots like Charles McVety. It's a Conservative movement that freely attacks teachers and one that holds up capital investments, and now an entire cohort of children doesn't benefit from the new schools that could have been.

Highway 413 is a billion-dollar environmental boondoggle that this government knows is about to happen. Why won't it cancel Highway 413 and invest every single dollar in publicly funded education in this province?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: We're listening to local councillors, who know more than anyone about the pressures of growth. Councillors and mayors in Peel and in York region have told us that this highway is needed to address growth.

But they're not the only councillors who have talked about the importance of new infrastructure to address

congestion. The member for Orléans, only a few years ago, told the CBC that without an expansion of Brian Coburn Boulevard, east-end gridlock in the Ottawa area would stymie growth. The member for Orléans said that without this expansion, the people of Orléans "are going to be stuck with" the congestion that they've got.

Why won't he show the same consideration to the people living in the GTA that he does for those living in his riding? The member opposite was so eager to address this growth, so much so that he wanted to strong-arm the National Capital Commission to pave over ecologically sensitive lands around the Ottawa greenbelt.

I won't take any lessons from the Liberals on highway construction and the environment, and nor should anyone else.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Christine Hogarth: My question is for the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

This pandemic has taught us the importance of being able to quickly innovate and adapt to challenging circumstances across our communities, business sectors and government. Recently, we've seen how municipalities and academic institutions have been able to embrace innovation, using waste water surveillance to help identify and stop the spread of COVID-19 in our communities. Scientists are finding that early detection of the virus in waste water may provide public health authorities with the ability to assess trends and identify asymptomatic cases typically not caught in clinical testing.

As communities and businesses continue to deal with the wide-ranging impacts of COVID-19, they need to know that their government is prepared to respond to these new conditions and challenges as they arrive. Can the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks assure me that this government is exploring innovative ways to help respond to COVID-19 in Ontario communities?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant and member for Barrie–Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: It's all hands on deck in this government. We are acting on behalf of the people who elected us to really combat COVID-19. Whether it's the Solicitor General, whether it's the Minister of Health, we are all acting together as a team. The Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks is doing its part as well.

We invested \$12 million to support water surveillance initiatives across our communities. This will actually help us detect COVID-19 proteins within the waste water. It's us embracing more science in order to help many communities stop the outbreak well ahead of time. We've seen how this has been possible science that we've relied on. For example, public health units like Ottawa have also looked at waste water surveillance to help them combat the COVID-19 virus in their communities.

Speaker, we're doing so much more. I'll have more to say in my supplemental.

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

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Thank you to the parliamentary assistant for that answer. Mr. Speaker, historical applications of waste-water-based epidemiology, also known as WBE, have been wide-ranging across the globe. In 2014, WBE showed peak norovirus levels detected two to three weeks before most patients were diagnosed with the infection in outbreaks in Gothenburg, Sweden. This is proof that the method may be a tool to detect incipient outbreaks of viruses and provide early warnings before the causative pathogens have been recognized in health care.

Mr. Speaker, we can continue to battle against this unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. But this is great news for the constituents all across the province of Ontario who are eager to see that light at the end of the tunnel. Can the parliamentary assistant please share with the House what are further benefits of using waste-water-based epidemiology in this province?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: The member clearly recognizes that waste water surveillance is sort of like a smoke detector in your home. It's an early detector for us to help combat this virus across our communities. Of course, it has so much more potential, Speaker. This infrastructure that we're embracing across our communities is monitoring that we can use not just for COVID-19, but as we deploy more of these infrastructure and waste water monitoring techniques, we are now able to also use it for future ways to make sure that our communities stay vibrant and are resilient and are healthy.

Of course, waste water monitoring techniques are not new. They've historically been used in many areas: for example, in the European Union and, of course, in many parts of the US as well. Speaker, I know we are very confident on our side of the House that we're going to work with scientists on this untapped resource to give it its full potential so that we can continue to keep our communities healthy and vibrant, not just now but in future years.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Premier. The Toronto Outdoor Picture Show brings outdoor film festivals to neighbourhoods across Toronto, and the Christie Pits Film Festival in my riding is a local favourite. Thousands of people attend. But COVID-19 has devastated this small arts organization's ability to operate and raise revenues. Despite this year's massive losses, the Toronto Outdoor Picture Show is not eligible for the small business support grant, and as a travelling film festival, they're also not eligible for property tax and energy cost rebates. That means they're receiving no provincial support at all.

This is my question: Can the Premier expand the eligibility criteria of the small business support program so arts organizations like the Toronto Outdoor Picture Show can get the supports they need?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: I'm happy to work with the member opposite about that incredible organization she's talking about. As you know, our ministry has a \$60-million fund at the Ontario Arts Council. We increased that last year by \$25 million to support core cultural institutions across Ontario.

We'll have more to say, obviously, today in the budget, but I can tell you that I am very optimistic that festivals and events will be back bigger and better post-COVID-19, once we get the appropriate framework. We're looking to continue to work with the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services as well as the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Job Creation to see how we can best support the cultural institutions across the province. But I can assure you, today is going to be a great day for culture and arts in the province of Ontario.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: Back to the Premier: That is true; recently the cultural heritage minister said that she was committed to ensuring Ontario's arts sector gets more financial help. But as a small arts organization with annual revenue under \$1 million, the Toronto Outdoor Picture Show is not eligible for the one-time arts recovery fund.

1120

I agree with the minister: Arts organizations need help to survive this pandemic. They create jobs, they entertain us, they tell our stories and they play a vital role in the well-being of Ontarians, which is exactly why I'm alarmed that arts organizations—small ones—are not getting the support they need from this government.

Premier, the staff at the Toronto Outdoor Picture Show want to know: Can this government increase support to smaller arts organizations so that they can survive this pandemic?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: There is no one in Ontario more proud to talk about our culture and our arts than this minister here. I'm proud to be working alongside my colleagues to offer to the arts and culture industry, as well as our tourism and heritage sectors, as well as our sports organizations, unprecedented funding.

In the last six weeks, the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries has released \$150 million for a tourism tax credit, \$105 million for the Ontario Trillium Foundation above and beyond its existing \$103-million operating grants, \$25 million on top of the \$60 million for the Ontario Arts Council, \$2.5 million dedicated towards live music, \$2 million to our museums, \$15 million for our sports organizations and \$62 million to iconic institutions across Ontario, making sure that our budget grew in the last six weeks by \$361 million.

Stay tuned for 4 o'clock.

HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier.

Speaker, this government is just bad for the environment. The first thing they did when they got to this place was to tear down a plan for climate change and put nothing

in its place. Then they axed the independent Environmental Commissioner and gutted conservation authorities. They're going to give themselves the power to allow building anything anywhere, retroactively, with no right of appeal.

Now, their latest assault on the environment is to build a highway. They're hell-bent on paving over green space to build a highway that no one wants. Speaker, through you: Can the Premier explain why spending billions of dollars on Highway 413 through green space is actually good for the environment?

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

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: With all due respect to the member opposite, I would ask the Liberals why, when they were in government, they decided to pave over 330 hectares of greenbelt by building the 407 East.

Mr. Speaker, on the west side, they cancelled environmental assessment processes, which are a very important process for governments to make decisions. They allow us to collect data, evidence and facts so that we can make the right kinds of transportation planning decisions that we're required to make for population growth, to manage congestion and to improve the quality of life of Ontarians.

On the west side, they cancel EAs, but on the east side of the GTA, they're paving over 330 hectares of greenbelt, wetlands and forests, Mr. Speaker. It's very hard to take them seriously when they're not consistent.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I'm so glad the minister raised the 407. I think that's the highway that government sold, which we're all still paying for, which they can't actually use the capacity on because they tied their hands. So I'm glad the minister brought that up.

Who's really benefiting here? It's the people who own the land. And who are they? Well, they're the government's friends. That's a problem.

Speaker, impacted municipalities don't want it—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll ask the member to withdraw. I believe he imputed motive.

Mr. John Fraser: Withdraw.

Affected municipalities don't want it, so why is the government so hell-bent on building it? There are better ways to be spending \$8 billion, like on building schools, like on repairing schools, like on building spaces for our children that are great places to learn. It would create thousands of jobs in the skilled trades. It would ensure our children got the best education system in the world.

Speaker, through you: Can the minister explain why he and his government think that spending \$8 billion on a highway that nobody wants is a good thing?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Well, I'm referring to the 407 East through Durham, which the Liberals built.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of stakeholders who are calling on us to study the impact of the 413 and whether it is the right project for Peel, Halton and York region, and that is exactly what we're doing. We are doing the work that is necessary so that we can conduct the

proper transportation planning process that Ontarians expect us to do.

The member opposite talks about jobs. Building the 413 will create \$350 million in impact to the GDP of this province. It will create 4,300 jobs each year during construction of the project. And there are numerous stakeholders, including local councillors and mayors, who are asking us to do this work, in addition to the Ontario Livestock Transporters Alliance, the Peel Federation of Agriculture, the Ontario Home Builders' Association, LiUNA, the Brampton Board of Trade, the Toronto board of trade and the Mississauga Board of Trade.

We are doing the work that we're being asked to do, which is study the merits of the highway, and that will determine whether we proceed with it or not.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

IMMUNISATION CONTRE LA COVID-19

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: My question is to the Premier. Mariette Larabie is a lovely 72-year-old resident of Kapuskasing, where she lives with her husband, Luc Larabie. Mr. and Mrs. Larabie are both coping with important health conditions. Mr. Larabie has a heart condition, while Mrs. Larabie is fighting cancer, has only one functioning lung and also has a heart condition. Still, Mrs. Larabie will have to wait until April to receive her first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Does the Premier think senior residents in Mushkegowuk—James Bay like Mrs. Larabie need to wait even more, despite the fact she's certainly at risk?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member very much for the question. We know that people across the province are waiting to receive their vaccines. We are waiting for the AstraZeneca vaccines to come in to be able to put them into pharmacies, but there are mass vaccination clinics. There are other ways that people can receive the vaccine. But it is really all dependent upon supply. We would like to be able to give everyone in Ontario a shot tomorrow, but the reality is, we don't have the supply of vaccines. As soon as we get them, we ship them out.

Each public health medical director is making plans for the vaccination of all the residents within their geographic area. They have developed a plan that's relevant to your area, as the others have for their areas, to make sure that we can get the vaccines to people as quickly as possible. Once we get them, it takes no time at all to get them into people's arms, but we have to receive them through the federal government first.

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

M. Guy Bourgouin: Encore au premier ministre : M^{me} Larabie ne peut pas attendre encore un autre mois. Comme elle m'a dit l'autre jour : « Guy, si j'attrape ce virus, je serai morte, c'est sûr. J'aurai le temps de mourir quatre fois. » De plus, à cause que M^{me} Larabie et son mari sont assez autonomes, ne vivent pas dans un foyer ou ne

reçoivent pas de soins à la maison, ils doivent toujours attendre.

Monsieur le Président, le premier ministre va-t-il dire à M^{me} Larabie que malgré son cancer, malgré son seul poumon, elle devra toujours attendre pour se faire vacciner?

Hon. Christine Elliott: From what you're describing, Monsieur and Madame Larabie, they probably would be best to receive their vaccines through their primary care provider since they have pre-existing health conditions. That is going to be distributed as well. As the AstraZeneca vaccines are received, they're going into both primary care offices as well as into pharmacies; the Moderna and Pfizer are being distributed through the mass vaccination clinics, if there are any in your area, because they all vary. As soon as the AstraZeneca are received, they will be going into primary care offices where Monsieur and Madame Larabie will be able to receive their vaccines.

In the event that we don't receive them in the near future, we are looking at ways that we can get vaccines—perhaps the Moderna vaccine that doesn't have the same kind of cold storage requirements as the Pfizer vaccine—into areas, into pharmacies, as well as into primary care offices so that people can receive those vaccines as quickly as possible. So we are looking at every single option possible.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Roman Baber: My question is to the Premier. The beauty industry is beautiful. Ontario's beauty and personal care industry employs about 200,000 people. It's over 81% female owned and operated.

According to Beauty United, more than 20% of the industry already shut down and many more will not survive the lockdown. The Premier likes to say that it's about health and science, but there's no data to suggest that beauty and personal care are putting anyone at risk. According to StatsCan, the personal care industry is responsible for about 44 out of 9,000 outbreaks recorded in Canada since the pandemic. It's responsible for zero deaths out of approximately 13,000 deaths attributed to outbreaks in Canada. They book appointments and have strict sign-ins, capacity control and ability to contact trace. They're trained in infection protocol and control, and are the only industry that's trained in IPAC that remains shut down. Targeting them makes absolutely no sense.

1130

My question, then, is: Why is the Premier ruining hundreds of thousand of lives and livelihoods by keeping the beauty and personal care industry closed?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: To the member opposite: I would say it's to keep people healthy and safe. That's the reason why. There is absolute sense to that. This is an issue that has been discussed with the Chief Medical Officer of Health and the public health measures table. As the member will be aware, the variants of concern are now the dominant strain in Ontario. It's a more deadly strain. It's much more transmissible. It results in more hospitalizations, more intensive care units being occupied by

people with the variants of concern and, unfortunately, more deaths.

Now, with respect to the beauty industry and personal care industry: That is an area where people are in very close proximity. Because of these variants of concern that are so transmissible, it's really important at this stage, as we are trying to get vaccines into people's arms and keep the transmission of those variants of concern low, that we have to move very carefully and very cautiously. That is the reason why beauty products and personal care salons have not been opened yet in many parts of the province. That is something we're going to continue to watch, and, when the time is right, of course, then they will be able to—

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

Mr. Roman Baber: My question is to the Premier. The province's restaurants are asking for safe indoor dining across Ontario. Between March and November 2020 alone, almost 15,000 restaurants have closed in Ontario. The CFIB says that the hospitality business was at most risk, with one in three at risk of closure.

The Premier likes to say that it's about health and science, but there is no data to suggest that the dining industry is putting anyone at risk. According to StatsCan, the food and drink industry is responsible for just about 2,000 cases out of 125,000 cases traced back to outbreaks. It's responsible for three deaths out of approximately 13,000 deaths attributed to outbreaks in Canada. They have sign-ins, capacity control and ability to contact trace. They're trained in cleaning protocols. Hundreds of thousands of employees, suppliers and families are destitute. Targeting restaurants makes absolutely no sense.

My question, then, is: Why is the Premier ruining hundreds of thousands of lives and livelihoods by preventing Ontario's residents from safely reopening indoor dining?

Hon. Christine Elliott: The answer is to save lives. That's the reason why. That is why this needs to be done, in order to make sure that people are going to be safe.

The indoor dining rules have been brought forward in some parts of the province, but not in other parts. But even in the grey-lockdown areas, the rules have been changed to allow for outdoor dining. That is something, with the weather getting better, that is going to help those industries. But indoor dining, again, because of the close proximity of people—in the grey-lockdown areas in particular—that is an area where the transmission can happen very easily, particularly with the variants of concern.

We want to make sure that we can keep people safe and healthy. We want to keep people alive. That is our goal. That is our primary goal, to protect the health and safety of the people of Ontario, and that is what we are committed to do.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Mr. Percy Hatfield: My question is to the health minister. Good morning, Minister.

Speaker, as you know, this pandemic has clearly proven the value of our 34 public health units. These units are supervised by boards made up of municipal and provincial appointees. But in Windsor's case, since 2019, none of the provincial appointees have been reappointed or replaced. It's a mystery. Perhaps there's a secret plan to eliminate or replace most of the 34 public health units in Ontario.

At a time of turbulence, amidst a global pandemic, these boards have been a stabilizing influence, instilling confidence in an effective public health system for all of our residents. Why, Speaker? What's the secret plan? What's the mystery? Why is this government not replacing its provincial appointees to the boards of directors of Ontario's public health units?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member for the question. I certainly would agree with you that our 34 public health units have done an enormous service to the people of Ontario since day one of this pandemic, from increasing their testing capacity to making sure they have case and contact tracers in order to follow up on cases.

However, I would advise that we have been replacing members of the boards for the public health units. I do not understand why that has not happened in Windsor. I will certainly look into that. But I can certainly advise you, and the members of this House, Speaker, that I have signed many applications to become members of the public health boards. That has been happening on a continuous basis since the pandemic began. What's happening in Windsor is something that I will look into and I will advise you accordingly of what I've been able to find out.

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

There being no further business this morning, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m. I will remind members: 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1135 to 1300.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I beg leave to present the seventh interim report of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Hogarth presents the committee's report. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: No, that's fine, thank you.
Report presented.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

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

Bill 228, An Act to prohibit unencapsulated expanded or extruded polystyrene in floating docks, floating platforms and buoys / *Projet de loi 228, Loi interdisant le polystyrène expansé ou extrudé sans enveloppe de protection dans les quais flottants, les plateformes flottantes et les bouées.*

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

Report adopted.

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

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Mr. Jeff Burch: I beg leave to prevent 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 152, An Act to proclaim Occupational Safety and Health Day / *Projet de loi 152, Loi proclamant la Journée de la sécurité et de la santé au travail.*

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

Report adopted.

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

2353043 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2021

Mr. Kanapathi moved first reading of the following bill: Bill Pr44, An Act to revive 2353043 Ontario Inc.

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): Pursuant to standing order 89, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

WATERPOWER DAY ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LA JOURNÉE DE L'ÉNERGIE HYDRAULIQUE

Mr. Mantha moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 268, An Act to proclaim Waterpower Day / *Projet de loi 268, Loi proclamant la Journée de l'énergie hydraulique.*

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): I'll invite the member for Algoma–Manitoulin to explain his bill.

Mr. Michael Mantha: The bill proclaims June 20 in each year as Waterpower Day. June 20 is also Adam Beck's birthday, and proclaiming June 20 as Waterpower Day raises awareness of the value of the over 200 water facilities in Ontario and the workers producing 25% of the province's electricity.

PETITIONS

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Mrs. Marsha Boyd from Coniston in my riding for signing this petition, which reads as follows:

“Ban Retirement Home PPE Charges.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario's retirement homes are largely privately owned corporations; and

“Whereas these businesses have a responsibility to provide personal protective equipment ... to their employees; and

“Whereas many retirement homes are adding PPE charges to the residents' monthly bill, but the PPE—the personal protective equipment—is not for the residents but for the employees of the retirement home; and

“Whereas residents of some Sudbury retirement homes have effectively organized letter-writing campaigns and actions to have the PPE charges to residents cancelled and recognized as a retirement home's cost of doing business;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Treat our province's seniors with respect and ban any additional COVID-related fees, including” personal protective equipment, “to retirement home residents.”

I fully agree with this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Petitions? Apparently there are no further petitions.

Pursuant to standing order 61(b), this House is recessed until 4 p.m.

The House recessed from 1307 to 1600.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2021 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L'ONTARIO DE 2021

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I move, seconded by Premier Ford, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Bethlenfalvy has moved, seconded by Mr. Ford, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On behalf of the Premier, our government, and every member of this Legislature, I want to begin with a simple “thank you.”

Thank you to the doctors, thank you to the nurses, thank you to the personal support workers and other front-line health care workers, the caring people of this Ontario.

Thank you to every employee and business owner keeping our economy moving and local communities running.

And thank you to the people of Ontario ...

For following public health guidance.

And for every act of kindness, consideration and patience that has made this tough time a little bit easier.

Because, Mr. Speaker, when the story of this past year is written, it will be a story of these acts, big and small, that are remembered.

Monsieur le Président, ce budget est notre plan pour terminer la tâche que nous avons entreprise il y a un an.

Car après avoir navigué sur des eaux agitées pendant un an, nous espérons enfin arriver à bon port.

That is the story of the Ontario spirit. And it is the story of the 2021 budget.

And Mr. Speaker, this is our plan to finish the job we started one year ago.

Because, Mr. Speaker, after a year in stormy seas, a safe harbour is finally in sight.

Hope is on the horizon.

At community centres, doctors' offices, pharmacies and hospitals across our great province, Ontario's health care heroes are delivering vaccines that will help us get back to normal.

That is what hope looks like, Mr. Speaker.

But our difficult voyage is not over.

Land is in sight, but waters remain troubled as we are now in a race against time: vaccines versus variants.

And the government's job, Mr. Speaker—to protect you, the people of Ontario—is not yet done.

Et la tâche du gouvernement, qui est de protéger les Ontariennes et Ontariens, n'est pas encore achevée.

As the pandemic has continued to unfold, people have been very clear that they expect us to focus on two vital priorities:

1. First and foremost, they expect us to protect the people's health—your health.

2. And second, they expect us to protect our economy.

That is exactly what this budget does.

Ontario's total response to COVID-19 is now \$51 billion ...

And this next phase of Ontario's action plan makes good on the Premier's simple promise to the people—we will do whatever it takes to keep you safe.

Premier Ford has worked day and night to protect our province. His steadfast leadership has saved lives. And his focus on our health has been unrelenting. Thank you, Premier.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy brings the government's total investment to protect people's health to \$16.3 billion.

It starts with vaccines.

And the scientists behind the COVID-19 vaccines achieved a scientific miracle.

A human miracle.

By developing safe, effective vaccines in record time, they have also managed to bottle hope in a tiny vial.

Millions of tiny vials, in fact, that will eventually close one of the darkest chapters of our lifetime.

The question that remains is how long it will take.

That's why our top priority is getting vaccines in arms. Full stop.

At this very moment, nurses, doctors and pharmacists are vaccinating the people of Ontario ...

Today, I am announcing that Ontario is making more than \$1 billion available for our province-wide vaccination plan.

The plan has three phases and activates every available health care resource.

Nothing will prevent us from getting the job done.

For instance, we are investing in a program to provide safe, accessible transportation for persons with disabilities and older adults with limited mobility to get to their vaccination appointment.

And we are dedicating an additional \$50 million to vaccination programs in Indigenous communities—in which so many are at higher risk.

Nobody will be left behind.

To execute a rollout of this size, we have pulled together health care professionals, medical experts and front-line workers across the province.

From truckers to move the vaccines.

To front-line health care workers to administer them.

To an army of volunteers to help make appointments, drive people to vaccination sites or simply encourage a loved one to receive their shots.

Everyone has a role to play.

We are mobilizing Team Ontario.

There are many challenges ahead of us. But having spoken to so many people involved in this effort, I am inspired by their determination and compassion.

They are the fuel that drives the Ontario spirit.

I invite you to join me in applauding their effort.

Applause.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Mr. Speaker, while vaccines are rolling out, continued action is needed to stop the spread.

That requires more testing.

Anyone who needs a test can get a test.

And they can count on getting their results quickly.

Well over 14 million tests have already been completed.

But let me be clear, with vaccines on the horizon and the possibility of more restrictions being lifted, we need more tests, not less.

That's how we can catch new outbreaks and identify the presence of new variants.

And it's why we are ramping up our testing program.

To make it safer to re-engage with our workplaces, schools, businesses and communities, our government is investing \$2.3 billion more for testing and contact tracing in 2021-22, bringing the total investment since the beginning of the pandemic to \$3.7 billion.

Rapid tests are a key part of our strategy ...

Going forward, we will provide around 385,000 rapid tests per week in long-term care ...

118,000 in retirement homes ...

And 300,000 in essential workplaces, like manufacturing, warehouses, construction and food processing.

This ambitious testing strategy continues to ease anxiety, make life safer and ultimately save lives.

And it's an important part of our plan to defeat the pandemic and help get life back to normal.

1610

Mr. Speaker, vaccines and testing help stop the spread.

But when someone gets sick or requires care, a hospital bed must be available.

One of our greatest fears since the beginning of COVID-19 has been running out of hospital space.

Fortunately, we have prevented that from happening.

To ensure every person who requires hospital care can have access to a bed, even during the worst of the pandemic, we have invested an additional \$5.1 billion since the beginning of COVID-19.

This has created more than 3,100 additional hospital beds—the equivalent of six new large community hospitals.

Like every province, Ontario faces a punishing backlog of surgeries and other procedures.

That's why our budget makes more resources available to clear the backlog the pandemic has created.

So we will be keeping operating rooms open late into the night because no patient should be left behind without the care they need.

More of that care will be delivered in new, modern, bigger and better hospitals.

Today we are accelerating our long-standing work with a more than \$30-billion plan to build, expand and improve hospitals across the province over the next 10 years.

No government, Mr. Speaker, has committed to invest more in Ontario hospitals.

This includes a historic and overdue investment for the Peel region.

Today I am proud to announce we will support the hospital expansion and construction of a new wing at the William Osler Health System in Brampton.

I'd very much like to thank my colleagues the members from Brampton West and Brampton South for advocating for this project.

It is a priority for their constituents. It's a priority for patients. And it is a priority for our government.

In addition, we are working with Trillium Health Partners on a major redevelopment and hospital expansion in Mississauga ...

And expanding a hospital in Etobicoke to meet patient needs in these fast-growing communities.

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to announce today that we are supporting the planning of a new regional hospital in Windsor-Essex.

And we are doubling capacity of the London Health Sciences stem cell transplant unit.

And I'm very proud to announce we are building a new facility to provide care and treatment to 30,000 families with young patients in Chatham-Kent.

And, Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to announce we are investing in a new children's treatment centre in Ottawa as part of the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario ...

These are investments that deliver on our commitment to build more hospital beds.

To provide critical infrastructure to match the expertise of our health care workers.

And to ensure patients receive the care they need, when and where they need it.

Protecting loved ones in long-term care is very important to all of us in this House.

Mr. Speaker, while COVID-19 threatens us all, it is the residents and staff in long-term-care homes who have suffered the most.

The good news is this, today nearly every long-term-care resident in Ontario has been fully immunized.

Cases and deaths in long-term-care homes have declined.

This is, of course, positive news.

But it's only a start.

To protect our loved ones in long-term care from the deadly COVID-19 virus, Ontario is investing an additional \$650 million this year to prevent the spread, increase staffing and buy more supplies, such as masks.

That brings the total additional resources provided since the beginning of the pandemic to over \$2 billion.

Because, Mr. Speaker, what happened in long-term-care homes during the pandemic exposed a tragedy, decades in the making.

I think we can all agree this tragedy was the result of years of neglect and underfunding in long-term care ...

But the inaction stops with us. It stops right here.

The previous government took nearly 10 years to build 611 new beds across the province.

Mr. Speaker, we are building 30,000 new beds.

And with this budget, Ontario is investing an additional \$933 million, for a total of \$2.6 billion, to make good on that commitment.

Mr. Speaker, we are also building four new long-term-care homes on an accelerated basis.

Shovels are already in the ground.

And we are investing \$246 million to improve living conditions in existing homes, including ensuring air conditioning for residents.

This will ensure our loved ones live in comfort and with safety, dignity and respect.

But it's not just about beds, Mr. Speaker.

It's also about the quality of care.

Last November we committed to ensuring residents receive, on average, four hours of direct care per day. Frankly, they deserved as much a long time ago.

This is an ambitious commitment. It will make Ontario the leader in Canada.

However, there are many hurdles to making it a reality—including the need to hire tens of thousands of new staff to provide the care—something that clearly can't happen overnight.

But we will clear these hurdles, Mr. Speaker.

That is why Ontario is investing \$4.9 billion over four years to increase the average direct care to four hours a day.

We will also hire more than 27,000 new positions, including personal support workers and nurses.

And we are not waiting to act. We are investing over \$121 million to support the accelerated training of almost 9,000 personal support workers.

Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of the personal support workers that work day in and day out to protect us all.

They sacrifice so much, at personal risk, in difficult conditions. They are front-line heroes and too often forgotten. We will always be there for Ontario's personal support workers.

Mr. Speaker, while we improve long-term care and retirement homes, we are also making it easier for seniors to live in the homes they love, longer.

It's why we are investing \$160 million in the community paramedicine program to bring care and services to the homes of seniors in 33 communities.

Mr. Speaker, in communities like Orangeville and Merrickville. Waterloo and Brant. York region and Windsor.

Mr. Speaker, there's also another area that I'd like to focus on.

To reflect the true character of the Ontario people, their government must act with compassion.

That's why better care for our seniors is such an important focus of our budget.

And it drives our commitment to mental health and addictions treatment and care.

Because Mr. Speaker, mental health is health. Period.

This phrase is so simple, and yet it represents a monumental shift in our society's recognition that people with mental health and addictions challenges deserve access to the treatment and care they need.

It has driven so many of our actions since taking office—including the Roadmap to Wellness, our \$3.8-billion 10-year commitment to mental health and addictions funding, providing more psychology treatment to patients ...

And the first centre of excellence for mental health in the province's history.

We have a lot of work left to do. COVID-19 has only intensified the need for action.

To help the thousands of people struggling with mental health and addictions issues, our government is making record investments ...

Including an additional \$175 million in 2021-22, to provide more and better care for everyone who needs it, bringing our total investment this year to \$525 million.

And we are going to bring support directly to those who need it.

That includes four new mobile mental health clinics to serve rural and underserved communities ...

A new program to embed mental health workers in police call centres, to ensure people in crisis get the right support ...

1620

And investments to help our uniformed heroes, including veterans and OPP staff.

To anybody tuning in today:

Please reach out to a family member or friend to check in, acknowledge the struggle of those dealing with mental health challenges or ask for help if you need it.

It's okay not to be okay.

And know this: We will be there to support you.

Mr. Speaker, mental health and addictions challenges are not the only challenges that have intensified during the pandemic that may not be obvious.

One that concerns me deeply is the alarming increase in domestic violence.

Every child and every woman deserve to live in a home where they do not have to fear for their safety when they walk through the front door.

I am grateful to my colleague, the exceptional Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues. She has brought leadership and the perspectives of so many experts to end the travesty that is violence against women and children.

Thank you, Minister.

It starts with a statement of resolve:

Domestic abusers should face severe criminal consequences. The only place for them is behind bars.

While the federal government writes criminal laws, and the justice system enforces them—our government has a role to play in providing more support to victims.

And this budget does just that with new investments to expand support services.

We are investing an additional \$18.2 million over three years to protect and support First Nations, Inuit and Métis women and girls who can face higher rates of violence than others.

And \$18.5 million to support victims of domestic violence and human trafficking survivors find and maintain safe housing.

We remain committed to supporting victims of domestic violence, human trafficking and other violent crimes.

This is a government that will always stand up for victims.

Because every law-abiding citizen deserves to be protected.

Mr. Speaker, our investments not only protect people from COVID-19.

They also build a better health care system for tomorrow.

So that in Ontario, people can always receive the care they need.

Because without healthy people, we cannot have a healthy economy.

And Mr. Speaker, that brings me to the second pillar of our plan.

Overwhelmingly, the people and employers of our province have done what it takes to protect each other from COVID-19—even when these sacrifices have impacted their livelihoods.

We recognize these sacrifices. And today, we are taking further steps to provide direct support to the families, workers and employers who have sacrificed so much.

Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy brings the government's total investment to protect Ontario's economy to \$23.3 billion.

Mr. Speaker, every parent in Ontario has faced new pressures due to COVID-19.

For some, that includes financial challenges caused by the pandemic. For many, it includes new expenses to support virtual learning or child care. And for all, it includes anxiety about their child's future in a world that will look different than it does today.

While our government can't make this pressure go away, we can provide a helping hand.

To put more money in parents' pockets, we are providing a third round of payments through the Ontario COVID-19 Child Benefit.

This announcement today brings the total direct support we have provided families since March 2020 to \$1.8 billion.

The payment will be doubled to \$400 per child and \$500 for each child with special needs.

Consider what that means for a family with three young children, including one with special needs.

They will have received \$2,600 through the Ontario COVID-19 Child Benefit.

That is real and meaningful relief.

It won't solve every problem. But it helps. And it's one of the simplest, quickest and most direct ways we can make a difference.

Mr. Speaker, few pressures parents face are more significant than the cost of child care.

Nearly every economist I speak with says making child care more affordable is one of the keys to ensuring a robust recovery from COVID-19—not to mention a vital factor in creating the growth necessary for long-term prosperity.

I also hear it directly from parents.

Too many tell me the high cost of child care will keep them out of the workforce.

And this burden is not borne equally.

Just as the virus hits different people with different levels of severity, so too does the economic impact of the pandemic.

And it is abundantly clear women have been significantly impacted.

While employment among men is currently down by 3.3%, it is down by nearly 5% for women.

In large part, this is because more women have tended to work in the jobs most affected by the necessary public health measures and restrictions.

The challenges have been exacerbated by the high cost and lack of access to child care spaces.

No one should be prevented from getting back to work because they can't afford child care.

So, we are proposing a temporary 20% enhancement to the CARE tax credit for 2021.

This would increase support from about \$1,250 to \$1,500, on average per family.

In total, it would provide about \$75 million in additional relief for over 300,000 families.

This is extra money.

Back into families' pockets.

To cover expenses like child care. After school programs. Even summer camp.

We also need to ensure child care is available to parents.

That's why our government pledged to create 30,000 new child care spaces.

I am pleased to report that we are more than two-thirds of the way to meeting that pledge.

With this new capacity, our enhanced CARE tax credit, and the third round of payments to parents, Ontario families will be stronger.

And strong families make a strong province.

Mr. Speaker, we are also supporting students.

COVID-19 has disrupted their routines and changed how they are taught ...

And young people have been among those disproportionately impacted by the economic impacts of the pandemic.

So, we are protecting students today ...

But also investing in their success for tomorrow.

We have led the country with close to \$1.7 billion to protect students and keep schools safe, including \$100 million to improve classroom ventilation.

We will also invest \$14 billion over the next 10 years to build and upgrade schools.

Like the first new school in Pickering in over 20 years, which will serve 536 students and create 73 licensed child care spaces.

All told, we are investing \$550 million in the 2020-21 school year to support 16,000 new learning spaces across 28 schools.

Of course, ensuring remote and online learning can be delivered for students has become vitally important during the pandemic, which is why we are investing \$40 million to improve remote learning technology.

This is an important step.

But there is another factor that is holding our students back.

Mr. Speaker, we heard from a principal during the second wave when the public health situation meant classes had to be 100% virtual.

The principal said their rural school was ready to teach online ...

Except most of their students didn't have a quality, reliable Internet connection.

In the province of Ontario. In the year 2021. That is simply unacceptable.

We are going to fix it with the most ambitious investment in Internet connectivity in Canadian history.

To connect homes, businesses and schools to broadband, our government is super charging our investment with another \$2.8 billion, bringing the province's total investment to nearly \$4 billion over six years.

Just as railways and highways were being built 100 years ago to physically connect this vast province ...

Our government will undertake this monumental province-building project to connect people virtually.

So that no student ever falls behind because they don't have Internet ...

So that no entrepreneur is ever held back from starting the business of their dreams ...

And so that no grandparent is ever cut off from their loved ones.

1630

I look forward to holding a video conference with that school principal to thank her for her advocacy for her students.

A video conference on a reliable Internet connection, delivered through this historic investment.

Mr. Speaker, too many of our neighbours lost their jobs since this pandemic began.

Workers in some industries—including hospitality, retail and tourism—have been more affected than others.

So have women, youth and racialized people.

They lost their jobs through no fault of their own, but rather to a virus that has required unprecedented restrictions on our economy to keep each other safe.

It simply is not fair. And these workers deserve our support getting back to work.

For some, that may mean exploring opportunities in a new industry.

And in many parts of the economy, employers are hiring, including in construction, manufacturing and long-term care.

But this often requires going back to school which costs money at a time when their personal finances may have already been stretched to the limit.

To help workers with their training expenses, the government is proposing a new temporary Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit for 2021.

It would provide up to \$2,000 per recipient, for 50% of eligible expenses.

This is estimated to provide \$260 million in support for about 230,000 people this year.

Consider what it means for Hope, a 27-year-old who lost her job due to the pandemic.

She decides to go back to school to start a new career. Say her tuition costs \$4,050.

Hope would receive \$2,000 from the Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit ... making retraining a more accessible option to consider.

We are building on this relief with more employment and training support—because we know it makes a difference.

I remember hearing about a worker who had been laid off from a job in manufacturing.

He had used our services to retrain.

And Mr. Speaker, he decided to become a personal support worker ...

Turning a personal economic loss into an opportunity to care for people in his community.

We want to help more people like this worker.

So, we are making a \$614-million investment to provide workers with employment and training support ...

\$117 million of that is specifically for people most affected, including women, youth, people with disabilities, racialized and Indigenous people.

I want to point out Hope's story is one of many where her career could be in the skilled trades.

As the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development never fails to point out, there are more jobs available in the skilled trades than qualified workers.

These jobs are high-paying, rewarding opportunities to build a career and support a family.

They also allow you to help build your community and your province.

And with our government's plans to spend more than \$145 billion over the next 10 years on infrastructure ...

Including the largest subway expansion in Canadian history ...

Making GO Transit a comprehensive, all-day rapid transit network ...

Bringing passenger rail service to the North ...

And historic investments in highways ...

There will be no shortage of opportunities to play a role in rebuilding Ontario.

To help more workers and students get into the skilled trades, our government is investing \$288 million this year in the skilled trades strategy to help more people find a career they wouldn't trade.

To help more workers like Hope.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most significant inequities of the pandemic has been the impact on small business owners and their employees who have faced significant restrictions.

And for our government, it has been among the heaviest burdens that we bear—although I know that burden is infinitely heavier for the small businesses affected.

That's why in January we announced the Ontario Small Business Support Grant for employers affected by the province-wide shutdown.

To date, about 100,000 eligible small businesses have already seen funds flow into their bank accounts.

Businesses in communities from Sarnia to Sault Ste. Marie. Kenora to Kitchener. Brockville to Barrie.

I've heard from some who have said this support is the difference between keeping the lights on and turning them off for good.

As we roll out vaccines, we recognize small businesses are still struggling—and will face additional expenses and more pressure as things get back to normal.

Today, we are announcing a second payment of the Ontario Small Business Support Grant—so that eligible small businesses will automatically receive a second payment in an amount equal to their first.

This will bring the estimated total support provided through this grant to \$3.4 billion.

In total, our government is providing small businesses \$6.3 billion in relief in 2021, which includes lower electricity bills, lower taxes and lower payroll costs.

Consider what this means for a small retail store in Markham.

They could receive two payments of \$20,000 through the Ontario Small Business Grant, a \$1,000 Ontario Main Street PPE Grant, and \$1,630 in property tax and energy cost rebates.

That's \$42,630 in direct support. This protects jobs now, and in the future.

Mr. Speaker, people in the tourism, hospitality, culture, sports and recreation industries have been particularly hard hit by the necessary public health restrictions.

In fact, 140,000 tourism and hospitality jobs were lost between February 2020 and 2021.

Today, Ontario is investing an additional \$400 million to support these employers, bringing our total support to more than \$625 million since the pandemic began.

And it includes the new Ontario Tourism and Hospitality Small Business Support Grant ...

Targeted specifically at some of the hardest-hit businesses, including hotels, overnight summer camps and amusement parks ...

And that will provide an estimated \$100 million in one-time payments of between \$10,000 and \$20,000 to eligible small businesses.

With these additional measures, we will ensure that Ontario remains a terrific place to discover.

Mr. Speaker, while all of us have been affected by COVID 19, some have been affected more than others.

Our government's support is designed to ease the burden for those who have been carrying more of the load during this difficult year.

As I've said, women in particular have been disproportionately affected—and it's clear we are experiencing a "she-cession."

It's why we are taking action to support affected workers and small business owners, improve access and affordability for child care and support survivors of increased domestic violence.

As a father to two wonderful daughters, a husband, a son and grandson, the disproportionate impact on women is troubling to me on a personal level.

That's why the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues and I will establish a task force to advise the government on how to address the unique and disproportionate economic barriers women face.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, when we all have equal opportunity, all of us do better.

I'd like to recognize the critical leadership of strong, capable, brilliant women during this pandemic.

Like Dr. Barbara Yaffe, who has advised our government.

Like the Minister of Health, whose steady leadership we have counted on.

Like the Minister of Long-Term Care, a medical doctor, who has worked tirelessly to protect the most vulnerable.

Like the Solicitor General, who has guided our emergency response.

And like the Leader of the Opposition, who has played such an important role holding our government to account.

1640

Mr. Speaker, all of us are better for their leadership and contributions.

We have made much progress. And yet we still have so much more to do.

We must also do better for Indigenous and racialized people.

Systemic racism is a reality—including here in Ontario. It is a reality we must change.

A long overdue conversation on race is under way. But a conversation, however frank, is not enough.

It is time for action. That is why we made a \$60-million investment in the Black Youth Action Plan last fall.

It is why we are investing \$117 million in employment and training supports for those most affected by the pandemic.

And it is why we are taking another step with the Anti-Racism and Anti-Hate Grant which will support community-based anti-racism initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, hate spreads when allowed to fester. So, let us all resolve to speak out against hatred when we see it, and work together to build a more inclusive province each and every day.

And as we look beyond COVID-19, let's make it our shared goal that nobody is left behind.

Truly sustainable growth must be inclusive growth.

It must include everyone.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have outlined our action plan to beat COVID-19 ... to put it behind us. To get the job done.

I will conclude with an update on our province's economic and fiscal situation.

As a student of history, I cannot deliver that update without thinking of other challenging times in our challenging past.

When Leslie Frost rose in the House to deliver his budget in 1945, perhaps in this very seat, he declared that the Legislature was meeting in difficult days. That we had a difficult path ahead. That he was standing in a wartime Legislature delivering a wartime budget.

Mr. Speaker, thank God we're not in a world war. And yet the circumstances of today share some similarities to when Minister Frost stood in this place.

The people of Ontario are united in a battle against a common enemy. The job is not done. The enemy is not yet defeated.

As the Minister of Finance and as the President of the Treasury Board, my job is to ensure we make every resource available to win our battle against the virus.

And we have.

Mr. Speaker, the Ontario government is projecting to spend \$173 billion in 2021-22. When you consider that the government spent \$148.8 billion in 2018-19, it's clear we have spared no expense to defeat COVID-19.

Of course, as it has for governments around the world, this spending has resulted in record deficits.

We project the deficit will be \$33.1 billion in 2021-22. And while this is neither sustainable nor desirable forever, I am absolutely, unequivocally convinced it is necessary to get through the pandemic and to recover stronger.

In fact, I believe the price of inaction would be much, much higher in terms of lost lives, jobs and prosperity.

Because as I've said, you cannot have a healthy economy without healthy people.

Mr. Speaker, in this budget, we once again outline three economic and fiscal scenarios, to be as transparent as possible about the uncertainty that remains in our global economy and the risks to our province's finances.

We will continue to be transparent with regular updates as the situation continues to evolve.

There is no doubt that our return to fiscal sustainability will take many, many years.

Some would tell us that tax hikes or cuts to public services are the only way to get there.

They are wrong.

The other path is to get Ontario growing again.

I'm convinced that along with a modern government and a federal partner who pays their fair share, economic growth is the key to our fiscal recovery.

And that growth will create jobs, provide revenues to support critical public services and ensure a sustainable financial position.

Since 2018, we have strengthened the foundation of our province's economy.

Later this year, our government will release our plan to strengthen the conditions for long-term economic growth.

We are already taking important steps today ...

Positioning Ontario to be a leader in electric vehicle manufacturing ...

Creating Invest Ontario and the \$400-million Invest Ontario Fund, making the province a top-tier destination for investment ...

And proposing to double the Regional Opportunities Investment Tax Credit to encourage growth in regions that have fallen behind ...

Which all build on the actions we took last November to remove barriers to growth that would have otherwise held Ontario back from a strong economic recovery ...

We've done that by reducing high electricity rates ...

By removing taxes on jobs ...

And lowering unfairly high business education property tax rates.

So, while we create the conditions, it will be the people and employers who create the actual growth.

Which brings me back to the Ontario spirit.

When the people of this province put their minds to something, they make it happen.

So today, I am putting the world on notice: Don't bet against the people of Ontario. We will succeed.

We have chosen growth, and as sure as I am standing here today, right beside the Premier and all my colleagues and our government, we will grow stronger than ever.

Because when Leslie Frost stood in this place in 1945, he said that "victory is assured if we adhere to our determination to win."

Mr. Speaker, we are going to defeat this pandemic. Because I know the people of this province. I know that they are determined to win.

In conclusion, as we face down this historic challenge, there is no place I'd rather be.

Like so many others in this province, my family's story is an immigrant story.

Both of my parents left Hungary as refugees because of World War II. It was here in Ontario that they met, married, built a life in Canada and raised a family.

And today their son has the privilege to serve as the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Speaker, that is the Ontario story. That is the Ontario dream.

And we must all work to ensure that it can be the Ontario story for every person in this province. That it can be everybody's dream.

Occasionally I step back after a conversation with a constituent and I reflect on how likely it is that they have a story or dream similar to mine.

Of families from around the world that chose to settle here.

Those choices mean we get to pull from the very best of the entire world.

And if COVID-19 has taught us anything, it's that the 14.7 million people of Ontario can accomplish anything when we work toward a common goal.

Our people's hard work, ingenuity and drive for better, stronger families and communities will set us on a path that restores Ontario's place as the economic engine of this country.

The Premier calls it the Ontario spirit.

The Ontario spirit is hard work and sacrifice. Kindness and respect.

Doing what's right, not what's easy.

It has not been—and it won't be—a straight path to the finish line, but the Ontario spirit will get us through COVID-19.

And when that time comes, the Ontario spirit will unleash growth unlike anything we've seen in the province, ever before.

Hope is on the horizon. The safe harbour is not far away. And until we reach those shores, we will maintain our relentless focus on protecting people's health and our economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I move the adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for London West is moving the adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PROTECTING THE PEOPLE OF ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2021

LOI DE 2021 VISANT À PROTÉGER LA POPULATION ONTARIENNE (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 269, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 269, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

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): Does the minister wish to give a brief explanation of his bill? I think he already has.

I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move adjournment of the House.

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

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1651.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.
Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Ted Arnott
Clerk / Greffier: Todd Decker
Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffier: Trevor Day
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Tonia Grannum, Valerie Quioc Lim, William Short,
Peter Sibenik, William Wong
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergente d'armes: Jacquelyn Gordon

| Member and Party / Député(e) et parti | Constituency / Circonscription | Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités |
|--|--|--|
| Anand, Deepak (PC) | Mississauga—Malton | |
| Andrew, Jill (NDP) | Toronto—St. Paul's | |
| Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP) | London—Fanshawe | |
| Arnott, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (PC) | Wellington—Halton Hills | Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative |
| Arthur, Ian (NDP) | Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles | |
| Baber, Roman (IND) | York Centre / York-Centre | |
| Babikian, Aris (PC) | Scarborough—Agincourt | |
| Bailey, Robert (PC) | Sarnia—Lambton | |
| Barrett, Toby (PC) | Haldimand—Norfolk | |
| Begum, Doly (NDP) | Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest | |
| Bell, Jessica (NDP) | University—Rosedale | |
| Berns-McGown, Rima (NDP) | Beaches—East York / Beaches—East York | |
| Bethlenfalvy, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (PC) | Pickering—Uxbridge | Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor |
| Bisson, Gilles (NDP) | Timmins | |
| Blais, Stephen (LIB) | Orléans | |
| Bouma, Will (PC) | Brantford—Brant | |
| Bourgouin, Guy (NDP) | Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James | |
| Burch, Jeff (NDP) | Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre | |
| Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC) | Markham—Stouffville | Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement |
| Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC) | Scarborough North / Scarborough-Nord | Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité |
| Cho, Stan (PC) | Willowdale | |
| Clark, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (PC) | Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes | Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement |
| Coe, Lorne (PC) | Whitby | |
| Collard, Lucille (LIB) | Ottawa—Vanier | |
| Coteau, Michael (LIB) | Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est | |
| Crawford, Stephen (PC) | Oakville | |
| Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC) | Mississauga—Lakeshore | |
| Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC) | Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte | Attorney General / Procureur général |
| Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC) | Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord | Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues / Ministre associée déléguée au dossier de l'Enfance et à la Condition féminine Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille |
| Elliott, Hon. / L'hon. Christine (PC) | Newmarket—Aurora | Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé |
| Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC) | Nipissing | Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce |
| Fee, Amy (PC) | Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler | |
| Fife, Catherine (NDP) | Waterloo | |

| Member and Party / Député(e) et parti | Constituency / Circonscription | Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités |
|--|--|--|
| Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC) | Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord | Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre |
| Fraser, John (LIB) | Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud | |
| French, Jennifer K. (NDP) | Oshawa | Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative |
| Fullerton, Hon. / L'hon. Merrilee (PC) | Kanata—Carleton | Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée |
| Gates, Wayne (NDP) | Niagara Falls | |
| Gélinas, France (NDP) | Nickel Belt | |
| Ghamari, Goldie (PC) | Carleton | |
| Gill, Parm (PC) | Milton | |
| Glover, Chris (NDP) | Spadina—Fort York | |
| Gravelle, Michael (LIB) | Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord | |
| Gretzky, Lisa (NDP) | Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest | First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée |
| Hardeman, Hon. / L'hon. Ernie (PC) | Oxford | Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales |
| Harden, Joel (NDP) | Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre | |
| Harris, Mike (PC) | Kitchener—Conestoga | |
| Hassan, Faisal (NDP) | York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston | |
| Hatfield, Percy (NDP) | Windsor—Tecumseh | Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative |
| Hillier, Randy (IND) | Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston | |
| Hogarth, Christine (PC) | Etobicoke—Lakeshore | |
| Horwath, Andrea (NDP) | Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre | Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle |
| Hunter, Mitzie (LIB) | Scarborough—Guildwood | |
| Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC) | Dufferin—Caledon | Solicitor General / Solliciteure générale |
| Kanapathi, Logan (PC) | Markham—Thornhill | |
| Karahalios, Belinda C. (NBP) | Cambridge | |
| Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP) | Parkdale—High Park | |
| Ke, Vincent (PC) | Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord | |
| Kernaghan, Terence (NDP) | London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord | |
| Khanjin, Andrea (PC) | Barrie—Innisfil | Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement |
| Kramp, Daryl (PC) | Hastings—Lennox and Addington | |
| Kusendova, Natalia (PC) | Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre | |
| Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC) | King—Vaughan | Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation |
| Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP) | Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre | |
| MacLeod, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa (PC) | Nepean | Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries / ministre des Industries du patrimoine, du sport, du tourisme et de la culture |
| Mamakwa, Sol (NDP) | Kiiwetinoong | |
| Mantha, Michael (NDP) | Algoma—Manitoulin | |
| Martin, Robin (PC) | Eglinton—Lawrence | |
| Martow, Gila (PC) | Thornhill | |
| McDonell, Jim (PC) | Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry | |
| McKenna, Jane (PC) | Burlington | |
| McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC) | Lambton—Kent—Middlesex | Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences |
| Miller, Norman (PC) | Parry Sound—Muskoka | |
| Miller, Paul (NDP) | Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek | |
| Mitas, Christina Maria (PC) | Scarborough Centre / Scarborough- Centre | |
| Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP) | Thunder Bay—Atikokan | |
| Morrison, Suze (NDP) | Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre | |
| Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC) | York—Simcoe | Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports |

| Member and Party / Député(e) et parti | Constituency / Circonscription | Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités |
|--|--|---|
| Natyshak, Taras (NDP) | Essex | |
| Nicholls, Rick (PC) | Chatham-Kent—Leamington | Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président |
| Oosterhoff, Sam (PC) | Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest | |
| Pang, Billy (PC) | Markham—Unionville | |
| Park, Lindsey (PC) | Durham | |
| Parsa, Michael (PC) | Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill | |
| Pettapiece, Randy (PC) | Perth—Wellington | |
| Phillips, Rod (PC) | Ajax | |
| Piccini, David (PC) | Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud | |
| Rakocevic, Tom (NDP) | Humber River—Black Creek | |
| Rasheed, Kaleed (PC) | Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville | |
| Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC) | Kenora—Rainy River | Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie, du Développement du Nord et des Mines Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones |
| Roberts, Jeremy (PC) | Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa- Ouest—Nepean | |
| Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC) | Sault Ste. Marie | Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités |
| Sabawy, Sheref (PC) | Mississauga—Erin Mills | |
| Sandhu, Amarjot (PC) | Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest | |
| Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC) | Brampton South / Brampton-Sud | Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associé délégué au dossier des Petites Entreprises et de la Réduction des formalités administratives Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille |
| Sattler, Peggy (NDP) | London West / London-Ouest | Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle |
| Schreiner, Mike (GRN) | Guelph | |
| Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC) | Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock | Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure |
| Shaw, Sandy (NDP) | Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas | |
| Simard, Amanda (LIB) | Glengarry—Prescott—Russell | |
| Singh, Gurratan (NDP) | Brampton East / Brampton-Est | Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle |
| Singh, Sara (NDP) | Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre | Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle |
| Skelly, Donna (PC) | Flamborough—Glanbrook | |
| Smith, Dave (PC) | Peterborough—Kawartha | |
| Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC) | Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte | Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires |
| Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP) | St. Catharines | |
| Stiles, Marit (NDP) | Davenport | |
| Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC) | Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre | Associate Minister of Transportation (GTA) / Ministre associée des Transports (RGT) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille |
| Tabuns, Peter (NDP) | Toronto—Danforth | |
| Tangri, Nina (PC) | Mississauga—Streetsville | |
| Taylor, Monique (NDP) | Hamilton Mountain | |
| Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC) | Scarborough—Rouge Park | |
| Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC) | Huron—Bruce | Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs |
| Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC) | Vaughan—Woodbridge | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille |
| Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC) | Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington | |
| Vanthof, John (NDP) | Timiskaming—Cochrane | Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle |
| Wai, Daisy (PC) | Richmond Hill | |

| Member and Party / Député(e) et parti | Constituency / Circonscription | Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités |
|--|---|--|
| Walker, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (PC) | Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound | Associate Minister of Energy / Ministre associé de l'Énergie Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille |
| West, Jamie (NDP) | Sudbury | |
| Wilson, Jim (IND) | Simcoe—Grey | |
| Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB) | Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest | |
| Yakubski, Hon. / L'hon. John (PC) | Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke | Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts |
| Yarde, Kevin (NDP) | Brampton North / Brampton-Nord | |
| Yurek, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (PC) | Elgin—Middlesex—London | Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs |

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Donna Skelly
Teresa J. Armstrong, Toby Barrett
Lorne Coe, Rudy Cuzzetto
Randy Hillier, Jane McKenna
Judith Monteith-Farrell, Michael Parsa
Randy Pettapiece, Donna Skelly
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs / Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques

Chair / Président: Amarjot Sandhu
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeremy Roberts
Ian Arthur, Stan Cho
Catherine Fife, Mitzie Hunter
Logan Kanapathi, Sol Mamakwa
David Piccini, Jeremy Roberts
Amarjot Sandhu, Dave Smith
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Julia Douglas

Standing Committee on General Government / Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales

Chair / Présidente: Goldie Ghamari
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Mike Schreiner
Jill Andrew, Robert Bailey
Guy Bourgouin, Stephen Crawford
Goldie Ghamari, Chris Glover
Mike Harris, Sheref Sabawy
Amarjot Sandhu, Mike Schreiner
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

Chair / Président: Gilles Bisson
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
Will Bouma, Lucille Collard
Parm Gill, Daryl Kramp
Natalia Kusendova, Suze Morrison
Lindsey Park, Guratan Singh
Nina Tangri, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité permanent de l'Assemblée législative

Chair / Président: Kaleed Rasheed
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vijay Thanigasalam
Rima Berns-McGown, Michael Coteau
Faisal Hassan, Logan Kanapathi
Michael Mantha, Jim McDonell
Christina Maria Mitas, Sam Oosterhoff
Kaleed Rasheed, Donna Skelly
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

Chair / Président: Taras Natyshak
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett
Jessica Bell, Stephen Blais
Stephen Crawford, Rudy Cuzzetto
France Gélinas, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Taras Natyshak
Michael Parsa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

Chair / Président: Logan Kanapathi
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Fraser
Will Bouma, John Fraser
Logan Kanapathi, Vincent Ke
Laura Mae Lindo, Paul Miller
Billy Pang, Jeremy Roberts
Dave Smith, Daisy Wai
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

Chair / Président: Deepak Anand
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Bhutila Karpoche
Deepak Anand, Aris Babikian
Jeff Burch, Amy Fee
Michael Gravelle, Joel Harden
Mike Harris, Christine Hogarth
Belinda C. Karahalios, Bhutila Karpoche
Natalia Kusendova
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan

Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight / Comité spécial de la surveillance de la gestion des situations d'urgence

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
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
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell