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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Monday 29 March 2021

Lundi 29 mars 2021

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS

HOMELESSNESS

Mr. Chris Glover: I move that, in the opinion of the House, the government of Ontario should commit to addressing the homelessness crisis by immediately acquiring emergency shelter space that will ultimately be converted into permanent supportive housing, building at least 69,000 affordable housing units, and building at least 30,000 supportive housing units accompanied by wrap-around supports including overdose prevention, employment programs, and mental health and addictions resources for those hardest to house.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 101, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Chris Glover: A couple of weeks ago, we were in here, and my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane told a farm story about an International 1066 tractor. I've never driven an International 1066 tractor, but I do have a farm story.

When I was young, when I was a youth, I was part of a youth exchange, with Sri Lanka, and I was posted to a farm just outside of Hamilton in a small four corners called Binbrook. I was there for three and a half months living on the farm, and it was one of those transformational experiences. I went in as a scrawny kid, and because of the hard work and also the good food, I put on 25 pounds. I came out weighing basically what I weigh now.

The beauty of the experience living in a small community like that was you can see the values that create a healthy society. I developed this theory while I was there. I thought, there are three values that make a healthy society. The first one is self-reliance and hard work, and community, and compassion.

Self-reliance and hard work: Everybody in that community, pretty much, was a farmer, so everybody's working hard—extremely hard. They're also responsible for their own business, their own farm.

As far as community goes, it was the harvest season, but it was also the time that people were preparing for the fall fair. Everybody, whenever they could, would go down to the fairgrounds. We were all pitching in. We were

building chicken coops. We were white-washing the rail fence around the race track. We were all pitching in. The fall fair was a wonderful event, but I really think the experience of building community was in those days when we were preparing for that fall fair.

The third value is compassion. If a farmer breaks his leg or a farmer becomes ill, the other farmers in the community will pitch in, and they will make sure that his cows are milked or his pigs are fed or his fields are harvested. Everybody looks out for each other.

I've have been thinking about these values ever since, about, how do we create a healthy society? As a government in Ontario, how do we create a healthy society in Ontario? I think when you look at this value of hard work and self-reliance, hard work deserves a just reward. The minimum wage in Ontario is \$14 an hour; 25% of the workers in Ontario make less than \$17 an hour. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives says that if you're living in the cities in Ontario, you need to make at least \$20 an hour in order to be able to afford a one-bedroom apartment.

Some of the actions of this government are actually fuelling the homelessness crisis, which is the topic of my motion today. There's an eviction blitz going on. I listened in to one of these Landlord and Tenant Board hearings. It was a woman being evicted because she had missed two months rent at the beginning of the pandemic because of a loss of work and income. Since then, she's gone back to work, she's been able to make all her monthly payments, but she wasn't able to make up those two months that were missing, and so, she got evicted. She and her daughter got evicted from their home because of that. This government last week voted down a motion from my colleague from Toronto Centre asking for rent support so those kinds of evictions wouldn't happen. It's this gap between wages and affordability of housing that is fuelling the homelessness crisis that we're experiencing.

Dini Petty, a talk show host that many of you will be familiar with—throughout this pandemic she's been supporting people experiencing homelessness. She says that the biggest reason for the recent increase in homelessness is that people can't pay their rent anymore. This eviction blitz that is happening is breaking up our communities.

I talk about the value of compassion. There's one gentleman we were helping last week—he has schizophrenia and he lives in a shelter. He lives in a shelter because there isn't nearly adequate housing for people with mental health issues in this province. He developed COVID-19. He spent four days in the hospital. Then after four days he

was discharged. He went back to his shelter. He wasn't allowed in the shelter, because he's COVID-positive. There's supposed to be a shelter for people who are homeless but also COVID-positive, but he couldn't find it. There were a bunch of us scrambling, trying to get a hold of him, trying to find him, because he doesn't have a cellphone. And so, this person with schizophrenia and who's COVID-positive was walking around the streets of Toronto, trying to find a place to stay warm in last week's temperatures, which were dipping down below zero at night.

When you're thinking about the two parts of this motion—one is to build supportive housing; the other one is to build affordable housing—I would ask you to call into question your own value of compassion for people like that person with schizophrenia who is COVID-positive. People need housing. They need supportive housing.

I see in the values of the community members around this value of compassion. Alicia Liebrechts, who lives in Liberty Village, started a program a couple of years ago called Liberty Village Cares that supports people who are vulnerable or people who are experiencing homelessness.

Susan Potvin, who lives near a tent encampment at Lamport Stadium, says, "It was deeply distressing to see so many people living in squalid tents all this winter. While nearby office towers and condo units lay vacant, warm and bright...."

At the beginning of this pandemic, a friend and I started a community care program that's now feeding 1,000 people a week—seniors, vulnerable residents and people experiencing homelessness. Ayesha Khan, one of the volunteers in the program, says, "Having had the chance to get to know many people suffering from homelessness, I have met good people, people who protected others, people who suffered from disabilities and mental health issues and yet kept close-knit in their homeless communities to survive."

I'd ask you to call on that value of compassion that you hear from these community members when you're deciding how to vote on my motion.

I was also speaking with Kim Curry, who's the director of a program called Seeds of Hope, which is just a couple of blocks from the Legislature here. She says during the coldest days in February, there was no place for people to go to get warm. The restaurants are closed. The libraries are closed. At one point at 10 o'clock at night she was scrambling around trying to find a place for one of the people she's caring for just to sleep for the night, because he was freezing and he was in pain. We lost 78 people who were suffering from homelessness in Toronto in 2020. Recently, two weeks ago, two people died in one day. So the decisions that we make in the Legislature are life-and-death decisions for many people.

0910

The first part of my motion is asking for 30,000 supportive housing units to be built over 10 years. This is a recommendation from Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions Leadership Advisory Council. These supportive housing units are to include wraparound supports,

overdose prevention, employment programs, and mental health and addictions resources to help reintegrate people back into the community, because when people are homeless, are they really part of our broader community? When we evict people from their homes and put them on the streets, are we saying they're part of our community? We need to welcome these people back into our community by providing housing.

Let me read this other quote. There are a number of agencies that are supportive of those 30,000 supportive housing units. Patricia Mueller from Homes First Society, Sonja Nerad from the Toronto Shelter Network, and Kira Heineck from the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness: They all say that, without those 30,000 units—"Without this motion, for many shelter clients there is no next step, no pathway out of homelessness." They say that shelters manage homelessness, but supportive housing will end it.

We are all one community. It's not just people in the encampments and people experiencing homelessness who are suffering. It also has impacts on community members around. Martin Del Campo says, "The communities surrounding these tent encampments have also been affected. We need compassion and empathy for the homeless and for the residents who live near the encampments."

Caroline Cai says, "In a time of chaos, fear and uncertainty, voting for this motion is a statement that we Ontarians are united to support each other, especially the less fortunate."

The second part of my motion is about affordable housing. The Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association and the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada recommend that we build 69,000 affordable housing units over the next 10 years. I'm hoping that many of these units will be co-ops.

I have had the good fortune of living in Campus Co-op, which is a co-op housing development not too far from here, when I was an undergrad. It was an incredible experience. Co-ops have really strong communities. There are people who are paying full market rent and there are other people who have their rent subsidized, but it's a democratic organization. Everybody—everybody—who lives there is a member and everybody gets one vote in all the decisions that are made in the co-op.

The other thing about affordable housing: Not only do we need to build affordable housing, we also need to make sure that we're not losing affordable housing. The residents of Chinatown are deeply concerned that 70% of the housing in Chinatown is rental housing, much of it is in rooming houses, but this is all under threat from gentrification. It's a process that threatens the very character of Chinatown. Chinatown was under threat once before. Community leaders like Jean Lumb fought to save it, and contributed greatly to the diversity and richness of our city that Chinatown brings.

I have written to members of my community for feedback on the motion. Universally, the response was positive. I received emails supporting this motion from Ashley Dent, Indra Narayansingh, Phil Zanotti, Louis

George Frank, Margot White, Wenting Li, Ronny Yaron, Sylvia Grady and so many others.

The other, final reason that I would like to bring out for you to support this motion is that we'll save money. Affordable housing costs for somebody who's fully subsidized is between \$800 and \$1,000 a month. Supportive housing costs \$2,000 a month. A shelter bed costs \$4,000 a month. Jail is \$7,000 a month, and a hospital is \$10,000 a month.

Djanka Gajdel, who is a business owner in Spadina–Fort York, says, “The West Queen West Business Improvement Association,” that employs thousands of people with 450 businesses, “says there is no hope for a robust economic recovery until homelessness is addressed.”

I will ask all of you to look at your values of hard work and self-reliance, of community and compassion, and I ask all the members of this House to support my motion today.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Parm Gill: It's a pleasure to rise in the House today to discuss the member opposite's private member's motion. We've seen the impact that the pandemic has had on vulnerable people in our communities, including those experiencing or at risk of homelessness. That is why, from the onset of COVID-19, we provided \$765 million to service managers and Indigenous program partners through our social services relief fund. In the member opposite's riding, the city of Toronto received over \$284 million. This funding is flexible so municipalities can use it to best respond to their local needs. This funding can be used to create long-term housing solutions for those at risk or experiencing homelessness, increase rent banks, purchase PPE, build modular housing, and expand or purchase new shelter spaces for the most vulnerable. With new COVID-19 variants of concern, we've directed service managers to be transparent with their SSR funding and address any gaps within their outbreak management plans and provide details on planned next steps.

We also provided the city of Toronto with an additional \$6.9 million to create up to 280 beds across two emergency isolation centres so those affected by COVID-19 can safely isolate away from others. These isolation facilities are also providing a range of wraparound services, including meals, security, transportation and links with health and social services.

Speaker, since taking office, we have increased funding for homelessness every year—more than what the previous Liberal government did for 15 years. We're taking action to end homelessness by directing service managers to implement by-name lists across our province. By-name lists are a better way to connect people experiencing homelessness with the supports and services they need.

The previous Liberal strategy was filled with gaps and limitations. Our government understands how critical it is to better understand who is homeless and match them to the actual supports they need.

This year alone, in the member opposite's own riding, the city of Toronto has been allocated almost \$200 million through various housing and homelessness programs.

Through our Home for Good program, which provides housing assistance and support services to people experiencing homelessness or who are at imminent risk of homelessness, we provided \$18 million to help transform a vacant complex at 389 Church Street into 120 supportive rental apartments for women experiencing or at risk of homelessness. I was proud to announce the critical project in partnership with the city of Toronto earlier this year.

It is critical that we continue to fund innovative housing projects that can be completed rapidly to give those in need a safe place to call home as soon as possible.

Speaker, I also know that the NDP and the Liberal Party are against the use of MZO's, but let me give you three examples of the difference they're making. At the request of the city of Toronto, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing issued two MZO's in Toronto last year for two modular supportive housing projects in members of the opposition's ridings. The minister made these MZO's less than 12 months ago, and today there are vulnerable Ontarians living in the completed modular housing units. In the Leader of the Opposition's riding, the city of Hamilton requested an MZO to help speed up the approvals process for 15 new affordable housing units. Without an MZO, the city of Hamilton wouldn't have met the timelines needed to access federal funding. Our government is proud to work with our municipal partners by using MZO's to accelerate critical projects that get our most vulnerable the housing they need today.

We know that demand for residential services is growing. That's why our government has invested more than \$1.8 billion for residential supports within the developmental services sector.

As part of our 2021 budget, we announced an investment of \$13 million over three years to assist more people with developmental disabilities in accessing community housing and to support their independent living through an expansion of the Adult Protective Service Worker Program.

0920

Our government recommits to working closely with all of our partners to ensure that people can access the housing and supports they need today and in the years to come. Everyone has a role to play in fixing Ontario's housing crisis. We continue to invite members of this House, municipalities, non-profits and private industry to work with us and join us in encouraging innovative ways to build different kinds of housing to make sure everyone can have a place to call home.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Bon matin. Ça me fait plaisir de pouvoir parler et d'appuyer la motion du député de Spadina–Fort York visant à créer une stratégie provinciale pour adresser deux crises de haute importance : le nombre croissant de sans-abri et le manque de logement et de services pour leur venir en aide.

Tout d'abord, j'aimerais vous parler d'une situation particulière dont plusieurs personnes seront surprises d'entendre parler : les sans-abri francophones. Lors du mois de novembre dernier, des journalistes d'ONFR+ ont fait une série de capsules adressant la situation des francophones en situation d'itinérance ici à Toronto, dans les alentours de cette Assemblée législative. Les journalistes d'ONFR+ ont parlé entre autres du fait que les centaines de francophones en situation d'itinérance sont doublement touchés par ce qu'ils vivent. Ils sont isolés du reste de la société dans des conditions toujours préoccupantes dans une crise sanitaire. De l'autre côté, ils sont doublement touchés, car la barrière linguistique les isole encore plus.

Dans ce rapportage, ONFR+ parle du fait que la première personne décédée de la COVID-19 en situation d'itinérance ici à Toronto s'agissait d'un homme francophone dans la cinquantaine. C'était un francophone d'origine congolaise, venu en Ontario dans les années 1990 avec l'espoir de trouver une meilleure vie.

I want to finish by underscoring the housing crisis that affects Indigenous peoples in Ontario, both on- and off-reserve. This past winter, Jackie Hookimaw from Attawapiskat First Nation brought light to the situation in North Bay, where Indigenous homeless people sometimes lack essential and most-needed services, but also culturally appropriate services, access to elders, healing and language, as well as clean, livable, affordable housing.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mrs. Robin Martin: I'm pleased to rise on this motion by the member from Spadina-Fort York. I wanted to talk a bit about the mental health aspects of the motion as it brings those forward.

As you know, Speaker, our government believes that mental health is health. We were elected on a promise to make mental health and addictions a priority. That's why we committed to invest \$3.8 billion over 10 years to create new services and to expand existing programs.

Minister Elliott was the Vice-Chair of the 2010 select committee on mental health and she was determined to ensure that we took action in this very important area. When we were first elected, I was charged by Minister Elliott, in my role as parliamentary assistant, to make the area of mental health and addictions my primary focus, which I was delighted to do.

An important first step was to understand what services existed already on the ground, where the gaps were and where we had strengths and weaknesses. To inform our planning, Minister Elliott and I hosted round tables all across Ontario—I think 18 in total; some of them I did with Minister Elliott, some of them I did separately. We consulted with many people in the sector and users of the services.

As a result of that extensive consultation across the province, we created our centre of excellence for mental health and addictions, which is now part of Ontario Health, and our Roadmap to Wellness, which we've talked quite a lot about. It's Ontario's comprehensive plan to build a

fully connected mental health and addictions system where every Ontarian is fully supported.

Ontario is investing \$176 million in 2020-21 in mental health and addictions services. This investment builds on the \$174 million the government invested last year for mental health and addictions programs. This brings new base investments across the sector since 2019 to a total of \$350 million. This is, of course, on top of the existing funding that was there.

In December 2020, Minister Tibollo and Minister Clark also announced that our government would invest \$47 million to provide supportive housing for individuals with severe mental health and addictions challenges who are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. This includes creating a new Back to Home Program to help patients transition from hospitals to permanent housing. The funding will do the following:

- help support and empower individuals living with severe mental health and addictions challenges and help them to live independently;

- alleviate hospital capacity pressures and therefore move us one step closer to our plan to end hallway health care; and

- provide landlords the resources they need to upgrade and maintain supportive housing to provide a safe and comfortable home for their tenants.

The province's targeted investment for mental health and addictions supportive housing includes:

- \$13.7 million to create this Back to Home Program that will provide supportive housing for patients in hospitals with mental health and addictions challenges who do not need hospital-level acute care;

- \$6.6 million in additional investments to help up to 25 supportive housing providers across Ontario that maintain housing units for those at risk of homelessness;

- \$1.9 million to assist the transition of the Homes for Special Care Program to the modernized Community Homes for Opportunity program, which will provide enhanced support services for tenants, such as the purchase of electronic devices to ensure tenants can maintain connections with their family and participate in virtual appointments;

- \$850,000 in rent supplements to retain supportive housing properties where agreements with Ontario are expiring;

- \$10 million to strengthen mental health and addictions supports for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in communities hit hard by COVID-19.

In addition, over \$14 million for supportive housing programs designated for justice-involved individuals, which was announced in November as part of our plan to expand mental health services across the justice system, will fund up to 524 new units across the province for individuals who are either on diversion plans from mental health court or have been released from a provincial correctional facility, including \$1.03 million for up to 20 units that are affiliated with five new post-court transitional case managers. Transitional case managers will also provide support to individuals involved in the

justice system with mental health or addictions challenges to rapidly access services such as counselling, therapy etc.

I think this government has shown a lot of compassion toward people with homeless issues, and we are going to do more. We're doing more every day.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: It's an honour to rise this morning on behalf of the decent and hard-working people of York South–Weston to speak to the vitally important motion put forward by my colleague from Spadina–Fort York.

Madam Speaker, I have worked extensively in housing and homelessness over the years. There are thousands and thousands of folks waiting on the waiting list for affordable housing. There are also reported to be 10,000 homeless in the GTA alone.

As a young man, I found myself homeless on the streets of Rome, and I know the struggles faced by those who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, and those losing their homes. Any of us in Ontario could find ourselves in that position, Madam Speaker.

0930

This motion addresses the devastating crisis in housing that exists in Ontario. This crisis began in 1994 and continues by downloading—from Mike Harris to Ernie Eves to Dalton McGuinty and Kathleen Wynne—to municipalities.

With this motion, Madam Speaker, we have an opportunity in this House to clearly and definitely call for the government to address the homelessness crisis with concrete measures that would provide immediate support to those struggling.

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that the right to housing is protected under international law, and indeed Canada has endorsed such rights guaranteeing an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing.

It is time to act and make real change that can address the homelessness and housing crisis in Ontario. Let us pass this motion, Madam Speaker, to get to work for the people of this province and address the issue of homelessness and housing. It is our responsibility and our moral imperative to act.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's an honour to rise and speak to the motion from the member for Spadina–Fort York on affordable housing. Speaker, the bottom line is we are facing a housing and mental health crisis in Ontario, but you would not know that from reading last week's budget. I was hoping that the government would recognize the crisis that we're facing, especially when members come to Queen's Park and they see the various tent cities in parts throughout Toronto, including right here at Queen's Park circle. But it appears that the chapter to address this somehow was forgotten at the printer when the budget was printed last week.

Speaker, how can people be expected to stay home during a pandemic when they don't have a home to stay

home in? That's exactly why it is vital that we address the housing and mental health crisis, especially coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The reality is we had a housing crisis and a mental health crisis prior to the pandemic; COVID has only made it worse. Pre-pandemic, 170,000 people in Ontario were on the waiting list to access social housing.

In Toronto, a minimum wage worker has to work 79 hours a week to afford a one-bedroom apartment and 96 hours to afford a two-bedroom apartment. It's not much better in Ottawa, where it takes a 70-hour workweek—0% of rental housing is affordable to a full-time minimum wage worker in cities such as Barrie, Guelph, Kitchener–Waterloo, Peterborough, Ottawa and Thunder Bay.

According to the Homeless Hub, the vast majority of people experiencing homelessness are also experiencing mental health and addiction challenges. Supportive housing is widely considered as the best, most cost-effective strategy to addressing both the homeless and mental health crisis.

Speaker, let me be clear: The numbers in this motion are the absolute bare minimum of what is needed in the province of Ontario. These numbers come from An Affordable Housing Plan for Ontario, a joint report in 2018 for the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association and the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada. I've been told by mental health experts that the 30,000 number was literally the bare minimum. That's essentially what this motion is asking the government to do, to provide a floor to address this crisis. Speaker, that's why the budget was so disappointing.

If I could just quote Toronto city councillors. They talked about the fact that, "The city has ... secured nearly 1,250 new supportive housing units" to help address the homeless crisis. Of those, 1,100 are waiting for operating funds from the province.

In my riding of Guelph, we have three projects that if properly funded will end homelessness in Guelph–Wellington. The federal government has provided the funding for the capital, and now we need the province to provide the funding for the operating expenses. As a matter of fact, this is such an exciting project that an unprecedented level of support from all three levels of government in Guelph–Wellington and across three different political parties—all are supporting these projects and asking the provincial government to just step up with the operating funds.

As a matter of fact, one of the projects is an amazing combination of a non-profit association, Kindle Communities, with a for-profit developer, Skyline, who actually donated the land and is donating the building expertise. The federal government is funding the actual capital needed for the project. We just need the province to provide a bit of money for the wraparound supportive mental health and addiction services.

Speaker, I want to close by saying that not only do we have a moral obligation to address this issue, but we have an economic imperative to do it. Every dollar invested in supportive housing creates two and a half times more jobs.

The cost of not addressing housing and the mental health costs associated with that costs the mental health system \$53,000 a year. It's the right thing to do, it's the economic thing to do, and it's the fiscally responsible thing to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Speaker. *Remarks in Oji-Cree.*

It's an honour to rise and speak this morning on the motion put forward by my colleague the MPP from Spadina–Fort York. His motion is to create a homelessness and housing crisis strategy. That is one that is needed across the province. We know that homelessness is a public health crisis.

One of the things that I've learned is that sometimes we call homeless people "street people." One of the things I have done in my work as an MPP is, during the campaign in 2018, I actually travelled with people without homes. I think it's really important to understand their perspective, their understanding of how things work. One of the things I learned is, don't call them "homeless people," because they're people first. "People without homes" is the proper term.

In Kiiwetinoong, one of the things that has happened is it has exposed the inequities and inequalities that are happening under COVID-19. One of them is people ending up homeless. I think my colleague mentioned there were 78 people without homes who passed away in Toronto in 2020. In Sioux Lookout, there were 10 people without homes who died in 2018. There are only 5,000 people there.

Of course, one of the things I did is I did go to Eabametoong, as well, on March 14. One of the things I found out is that there are people living in tents. That homelessness, houselessness, in the northern First Nations impacts and goes into the urban towns, goes into the cities. We have to be able to come up together and work together and address these people without homes.

I am proud to stand in support of this initiative put forward by my colleague for Spadina–Fort York. Kitchi meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate? The member for Davenport.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and good morning. Today, as always, it's a pleasure to rise on behalf of my constituents in the great riding of Davenport to support this motion brought forward by the member from Spadina–Fort York and actually the latest attempt by the official opposition to get this government to act to address the housing crisis that has created so much unnecessary suffering in our province and, certainly, in the city of Toronto.

In Toronto right now, economic upheaval, weak tenant protections and a wave of evictions—we've talked about an eviction blitz—have pushed people out of their homes and onto the streets. A crowded and overburdened shelter system has meant that the number of people living in makeshift encampments for survival is greater than ever. In the absolute absence of provincial leadership, we have

seen—and other members here have mentioned it this morning—community members step in to support their unhoused neighbours, because there are so few options.

0940

This government's inaction is quite literally costing lives in my riding and across the city, and it doesn't need to be this way.

There were no new announcements in the budget that was just presented last week—not one new announcement regarding housing. The FAO, the Financial Accountability Office, which is completely independent, noted that \$189 million had been cut from housing. In fact, this government continues to take credit for what are essentially federal transfers. Consider that for a moment.

What this motion is seeking to do is to get the government of Ontario to acquire emergency shelter space that will ultimately be converted into permanent, supportive housing and, over the next decade, to build at least 69,000 affordable housing units and 30,000 supportive housing units, accompanied by all of the wraparound supports that we know are so essential, like overdose prevention and more.

Madam Speaker, I urge the members opposite to at least begin to make this right by supporting this motion and investing in housing for all.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm honoured to be able to stand before you today to speak to this motion and to thank the member from Spadina–Fort York for bringing this important conversation to the floor this morning.

The crisis that we're all seeing in our communities is continuing to snowball.

In the last week, my office has received three calls from three different constituents who live in three different apartment buildings that are under a renovation.

The affordable housing crisis is skyrocketing. We look at people who are on Ontario Works, and the maximum allowance that they have for shelter is \$390, with a total income of \$733, and yet the average rent in Hamilton for a one-bedroom is \$1,395. That is a 3% increase from last year.

We look at people on Ontario disability—people with disabilities, no fault of their own, just in case they're looking for the bootstrap to pull people up by. A single person on ODSP—their housing allowance for shelter is \$479 a month, and their total income is \$1,086 a month. Again, I'll repeat: The average rent in Hamilton is \$1,395 for a one-bedroom. God forbid you have a child, because if you need a two-bedroom because you have even more than one child—because we know that children are bunking up—it's at \$1,645.

To see no investment in the budget to address these serious issues is only compounding the problem.

I've spent quite a few nights doing homeless walks and talking to people who are sleeping on the streets, offering them blankets and a warm cup of hot chocolate or coffee. They have nowhere to go. They're sent from other municipalities to Hamilton to get housing.

Our housing list continues to grow, and we see this government continue to ignore this. I hope they see the benefits in passing this motion today.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Back to the member for Spadina–Fort York for a two-minute reply.

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the members from York South–Weston, Davenport, Hamilton Mountain and Guelph for your comments today on the motion.

And I want to give a special thanks to the members from Mushkegowuk–James Bay and Kiiwetinoong for reminding us that homelessness is a problem not just in southern Ontario; it particularly affects the fly-in communities in the north. The devastation that the member from Kiiwetinoong was talking about, where 10 people died in a population of 5,000 in one year who were people without homes, is just appalling.

To the government member from Eglinton–Lawrence: You talked about all these mental health supports and the back-to-home plan that this government has. Well, the 30,000 supportive housing units that is in this motion would be a good step in that direction. If you don't put money behind those words, they are meaningless. In fact, they're actually cruel, because it means that people who need those mental health supports will not be getting them.

To the member from Milton: I was afraid of your response, actually, because I have heard this again and again. This government constantly trots out these numbers: “Oh, there's \$118 million here; there's a billion dollars here. We're giving all this money”—but the federal Parliamentary Budget Officer said, in 2019, that you cut \$160 million out of the housing budget, and the government's own public accounts report shows that you cut, last year, \$189 million out of the housing budget. You cannot hide behind numbers.

This is serious. People are out there—they're freezing. I have dealt with two people who had frostbite on their feet who were sleeping in tents this winter. And I'm sorry that I'm getting upset, but one of them, his foot was so black that we were afraid that it was going to be amputated.

We need to take action. This motion is an opportunity to take action. Please, please vote with compassion. Don't hide—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Mr. Glover has moved private members' notice of motion number 148. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

All those opposed to the motion will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the nays have it.

A recorded division being required, the vote on this item of private members' public business will be deferred until the next proceeding of deferred votes.

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Orders of the day.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): No further business. This House stands recessed until 1015.

The House recessed from 0947 to 1015.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Catherine Fife: Over the last year, housing has been top of mind for my constituents. At best, COVID-19 has given us the time to reflect on what matters when it comes to where we live and work. But I've heard from countless constituents who are concerned with the runaway real estate market in Kitchener-Waterloo; for instance, the average price of a home is now \$900,000. All levels of government need to work together on this to ensure that everyone can afford a safe and welcoming home. At its worst, the pandemic has shown us that there are too many people in our province who don't have access to affordable or safe housing.

That's why I was impressed to see the announcement earlier this week for the construction of 41 supportive housing units for women experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The project is a collaboration between the Kitchener-Waterloo YWCA, the city of Kitchener, the region of Waterloo and the federal government. The federal government has provided the funding; the city of Kitchener has provided a \$1 50-year lease to the region and the YWCA, who will ultimately provide the supportive housing units. Elizabeth Clarke, the ED, said, “This project will take a big chunk—almost a third—of women who are on a chronic homeless waiting list.” About 100 women in the region who are without homes are waiting for a place to live, she said. Most of them are living in the YWCA's shelter in downtown Kitchener.

I hope all of us in this House can reflect on the need for housing in our constituency and the value of doing the right thing: prioritizing more affordable housing projects across this province.

PASSOVER

Mrs. Robin Martin: Over the weekend, the Jewish community in Eglinton–Lawrence and across Ontario began the observance of Passover, one of the most significant holidays in the Jewish calendar. Passover commemorates the story of the Israelites' departure from ancient Egypt. To everyone celebrating, I wish you a Chag Pesach Sameach. Happy Passover. In Canada, those celebrating typically hold or attend Seders on the first two nights of the eight days of Passover, surrounded by close friends or extended family. Unfortunately, for the second year in a row, most of those Seders were far smaller than usual, as people opted to gather with their immediate families.

Speaker, I also want to recognize that yesterday was Palm Sunday, the start of the Holy Week for Christians in my riding and across the province. This is the most solemn

week of the church's liturgical year, and much like Passover, it once again looks very different than usual this year because of COVID-19.

On a personal level, I am very grateful that these religious services, rites and ceremonies can proceed this year in all areas of the province, with reduced capacity and enhanced public health measures. While it's not exactly how we're used to celebrating things before the pandemic, it is a hopeful sign that we have come a long way since last March, when we had much more severe public health restrictions in place.

I hope that next year, regardless of which holiday you personally observe or celebrate, we can all once again do so safely and gather, in person, with our families and friends.

HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

Mr. Chris Glover: Toronto, and my riding of Spadina-Fort York in particular, is known for world-famous diversity, culture and a vibrant music and entertainment scene. At the heart of it all are our local restaurants, bars, live music venues and our small businesses.

Unfortunately, instead of fast-tracking COVID-19 testing and the vaccine rollout, this government has been acting as if lockdowns are the primary solution. While announcing these lockdowns, they have failed to provide what we have repeatedly called for: financial support for tenants, for small businesses and for the workers they employ. As a result, in January, Statistics Canada estimated that 25,614 Ontario businesses have been forced to close.

I spoke to Sarah Bailey, who runs a non-profit called the Full Plate that provides support to hospitality workers. She told me that many restaurant workers and bartenders have been unemployed for a full year, and many are facing food insecurity and are forced to sign up for food boxes or grocery gift cards. Their mental health is being affected, and their bank accounts are running dry.

Danielle Bassett, a Toronto chef with 20-plus years in the industry, spent part of her youth living on the streets and is now using donations from shuttered restaurants to help contribute to the social programs she once relied on. She says she has multiple friends in the restaurant sector who committed suicide in the last year because they "lost their careers and businesses that took them decades to build."

1020

This government must provide proper supports such as paid sick days, presumptive coverage for those who contract COVID-19 at the workplace, and rent supports for those whose incomes are affected, like the thousands of restaurant workers are trying to do in my riding.

ABILITIES CENTRE

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm pleased to report that the Abilities Centre in my riding was a recipient of \$4.5 million last week from the Ontario budget. Now, this investment will

help the Abilities Centre serve more people in Durham region, through the expansion of its programs, services and partnerships. This strategic, partnership-based approach will ensure sustainable programs and service delivery, while providing model frameworks to support communities like Whitby and other adjoining municipalities to becoming autonomous in leveraging the values and benefits of accessibility and inclusion.

The Abilities Centre supports the delivery of services across several government-of-Ontario mandates to achieve the priorities of multiple ministries in a common framework, with a focus on COVID-19 response and recovery. I believe that in addition to providing more services and programs to Ontarians and, most importantly, residents in Durham, this investment in the centre will significantly enhance COVID-19 recovery efforts, resulting in sustained impacts in the years to come.

Congratulations to the staff and the board of directors of the Abilities Centre for the tremendous work they're doing in accessibility and inclusion of Durham region residents.

WINDSOR SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA MUSIC EDUCATION PROGRAM

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Speaker, I've told you before about our fantastic symphony orchestra in Windsor. While other symphonies had to lay off their musicians and close their doors during COVID, Windsor seized an opportunity to introduce young people to the magical sounds of the symphony orchestra.

The WSO's associate conductor, Daniel Wiley, developed an education program. It was no easy undertaking, but the symphony's musicians, production team and indeed the entire board of directors got behind the concept. Ten digital education programs were developed for grades K to 6, and another 12 hours of content were created for the senior grades, from 7 to 12. These concerts all followed established board curriculum. The symphony also put together four additional educational videos, and all programs included a virtual classroom visit from conductor Wiley or maestro Robert Franz.

Nearly 70,000 students were educated and entertained, from Windsor to Rainy River and Peterborough. The videos even made their way as far down as Texas. Across 10 school boards and 150 schools, students who otherwise may never have seen an orchestra had an opportunity to engage with classical music in a meaningful way.

COVID placed many restrictions on all of us, but the Windsor symphony found a way to enrich the lives of these students, and indeed their teachers, with this innovative presentation. For that, I say, well done, bravo and many thanks from all of us here in Ontario's provincial Parliament.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I want to take the opportunity this morning to speak about the important issue of homelessness and affordable housing. The global pandemic has

amplified shortfalls in our supply of affordable housing, especially for vulnerable populations. In Ottawa, there are 350 homeless families in motel rooms that cost \$3,000 a month. A federal government-commissioned report says the effect of the pandemic on homelessness in Canada could lead to a rise in homelessness by 10% to 15% in some cities, depending on what happens in the labour market.

Now is the time to look at involving the support of new and non-traditional partners to provide much-needed social services and to integrate affordability in housing developments. To encourage a new approach and ensure a suitable and diverse housing supply, the government needs to step in and take the lead with an aggressive strategy. Private sector organizations such as businesses and investors should care more about housing and the contribution they can make in driving affordable supply.

I've said it before, but I will say it again: In a province as prosperous as Ontario, everyone should have a place to call home. It's crucial that we start working together to implement innovative and sustainable solutions to homelessness before the aftermath of the pandemic forces more Ontarians into difficult circumstances.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Aris Babikian: The residents of Ontario faced a very challenging year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many experienced varieties of hardships. The residents of Scarborough–Agincourt were no exception. Last year, many businesses, seniors, families and non-profit organizations had to endure unprecedented hardships.

COVID also provided us with the opportunity to rediscover ourselves and the resilience of our community. Even though there were many heart-wrenching stories, there were also uplifting accounts of generosity, compassion and thoughtfulness. Regardless of our background, we supported each other in many ways.

I would like to pay tribute to some of the Scarborough–Agincourt unsung heroes, such as Scarborough Health Network doctors, nurses, staff, custodians and volunteers; 42 Division officers; the management and the staff of Carefirst Seniors and Community Services Association; Agincourt Community Services Association; the Salvation Army Agincourt Community Church food bank; Chinese Professionals Association of Canada; North American Muslim Foundation; Senior Persons Living Connected; Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto; Yee Hong Centre for Geriatric Care; Mon Sheong Foundation; Shepherd Village seniors' community; Armenian Relief Society; Golden Maple Leaf Seniors Association; the Cross-Cultural Community Services Association; Scarborough Senior Chinese Association; Centre for Immigrant and Community Services; Hong Fook Mental Health Association; the Confederation of Toronto Chinese Canadian Organizations; the Chinese Community Centre of Ontario; New Immigrants Foundation for Special Needs; Canada Confederation of Fujian Associations; Scarborough Chinese Baptist Church; St. John's Vintage Garden; and last but not least, Villa Elegance.

I am honoured and proud to serve and represent an outstanding group of Scarborough–Agincourt organizations and individuals.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Kevin Yarde: The Premier made an announcement on Friday claiming that the government will build a new hospital in Brampton. When I looked at the 2021 budget, I saw the announcement for what it really is: just another election promise.

Bramptonians have been struggling with a health care crisis since before the pandemic, and the city declared a health care emergency earlier last year. Despite this, the only mention of funding for Brampton's health care crisis was a \$1.5-million planning grant and up to \$18 million to expand Peel Memorial's urgent care centre to 24/7 operations. Brampton needs much more. This extension promised by the Premier on Friday is not sufficient, nor is it a new hospital. Also, it does not start construction until 2023.

What Brampton needs is for Peel Memorial to be converted into a full-fledged hospital, and we need another new stand-alone hospital. For one of the fastest-growing cities, with more than 600,000 people, it is unacceptable that we only have one hospital with an emergency room. Brampton deserves its fair share, and it starts with more investment into our health care system, not more empty election promises like we've had from previous Liberal and Conservative governments.

PARAMEDIC SERVICES

SERVICES AMBULANCIERS

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: In the recently tabled Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy, the government of Ontario has provisioned an absolute game-changer for taking care of our most vulnerable and at-risk seniors in Mississauga Centre.

As a part of the Community Paramedicine for Long-Term Care Program, which commits a new instalment of \$160 million to support the program in 33 communities across Ontario, \$9.75 million in funding is directed to the region of Peel paramedic services. This funding is the next step in revolutionizing care provisions, with a more coordinated, accessible and home-based care model for seniors within reach.

1030

Grâce à cet investissement, les ambulanciers paramédicaux régionaux de Peel et les équipes Santé Ontario collaboreront plus efficacement pour élargir les programmes actuels dont dépendent les personnes âgées en attente de soins de longue durée. Cet engagement de près de 10 millions de dollars se traduira par des soutiens plus adaptés dans un cadre familial confortable pour les aînés, retardant, voire supprimant, le besoin de placement dans des lits de soins de longue durée.

As a result, strains on long-term-care-bed waiting lists will decrease and provide another option for our seniors to get the care that they deserve.

To the men and women in paramedicine who bravely continue to fulfill their duties in Mississauga and across Ontario, as they have throughout this pandemic, we salute you.

GAS THEFT

Mr. Deepak Anand: A rising trend posing a serious threat for consumers and employees at Ontario gas stations is the 100% preventable crime of gas-and-dash thefts. In 2019 alone, there were 37,000 cases, skyrocketing from a mere 9,200 thefts in 2010. That is over 100 cases of gas thefts a day, and rising.

In the past, there are many instances where workers were chasing cars and getting hurt—even lost lives—to avoid docked pay, an unnecessary yet common practice in Ontario. Though they don't have to, these vulnerable workers—many times, some of them are new immigrants—often feel morally obligated to catch these fleeing criminals. This also poses risks to innocent bystanders and adds up work to our police officers.

Mr. Speaker, we have a choice, and we can avoid these risks. My private member's bill, Bill 231, unanimously supported by all members, will decisively address all these issues of community safety by making prepayment at gas stations a requirement. BC and Alberta have already implemented prepayment and have avoided these risks for their residents.

I'd like to thank the Ontario Convenience Stores Association, the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police and all members of this Legislature for supporting Bill 231. Together, let's make our community safer and induce further trust in our system.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I want to thank the members for their eloquent statements this morning and remind them that the standing orders allow us to have 90 seconds for individual statements, and if we could plan that accordingly.

It is now time for oral questions.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question this morning is to the Premier.

When we got back to the Legislature after our winter break in the middle of February, the Premier basically dismissed concerns of the third wave, saying that the numbers were in fact going down. Today, Speaker, the Globe and Mail reports that hospitals are literally making triage plans, including the use of an online calculator to determine which Ontarians are going to get treatment and which ones are not.

The government hasn't listened to the experts, hasn't listened to the warnings from hospitals, and now, they're dragging us into what looks to be a very serious possibility of a devastating third wave. So I guess my question is, after a year, why does the government continue to not listen to the health experts and to the hospital professionals in terms of advice around how to curb this virus?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant and member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you for the question. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, our government has taken prudent, progressive and focused action to protect the health and well-being of Ontarians as we've responded to this unprecedented public health crisis. From the outset of the outbreak, our government has been guided by our world-class health care experts, who have continually advised us on our response and the appropriate steps in taking to battle this virus.

This collaborative effort has allowed our province and our health system to successfully respond to COVID-19 in a number of ways, such as developing a robust testing strategy, regularly testing over 60,000 Ontarians a day, with more than 12 million people tested to date. Our government has also opened 185 assessment centres, 120 community-based testing sites, expanded testing to over 210 pharmacies to ensure everyone has access to testing. Now we're rolling out a comprehensive mass vaccination campaign. We're working and all the time listening to our public health experts.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I want to share with the government just three things that were extremely problematic and continue to be so. One is that the government has ignored advice from all kinds of different place and experts, suggesting that they are going too quickly when it comes to taking away the health measures that will stop the spread. They have failed to support everyday people when it comes to COVID-19. We don't see paid sick days for essential workers, paid sick days for anyone, nor do we see paid time off for people to be able to go get their vaccines. We don't see extra measures in schools that we should have seen. The disastrous rollout of this government's vaccine plan has been very unfair and very confusing.

Speaker, the numbers are climbing. Every day, the numbers are climbing in terms of COVID-19. But it is not too late for this government to curb the third wave. They can do so by implementing some of the things I've just mentioned. Will they do the right thing and implement them?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Our government's top priority is ensuring the health and well-being of all Ontarians. It's important to remember that everyone is still strongly urged to continue to follow all the public health and workplace safety measures, limit trips outside their household and only congregate with groups of people living in their household.

Since the start of the pandemic, our government has been guided by science and data and our team of expert public health professionals who have continually advised us, which is why, after consultations, our government is allowing for the safe resumption of certain activities with public health measures strengthened. It's important to point out that these services and activities still have to adhere to public health guidelines.

We have paid sick days through the federal program, as we've said many times.

The first one million vaccines took 86 days to administer. Since then, in 17 days we've administered a second one million vaccines, so we're ramping up our vaccine rollout and we'll get them to every Ontarian.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier has ignored calls for paid sick days in this province for months and months and months; everybody knows it. And yet, emergency room doctors are actually identifying that a majority of their patients in the ICUs are essential workers who couldn't take time off when they were sick because they couldn't afford to and couldn't take time off to book a vaccination.

Dr. Williams, the government's own Chief Medical Officer of Health, who the Premier says he always listens to, supports paid sick days. Saskatchewan, a Conservative province, has actually implemented paid time off to get vaccines. So why does this government refuse to undertake these very measures? Why do they continue to not understand how important these things are to stopping the spread and taking away the likelihood of a major third wave?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: As the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health just highlighted, of course, there are 20 sick days available to the people of the province of Ontario. What we simply will not do is take the advice of the Leader of the Opposition on this and reduce the sick days to 14 days, like she and her party would like us to do. We think 20 sick days is what is important to people of the province of Ontario. That's why we've worked very closely with our partners at the federal level to ensure that the Safe Restart Agreement that was in place and the over \$1 billion that was a part of that restart agreement were available. As I said, 20 sick days are a part of that. We just simply will not do what the Leader of the Opposition wants and reduce that to 14 sick days. It's just not sufficient.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. I think it's clear that the government's rollout of their vaccination plan has been pretty disastrous. It's really been problematic. It's been unfair, it has been confusing and it's making things worse, frankly.

Dr. Amit Arya says this about where we are right now:

“—Over 400,000 doses are sitting in freezers

“—Many Family Doctors still unable to vaccinate.”

Hot zones are being neglected. “The 3rd wave is here,” Dr. Arya says. “Why have we dropped the ball?”

My question to the government and to the Premier is exactly Dr. Arya's question: Why has the government dropped the ball on the vaccine rollout?

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Eglinton–Lawrence and parliamentary assistant.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you for the question. In fact, our government has done a great vaccine rollout. The provincial vaccine booking system launched on March 15, and now we have administered in Ontario over two million vaccines and over 300,000 second doses. As I said before, that was one million doses within the first 86 days and, 17 days later, we'd administered another million doses.

It's important that the member opposite realizes that any vaccines in freezers—and I think we've administered already 87% of the vaccines that we have, but any vaccines in freezers are actually already allocated to individuals. They are for appointments that have been booked. We don't want people to have to show up for an appointment and find there is no vaccine.

When we have more vaccines from the federal government, more vaccines will be going out quickly. We can easily ramp up to 150,000 and more daily, and we want to do that. We want all Ontarians to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, the Premier and his government like to play the blame game, pointing to Ottawa, but Ontario is fifth when it comes to the per capita vaccination rate in our province.

We know that the rollout has been disastrous, no matter what the member opposite tries to claim. Pharmacies in the GTA were forgotten. They were left off the list in those neighbourhoods that were the hardest hit by COVID-19. It's shameful. In fact, even to this day, when communities identify that they're going into crisis, they can't get an answer from the Ford government. The mayor of Sarnia is ignored. Not only do they not get an answer, but they certainly don't get any vaccines. This is not an indicator of a good rollout, Speaker.

When will the government finally admit that they have a problem here and fix their disastrous vaccine rollout?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. The campaign for our vaccine rollout has been wildly successful. As I indicated, to this point 80% of people over the age of 80 already have a vaccine or have booked for an appointment, and for the group of 70-to-79-year-olds, one third of all Ontarians in that age group have a vaccine. So we're making great strides, and all of this is of course dependent on receiving vaccines.

The AstraZeneca vaccine that we received was 194,500 doses, received from India, which were to expire on April 3. Those vaccines were given out and allocated to various pharmacies—325, I believe—and also to some doctors' offices.

When we have more vaccines, those vaccines will get out to all of the pharmacies. I believe we have now signed up 700 pharmacies, and we're ready to double that as soon as we have the vaccines to put in the pharmacies. We want to get them out there, and we want to vaccinate all Ontarians as quickly as possible.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Oh, the vaccine rollout has been wild, all right. It's been wildly disastrous, Speaker; wildly disastrous.

But you know, it didn't have to be this way. We didn't have to be in a situation where we're headed to more lockdowns, where we're headed to a third wave that could be quite horrifying. We could have had paid sick days in our province. We could have had paid time off for people to go get their vaccines. We could have had smaller class sizes and better protections in schools. We could have had a vaccine rollout that actually targeted those that were most at risk.

We didn't do any of those things in Ontario. Our Premier didn't want to do any of those things in Ontario, but it can still be fixed. So, will he? Will he fix it?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you for the question. Our government has run a very successful vaccine rollout campaign. As I have said, we've launched our online booking system. We've signed up hundreds of thousands of people for appointments. We are getting the vaccines rolled out; 87% of the ones we have already have been administered, and we are doing that by priority group.

The member opposite will know that we managed to vaccinate 90% of all long-term care residents fully, and the numbers in long-term care have shown the results of that. The death rate has declined significantly and almost to a complete stop—which was the vulnerable group that needed the priority vaccinations and got them.

That is how our plan is working. We've moved on to the elderly, who are the most at risk because of age, and we are now moving on to other groups at risk because of age and because of transmission risk. We will get those vaccines out to those people quickly. As soon as we have them, they will go out.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question to the Minister of the Environment. Last week, the Supreme Court made it clear that climate change is real and it's a threat to our humanity if governments don't act. This government wasted \$30 million going to court that should have been spent on building a real plan to fight the climate crisis. We've learned they also hired a climate change denier to provide "expert testimony" and defend the Premier's gas pump stickers that, as you know, Speaker, didn't even stick.

After losing two court battles and millions of dollars wasted, can the minister tell us how much public money went into the pocket of this climate-denying Trump supporter?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: I thank the member opposite for that question. Since day one of being elected as government in 2018, we've worked hard to make life more affordable for families and businesses, while at the same time ensuring that measures are taken to protect the environment, which produced our Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan that not only protects land, air and water, but also focuses in on reducing greenhouse gases to achieve our Paris climate target of 30% emissions below 2005 targets. We're well on our way.

We have a number of initiatives that the member opposite knows we've put forward to reduce emissions, such as our emissions testing to get the heavy-duty truck emissions down. Our Emissions Performance Standards Program, which we're in the middle of implementing, with partnership and approved by the federal government, will ensure that big polluters are held accountable for the pollution they're making. It's a fair and tough policy moving forward.

I look forward to telling the member opposite more about our plan for the environment in the supplemental.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, the government certainly made life better for climate deniers, no question. This government hired Benjamin Zycher for \$111,000. I want to note some of this man's opinions: racist personal attacks on Michelle Obama, Islamophobic hatred against Muslims, going to bat for Donald Trump to deny climate change. He's so discredited that he attacked the Republicans in Congress for quietly acknowledging climate change.

The government's only actions to date on climate change include millions on wasteful court battles that can only be defended by climate change deniers. Why does this government align themselves with climate change deniers time and again, and when will they bring in a green new deal to actually deal with the climate crisis in this province?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks again for that question. Mr. Speaker, that person the member mentioned is probably going to come out against our government as well. We know climate change is real, and we know it's a threat to the people of this province and the country.

What we don't agree with the member opposite on is we have a different way and a plan for dealing with reducing our greenhouse gas emissions which not only keeps life affordable for families, not only allows businesses, small and medium-sized, to stay open and compete, but also balances out with strong environmental protection.

I've already mentioned our emissions reduction standards for industry across this province. We're also coming out with Ontario's first low-carbon hydrogen strategy. I know the member opposite may not be supportive of that, but this is going to be, moving forward, another

alternative to lower greenhouse gases in our communities. Whether it's mixing with natural gas, a new source of low-carbon or zero-carbon-emission vehicles, trains and buses, I'm pretty excited about our hydrogen strategy coming out. This is in addition to the \$20 million we've put towards conserving more land throughout this province and the \$30 million we put towards the wetland restoration in this province.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Mr. Speaker, if you consider the population growth in the GTA we will experience in the coming years, there's little doubt about the need to invest in public transit. We need to get building. But it is not just accommodating this growth; it's also about protecting the economy. This government has critical subway projects under way, all of which will stimulate future growth and job creation.

Residents in Richmond Hill are so excited. They just cannot wait, especially when this month the initial business case for the Yonge North subway extension was released. Could the Minister of Transportation speak about the significance of this news?

1050

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Thank you to the member from Richmond Hill for her question. We are full steam ahead on all of our priority transit projects, because now is not the time for inaction.

Last week, the Minister of Finance spoke about setting the foundations for long-term economic growth, and I couldn't agree more. It has been estimated that every \$100 million invested in public infrastructure supports \$114 million in real GDP. Infrastructure creates jobs. Consider the Yonge North subway expansion, Speaker: The equivalent of 4,300 full-time jobs will be created each year of construction. The IBC shows that almost 50,000 people will be within a 10-minute walk of a station by 2041, unlocking access to employment and housing opportunities. This extension will connect GO and Viva, making it easier and faster for people to get around.

We are working closely with York region and the city of Toronto. I look forward to sharing more in the supplementary.

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

Mrs. Daisy Wai: This is very exciting, Minister. We just cannot wait. This certainly is a compelling case for moving forward with these priority transit projects.

I understand that the federal government has a role to play here, too. In the 2019 federal election, the Prime Minister committed to supporting these projects, yet we haven't seen any money.

Economic recovery is a priority that is national in scope and we need our federal partners at the table with us. Could the minister please provide an update on the status of her discussions with the federal government on the funding of these subway projects?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Thank you again to the member from Richmond Hill for her question. Our four

subway lines are nationally significant and they mark the most ambitious transit expansion plan in Canadian history. These are critical stimulus projects for our economy, and I know that the federal government shares this same view. So I am taking the Prime Minister at his word. We are asking for at least 40% in funding towards the priority subway projects, and a contribution towards an updated Hamilton LRT. This is a continued call not only from Ontario, Speaker, but from our municipal partners as well. We've provided business cases for all five priority projects and we have nominated each of them under the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program.

Speaker, all three levels of government agree on the importance of investing in shovel-ready projects. The federal government is the last piece of the puzzle. We need them to make good on their commitment made in the last federal election.

INDIGENOUS HOUSING

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: My question is to the Premier. The Eabametoong First Nation has one of Ontario's longest boil-water advisories, and it also has a severe housing shortage. Multiple generations live in overcrowded homes without adequate heat and plumbing. Currently, Mr. Speaker, there are 17 people living in tents and shacks in the winter weather. You cannot isolate from COVID-19 in tents. The Eabametoong have so far been able to stop the spread of the virus, but they need resources to stop COVID.

Speaker, when will Ontario stop playing jurisdictional Ping-Pong and address the severe housing shortage in Eabametoong with a real plan to address the crisis?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Government House leader to respond.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, I accept the member's criticism. I understand his knowledge of that area and I wouldn't even begin to pretend that I have the knowledge that he has on that. But it's less about jurisdictional Ping-Pong, Mr. Speaker, than it is about the need to actually work together, not only with the federal government on an issue like this, but also with the affected First Nations. We've seen that whether it is through housing or through the COVID action plan, frankly. There has been a lot of work that has been done, that has been accomplished by working together.

Look, this is an issue that we inherited, and it's not just something that we inherited from the previous government; it's something that has been an issue for many governments, dating back many, many years. I am with the gentleman in suggesting that we have to do a better job working together on this, and it is unacceptable in this day and age. But I say very sincerely to him, we can't not work with our federal partners and with our First Nations on this. The only way we'll solve this is by working across party lines and with all partners at the table.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Back to the Premier: Philip Wapoose and his wife lived in one of the tents I just told

you about. She was in poor health and on dialysis while living in a tent with no proper heat, no running water—no kitchen, no bathroom or toilet. She passed away this winter in these conditions. Why is this acceptable for people in First Nations?

Ontario is a treaty partner with Eabametoong, with Treaty 9. How is it possible to not have a proper place to live and die in? Where is the decency? What will Ontario do to alleviate the housing crisis immediately?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I would ask members to take their seats.

To reply, again the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, I agree with the honourable gentleman. These are issues that have to be tackled in the province of Ontario, in co-operation with our First Nations partners and in co-operation with the federal government. We can't simply work in isolation on these issues. I think the honourable gentleman would agree with us on that. He has spoken often and eloquently about the need for governments to work with First Nations and not dictate to First Nations.

But he's absolutely correct: It is unacceptable in this day and age that we should have boil-water advisories in the province of Ontario. I note that the federal government had promised that that would be a thing of the past. They have made some progress, yes, but they have a long way to go. It is, of course, an issue that we inherited when we took government. But it is not just the fault of the previous Liberal government, it's the fault of many governments. We will continue to work very closely with our partners. We will get the job done. We have to, and I know that the honourable gentleman will hold us accountable to getting that done.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Premier. The Premier has thrown millions of dollars away on lawyers, trying to defend his fringe climate change views. While the majority of world leaders align on the need to take immediate action, he and his government are holding Ontario back from tackling the greatest challenge of our generation. And his government is dangerously out of touch with our new reality.

With a global pandemic under way and worsening effects of climate change, Ontarians need and deserve a government that prioritizes our children's future and recognizes the connection between economic prosperity, health and the environment—not a Premier who fights science and environmental protections to help his friends.

So, Mr. Speaker, I have to ask, through you: Does the Premier even believe in man-made climate change?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the member opposite. As I mentioned in the last response to the opposition, this is a government that believes in climate change. We know it's a threat to the

prosperity of Ontarians and to our future, and that's why we took measures, once we were elected, to come out with a plan that not only fights climate change and deals with having clean, strong environmental protections; we've also taken the measures to balance that out with affordability and economic strength in our province as well.

The member can note, in our Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan, there are numerous projects that we've moved forward on to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. For instance, I mentioned earlier about the new emissions performance standards for heavy-duty vehicles, with our federally approved emissions output pricing that is coming forward. We're working with industry on a made-in-Ontario solution that is going to lower emissions from the big, heavy polluters of this province, but also keep them competitive, keep jobs in Ontario while we work towards our goal of a 30% reduction in GHGs by 2030.

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

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Mr. Stephen Blais: My supplemental is also for the Premier. The money the government has spent on lawyers to fight science and environmental progress could have been put to much better use helping Ontarians.

The Premier has wasted millions pandering to Conservative climate change deniers by cancelling the cap-and-trade program, axing Ontario's Environmental Commissioner, spending \$30 million to fight climate change with the federal government, spending \$231 million to cancel green energy projects and kill jobs. They're selling off the greenbelt and they're bypassing environmental protections through ministerial fiat. The Premier has fined business owners tens of thousands of dollars for refusing to display the government's partisan anti-climate propaganda stickers, and the court has struck it down as being "unconstitutional" and "a misuse of a governing party's legislative power."

Mr. Speaker, I'll ask again: Does the Premier actually believe that climate change is real? And if he does, why does he tolerate members of his own caucus, like the member for Oakville North—Burlington, and other climate change skeptics in his party?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks very much for the question from the member opposite. I'll repeat: This government believes in climate change. We know it's a threat to the prosperity and the safety of Ontarians.

Mr. Speaker, I do have to comment on the member that he made mention of—this is a government that is in current consultations now to expand the greenbelt, one of the largest expansions we'll be undergoing in decades. That member opposite is part of a party that cut up the greenbelt, shrunk up the greenbelt over its term, in 15 years in government. We aren't going to do that. We're going to protect and conserve the greenbelt in this province.

We're also going to invest \$30 million to protect and restore wetlands in the province, something that government and the member opposite didn't do when they were

in office. We also have our \$20-million Greenlands Conservation Partnership program. We're working with the Nature Conservancy of Canada. We are conserving quality productive land in this province for future generations to love and enjoy.

SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Speaker, COVID-19 has hit many Ontarians hard, including our children and youth. Our young ones have been facing additional stress throughout the pandemic, whether with school or mental health or more. We must ensure that these kids are supported throughout the pandemic and beyond, and we must work together across ministries to help these children and youth.

Speaker, can the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services please explain to the House what our government is doing for children across Ontario throughout this pandemic?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant, the member for Ottawa West–Nepean.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Thank you to the member for Richmond Hill. We know that the member from Richmond Hill is a fierce advocate for seniors in her role as the parliamentary assistant, but we here on this side of the House also know that she is a fierce advocate for children, as well.

Speaker, the member is absolutely right: Children and youth in Ontario need to be supported throughout this pandemic and beyond. That's why, thanks to our Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, our government is making historic investments into mental health across the province, including for children and youth. This includes mobile mental health clinics for those in rural, remote communities, like youth who live in northern Ontario.

Through the work of the Minister of Education, we have been working hard to keep schools safe, as well as making the necessary investments to build and upgrade schools. We are also supporting children and youth in residential settings by providing funding for infection and prevention control. This is a cross-government effort. We will continue working to keep our kids safe today and into the—

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

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you very much, PA. Youth and children are the future of Ontario. Yes, we have to take care of them.

I thank you for what we are suggesting; however, I also want to touch on the other area where the children are particularly vulnerable: they who are part of our child welfare system. Statistics have shown that the high school graduation rates for kids in care is only 46%, versus 83% of all youth in the same year. With the changes the pandemic has created, their health and well-being is all the more critical.

Speaker, can the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues share what our government is doing

regarding the child welfare system so that children and youth who have been hit and left by the Liberals and NDP will now have a chance at success?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Thank you to the member again for raising that important question. Speaker, all children and youth in Ontario deserve the same level of care and support no matter their circumstances. This is no different for those who are part of our child welfare system.

The Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues has been hard at work redesigning Ontario's child welfare system in partnership with First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous partners, with the Black and other racialized communities, those with lived experiences, sector leaders and more.

Speaker, the minister earlier this month announced that our government was extending the moratorium so no youth would age out of care until September 30, 2022. She also stated that our government would be developing a new model for youth leaving care so that they feel more prepared as they leave. This model is being developed with those who have lived experience with the system.

We're committed to getting this done right. We're committed to our youth and we're going to keep moving important forward on this important priority.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Gurratan Singh: My question is to the Premier. Brampton is suffering from a health care crisis, but instead of acting now to fix this crisis, last week the Premier made an empty promise to build another hospital in Brampton without a single dollar in the budget or any plan. He was actually called out for this lack of plan and money and came to Brampton last Friday to clarify his position, where he doubled down and admitted that there is no money in this year's budget to build another hospital. Instead, he made an empty election promise to do some work on Peel Memorial in 2023—that's after the next election.

People in Brampton need investment now to fix our health care crisis, not in two years after the next election. That means building another hospital in Brampton. That means investing now to convert Peel Memorial from a health centre into a hospital, and properly funding Peel Memorial.

Why is the Premier using Brampton's health care crisis to make empty election promises?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant and member for Eglinton–Lawrence to reply.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you for the question. Speaker, our government is supporting the transformation of the Peel Memorial Centre for Integrated Health and Wellness in Brampton from a day facility into a new hospital with a 24/7 emergency department. I don't know why the member opposite is using this for political grandstanding, but I'm delighted that we're proceeding with this.

Peel Memorial will provide a range of services. Currently, it provides outpatient services, but this will support the transformation of Peel Memorial into a new

hospital. We're funding the construction of over 250 new beds at the site. We're also providing \$18 million in the 2021-22 budget to expand the urgent care centre to 24/7 operations, paving the way for the emergency department to come as Peel Memorial expands into an in-patient hospital.

This added investment is part of our government's additional funding of \$3 billion in health care infrastructure, which was part of the 2021 budget. We're delighted about this new urgent care centre and emergency department coming to Brampton, and I wish the member opposite would join us and celebrate.

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

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Back to the Premier: Brampton is a city of over 600,000 people, with only one hospital that is chronically overcrowded and underfunded. But instead of working to fix this crisis, the Premier came to Brampton a year before the election to campaign. What was supposed to be an announcement for a new hospital in Brampton looked far more like a pre-election campaign stop, full of fake, empty promises for a new hospital and, in addition, numerous partisan attacks against the NDP.

Bramptonians don't need the Premier to come to our city and to campaign a year before the election. We need him to get to work today to fix our health care crisis.

Will the Premier commit today to investing to fix our health care crisis in this year's budget? That means investing to convert Peel Memorial from a health care centre into a hospital, properly funding Brampton Civic and building another hospital in Brampton?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. I watched the press conference and I thought it was a great announcement. Certainly the local members, the mayor and everybody else in Brampton embraced this new announcement of Peel Memorial Hospital becoming an emergency department and a hospital with in-patient facilities.

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As I said, this is part of our \$3 billion in health care infrastructure that was part of the 2021 budget. These investments will help to ensure that the people of Brampton have access to 24/7 hospital services, including urgent care, complex continuing care, enhanced mental health and rehabilitation for patients and their families.

The people of Brampton deserve this, and this government is going to deliver it to them. It's not politicking. It is what we have planned, and we are delivering it to Brampton.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier. Ontario's ICU admissions are on the rise and hospitals are, once again, dangerously close to being overwhelmed. We're on the verge of enacting a triage protocol that for most of us is unthinkable, and the Premier's priority today is another campaign-style announcement in Niagara. It's as if Friday's shameless political plug on the public dime

wasn't enough. For too long, the Premier has been too focused on too many other things other than the most important ones, like the vaccine rollout.

Today, seniors in Ottawa trying to book their appointments—if they can get through—are getting one in August. It's the same problems we had last week. So up until this point we haven't been able to get vaccines into the right arms or to the right places fast enough.

Speaker, through you: With case counts rising and the third wave ready to slam us, why is the Premier continuing to focus on campaigning?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The response, the member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you, Speaker. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, our government has been working with our hospital partners to create unprecedented capacity and be ready to respond to any scenario, and to ensure that anyone who requires care in a hospital can receive it. We have put an additional \$1.8 billion in the hospital sector for 2021-22, bringing the total additional investments in hospitals since the start of the pandemic to over \$5.1 billion.

Those are a lot of investments, but we've also started running the most successful and, frankly, largest mass vaccination campaign in the province's history. We've been getting the vaccinations out there. As I said earlier in answer to a question, the first one million doses took 86 days; the second, 17 days—one million doses. We've now got two million doses into arms, and 80% of people over the age of 80 have an appointment or have a vaccine already, and for those 70 to 79, one third have been vaccinated. I'd call that—

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

Mr. John Fraser: It took you half a million doses and 60 days to get the 70,000 patients in long-term care a first dose. I don't call that success. I don't think anybody else here does either.

The Premier's own advisers at the science table have continually advised him on the risk of a third wave. The Premier has ignored much of that advice and is now loosening public health restrictions, and now we find ourselves back where we were again, except this time worse.

The head of the Ontario Hospital Association says Ontario is on track to surpass 420 in our ICU units—the peak. It's like we learned nothing from the first wave, or the second wave. And there continues to be no sense of urgency from this government. The vaccine rollout and public health measures require the Premier's fullest attention.

Speaker, through you: When will the Premier stop campaigning and start focusing on the things that are most important to Ontario families?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. The Premier is focused on what matters most to Ontarians; he has been throughout the entire pandemic. He has been in front of Ontarians every day and dealing with the issues at hand. The vaccine

rollout is certainly a very high priority for the Premier, as is ensuring that our health care system continues to provide the care that Ontarians expect and know. Our government's top priority, as we have said all along, is ensuring the health and well-being of all Ontarians.

The member opposite should know that we're still encouraging everyone to follow public health measures and workplace safety measures, limit trips outside their household and not gather with individuals outside of their household in order to stop the spread of COVID-19. We have been working with our public health experts to allow some easing where it makes sense, but we're providing standards to make sure that public health measures are still in place and people are following them.

We think it's very important to help Ontarians get through these few months before the vaccines hopefully get to everybody. We're working hard to make it a livable experience for all of us so we can get to the end of the tunnel and see that light.

BROADBAND ACCESS

Mr. Parm Gill: My question is for the Minister of Infrastructure. Last week, the Minister of Finance delivered a strong budget that will protect the health of people of our province and also our economy. There has been a historic \$1-billion investment into broadband. And now this budget commits an additional \$3 billion to help connect more communities to reliable Internet service.

Of course, I represent Milton. A lot of people may not know, but in a part of my riding, there is a significant rural component—also a rural component of Burlington that I represent. I am honoured to represent each one of my constituents. One of the concerns that I hear each and every day—it's from families, it's from students, it's from small businesses and it's from farmers.

I'm wondering if the Minister of Infrastructure can please elaborate what this commitment means to everyone in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Oakville and parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member from Milton, my Halton colleague, for the question.

Our government's primary focus is to protect every life and every job we possibly can from COVID-19. Without healthy people, we can't have a healthy economy. Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy is the next phase of our response to COVID-19. With our 2021 budget, our action plan now totals some \$51 billion. Part of this investment goes directly to getting more Ontarians connected to the digital economy to ensure that nobody gets left behind.

We know that there are some serious barriers faced by people across this province as they learn and work from home. That's why we've stepped up to the plate to do what the federal government has neglected to do for decade upon decade. We're taking the steps to ensure 100% connectivity, no matter where you live in this great province. From Barrie to Bancroft, Haliburton to Halton,

and Manitoulin to Mississauga, no one will be left out of today's 21st-century digital economy.

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

Mr. Parm Gill: I want to thank my colleague for that answer. This pandemic has shown us exactly why broadband is so important to the people of Ontario. We've heard stories of Ontarians who tried to go online to do simple things like book a vaccine appointment, but because of the poor Internet connection, they're forced to book an appointment through a telephone. This is an important government service Ontarians need and deserve to be able to access barrier-free. That's why I'm thrilled to learn that our government's \$4-billion investment will help connect my community of Milton and the rest of the province.

Can the minister please tell the House what other steps are being taken to ensure that all Ontarians have reliable Internet access, regardless of where they live?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you again for the question to the member. Like the member mentioned earlier, we've all heard the stories and we can count on our fingers the number of times we've experienced dropped calls, spinning wheels as documents download and abrupt video call interruptions because there simply isn't enough bandwidth. These challenges are very real and have, of course, been magnified by the pandemic.

That's why we introduced the Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act, 2021. If passed, this legislation would help connect communities to reliable high-speed Internet sooner by accelerating the deployment of provincially significant broadband infrastructure across Ontario.

Did you know that 700,000 households across Ontario lack reliable high-speed broadband? On this side of the House, we know that 700,000 is 700,000 too many. That's why we're taking action right now. We simply cannot wait for the federal government to step up. We need the support of every member in this House to connect Ontario, and I urge all members opposite to support this bill.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. This weekend, like all weekends, I've heard from hundreds of front-line educators, parents, students, talking again about how the shift to emergency remote learning during the pandemic has been a really rough one for students, for education workers, for their families. Surely what we've learned from this experience is that kids need to be in school, face to face with teachers and education workers, for their mental and emotional health and, frankly, for their academic success as well.

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It came as a real surprise last week when parents and students across Ontario found out that this government is quietly moving forward with a scheme to move more students out of classrooms and online permanently.

After such a difficult year, when so many of our children and youth are struggling, why is the Premier so set on undermining the quality of their education?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we believe that parents deserve a choice. They benefited in September from having an in-class option, which the vast majority of parents exercised, and an online option, which roughly 25% of our collective constituents chose for their own personal circumstance, be it health in their family or the choice of their child learning online and doing well in that forum. We believe in choice. We believe in allowing parents to make that choice.

When it comes to next September, I think we appreciate that the pandemic is not going anywhere, and I think a lesson learned is to be ready and prepared and to think ahead, while preserving the choice parents could retain.

For the vast majority of parents, I don't expect them to enroll their child online; they continue to benefit from the development of learning in class, and that makes a lot of sense to me. But for that minority of parents who prefer it, for the 40% of high school students who maybe want to access a physics class that they cannot access in their small school today, this is an opportunity to diversify course offerings, preserve choice and make sure educational quality is provided online and in class in this province.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Back to the Premier: Families in this province want their kids learning safely in school. But instead of investing to make our schools safer and to protect students and staff from illness, this government has been winding down COVID-19 supports. They are laying off education workers, and they're trying to find a cheaper way to educate our students. This plan takes online learning out of the hands of school boards and siphons it off—precious public dollars going into the hands of for-profits.

And let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, when this government talks about choice, we all know what that means: That is code for privatization in education.

Will the Premier listen to the chorus of parents, educators and school boards who have come out against this plan and scrap it?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: So that parents understand where the opposition parties are at on this: They opposed the choice of online learning that was provided to them in September, meaning, under their plan—the New Democrats and the Liberals—they would not have had the choice this past September to opt in online or to provide their students learning in class. They also would have kept schools closed in 2021. They have consistently been on the wrong side of parent and public opinion when it comes to quality public education.

Our Premier believes in giving parents the choice of publicly funded in-class learning or publicly funded online learning provided by Ontario-certified teachers.

We believe, when it comes to strengthening the ability of families to learn in their own circumstance, respecting the choice parents made by investing \$40 million more in the budget, as we did to improve the infrastructure, to improve connectivity—a historic \$3-billion investment to end the digital divide. These types of investments will ensure that never again will students have to learn at home alone. They will be provided with excellence in learning online and in class.

GOVERNMENT FISCAL POLICIES

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: My question is for the Premier.

During the 2018 campaign, the Premier said that this government was the only fiscally responsible option for voters and that he would fix our fiscal mess and put money back in the pockets of taxpayers.

Last week, this progressive government released its third budget in a row offering no tax relief for individuals or businesses and no plan to balance the budget—instead, sustained deficits of over \$20 billion until 2023-24, deficits until 2029 and with our province's debt-to-gross-domestic-product ratio finally eclipsing 50%.

Can the minister please explain what part of running deficits of over \$20 billion in 2023 and 2024, after pandemic-related spending has ended, does he consider fiscally responsible?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Willowdale and the parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Stan Cho: I appreciate the member highlighting an important issue.

Obviously, this level of spending is not sustainable moving forward, but this government will not make apologies when it comes to the health and safety of the people we serve. Our Premier has been very clear from the outset of this pandemic that he would spare no expense to that end, and this budget is another example: our third phase in our \$51-billion action plan to get us through COVID-19, a measured response—\$16.3 billion into the health care system, because there is no economy without healthy people. We will not cease. We will not relent on those investments into health care. We know that these are investments to fix a fragmented and disjointed health care system. Oftentimes, out of crisis can come opportunity, and this move of revolutionizing and modernizing the health care system is an example of that. Speaker, we will continue to prioritize the health and safety of all Ontarians through the pandemic and beyond.

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

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Well, it remains that the most recent budget is evidence of yet more promises made and more promises broken by this progressive government. Another promise recently made, to add to a long list of others, came on March 17. The Premier posted on social media that once the pandemic is over, “we’re going to ramp up this economy, the likes of which this province has never seen. We’re going to create more jobs,

more opportunities ... get businesses going until they can thrive and prosper and grow.” Yet in the government’s budget, they predict that in 2023 and 2024, the two fiscal years following the pandemic, government revenues will only grow by 2%.

Can the minister explain why, if this government will be implementing pro-growth strategies, they expect such a paltry growth of Ontario’s economy after the pandemic?

Mr. Stan Cho: I know that when you’re protecting the health and safety of Ontarians, there’s no price tag you can put on accomplishing that goal, of course. There are some who believe that the path back to balance involves austerity measures and cuts to programs and services, and there are others who believe that you need to increase taxes on individuals and small businesses. But this government believes that that’s a false choice, that there is a third path, that we can invest and bet on the people of this province, and that’s exactly what we’re doing.

We know the growth will return to Ontario. We saw that in our first two and a half years in government, when we saw record job growth, leading not just the country but North America in terms of increasing those revenues to the province. We’re modernizing government, improving the programs and services that we offer. I’m very optimistic about the future that we have, and we will continue to be transparent with the people of this province. That’s why we are tabling this budget, hot off the heels of the last one in November. We will continue to hit our fiscal reporting targets until we are out of government, Speaker, and I hope for the sake of the people of this province that is a very long time from now.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: My question is for the Premier. Teachers have done an outstanding job in the face of this year’s challenges, and students have shown such resilience. Yet last week the government announced their cuts to education, laying off thousands of people, and we are now in the third wave.

Kim, an educator in my riding, told me that all her classes are currently above the cap, packed with so many students she can’t even walk between the desks. She says just the other day, 96 jobs were left unfilled across the board in London. The 1.5 extra educators that the minister claims are clearly not enough, yet this government is plowing ahead, regressing to earlier, merciless cuts.

Ryan tells me that educators have done everything they can to make education work for kids yet are “being lambasted by our own minister”: no respect, no appreciation. Teachers have been promising students better days ahead and that things will get better, but gutting education and making online learning permanent devastates children’s and parents’ mental health.

Why does this government keep trying to balance the budget on the backs of students?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: For precisely 12 months during the pandemic, the one constant has been the refrain from the members opposite suggesting that this government has not invested or hired a solitary new person—teacher, custodian, EA—to support safe schools. For the past week, given the political opportunism now, there is \$1.6 billion of critical supports that must be renewed. I guess I ask the question, which one is it? I mean, for a year, we didn’t invest; today, these investments were so consequential to the safety of classes they have to be renewed.

What we’ve done in our budget is provided a \$700-million net year-over-year increase, a \$40-million enhancement to our Internet as well as our remote learning connectivity, \$100 million to the largest summer learning program to mitigate learning loss in Ontario history; and we have the Grants for Student Needs, the upcoming principal vehicle funding to school boards, which will be released in the month of April that will continue to demonstrate a focus on mental health, on special education, on mathematics and STEM learning so that all students can succeed next year.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Back to the Premier: Through you, Speaker, earlier the minister talked about how parents want choice, but e-learning has always been a choice. I would have really appreciated hearing the minister show some recognition for the work of educators and show them some respect.

These cuts could not have come at a worse time. Students in London need a government that looks forward and invests in their education instead of handing down merciless cuts. Despite best efforts, many children have fallen behind. Maintaining an investment in education would help kids catch up.

1130

Alia, another educator in my riding, tells me that the so-called training for online learning was, “Here’s your login. Go make it work ... tomorrow.” Alia said many teachers even had to supply their own technology. So, here we are, families and teachers propping up the education system because of the government’s neglect.

To this day, I haven’t spoken with any student or educator who has seen a public health nurse in school, despite the minister’s promises.

Speaker, the Liberals underfunded our education system for years. Why, during a pandemic, is this Conservative government doing more of the same?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, as one parent said in a recent media story, “Different kids have different needs. They have different ways of learning, and I think definitely online school caters to a lot of them.” Another parent said, “I do think there needs to be change in our education system, and this could be one of the ways it could be better.”

At the end of the day, we are ensuring students have a choice when it comes to learning online and in class. We are still consulting on the matter, as has been noted clearly,

but I think we believe as a default that giving parents, Ontario moms and dads, the option to opt into online learning—or simply to never opt in if they oppose it outright or it doesn't work for their kids. The fact is, Speaker, this choice in September uniquely positioned Ontario to lead the nation by providing safe learning when we had to close schools as a consequence of advice by the Chief Medical Officer of Health in our public health environment. We had a backstop that kept our kids learning. That was essential, and we'll continue to improve it, to strengthen it and provide the choice to parents going forward.

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Mr. Mike Schreiner: My question is to the Premier. Ontario's housing affordability crisis has worsened during COVID. Lack of affordable housing affects everyone, but it affects the most vulnerable the hardest, increasing homelessness in tent cities. Many people experiencing homelessness are also facing mental health and addiction challenges. They need investments in supportive housing that include wraparound mental health and addiction services.

The federal government is supporting housing projects, but we need the province to step up with the funding for mental health supports. Speaker, it seems like the affordable housing chapter of the budget was forgotten at the printer. Since supportive housing is essential to ending homelessness, and a vital part of any mental health and addiction strategy, will the Premier commit today to provide immediate funding for supportive housing?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The response? The member for Milton and parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, our government believes everyone deserves a place to call home, and supportive housing is a key to helping address homelessness. That's why we are investing over \$2.2 billion in supportive housing every year. In 2021 alone, our government has allocated just the city of Toronto with \$489 million in various housing and homelessness funding. However, under the National Housing Strategy, Ontario currently receives 33% of available funding, despite having 44% of the Canadian households in core housing needs, representing a funding shortfall of \$490 million.

We will continue to work with all levels of government to create and sustain much-needed affordable housing units, but Ontario needs its fair share of the National Housing Strategy funding.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Ottawa South has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question this morning concerning vaccine rollout and capacity. This matter will be debated tomorrow, March 30, 2021, following private members' public business.

DEFERRED VOTES

HOMELESSNESS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We now have a deferred vote on private members' notice of motion number 148, standing in the name of Mr. Glover. The bells will now ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes. I'll ask the Clerks to prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1135 to 1205.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote on private members' notice of motion number 148 has been held.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 24; the nays are 44.

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

Motion negatived.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There being no further business at this time, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1206 to 1300.

PETITIONS

HEALTH PROTECTION LEGISLATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank people from, really, all over, but specifically from a special pharmacy called Seasons Pharmacy and Culinaria. It goes as follows:

“Temptation Be Gone...;

“Since the global pandemic began, lines at the cash register have gotten longer, as have the waits;

“Whereas marketers know that strategically placing high fat, sugar and sodium foods in and around those lineups pays off in higher sales;

“Whereas there are serious health implication from the chronic consumption of ultra-processed foods, which are high in sugar, fat and salt;

“Whereas the Canadian Cancer Society says that 40% of” all “cancer could be prevented through healthy living and policies that” promote “the health of Ontarians;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To immediately implement Bill 263, Temptation Be Gone Act, to help promote good health for the people of Ontario.”

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

LANGUE ET CULTURE FRANÇAISES

M. Guy Bourgouin: J'ai une pétition intitulée « Jour de la bataille aux épingles à chapeau proclamé en Ontario.

« À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Alors que l'Ontario reconnaît les droits linguistiques des Franco-Ontariens;

« Alors que la bataille aux épingles à chapeau du 7 janvier 1916 est un chapitre essentiel dans l'histoire de la francophonie ontarienne;

« Alors que la bataille aux épingles à chapeau est un symbole durable de la lutte des droits linguistiques des Franco-Ontariens et des Franco-Ontariennes;

« Nous, soussignés, pétitionnons l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario pour qu'elle s'assure que le 7 janvier de chaque année soit proclamé le Jour de la bataille aux épingles à chapeau. »

Je suis prêt à signer la pétition et je l'envoie à la table.

CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition signed by residents of London West called "Support Conservation Authorities." It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's 36 conservation authorities have developed a deep understanding of local ecosystems and have implemented a range of non-mandatory programs to best protect them; and

"Whereas these non-mandatory programs include water quality monitoring and improvement, tree planting and woodlot management, curriculum-based environmental education, trail development and outdoor recreation, support for local environmental initiatives and more; and

"Whereas it is unnecessary and prohibitive to require conservation authorities to secure MOUs with every municipality in their watershed in order to continue non-mandatory programs; and

"Whereas we are deeply concerned that stopping non-mandatory programs will adversely affect the health of our environment;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the continued delivery of the full range of programs and services that have been developed by conservation authorities, including programs and services that are not mandated by the province."

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

ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank Denise Sandul who collected these petitions for her son, Myles Keaney, who died from an opioid overdose.

"Whereas Ontario is expecting more than 2,200 opioid-related deaths in 2020;

"Whereas opioid-related deaths are up 25% in northern Ontario compared to 2019;

"Whereas death rates in northern Ontario are almost double what they are in southern Ontario;

"Whereas northern Ontario has fewer health resources to handle the opioid crisis than southern Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to declare the opioid crisis a public health emergency in northern Ontario and commit to funding local evidence-based initiatives such as harm reduction strategies,

awareness programs, anti-stigma training, residential treatment, and overdose prevention services, including a supervised consumption site in Greater Sudbury."

I agree with this petition, I'll affix my signature and give it to the Clerk.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Lindsay Fournier from Coniston in my riding for these petitions. It reads as follows:

"Ban Retirement Home PPE Charges....

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

"Whereas these businesses have a responsibility to provide personal protective equipment"—better known as PPE—"to their employees; and

"Whereas many retirement homes are adding PPE charges to the residents' monthly bill, but the PPE 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 PPE, to retirement home residents."

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

ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank Kayla Kalijarvi for collecting these petitions on behalf of Myles Keaney, who died from an opioid overdose in Sudbury.

"Whereas Ontario is expecting more than 2,200 opioid-related deaths in 2020;

"Whereas opioid-related deaths are up 25% in northern Ontario compared to 2019;

"Whereas death rates in northern Ontario are almost double what they are in southern Ontario;

"Whereas northern Ontario has fewer health resources to handle the opioid crisis than southern Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to declare the opioid crisis a public health emergency in northern Ontario and commit to funding local evidence-based initiatives such as harm reduction strategies, awareness programs, anti-stigma training, residential treatment, and overdose prevention services, including a supervised consumption site in Greater Sudbury."

I agree with this petition, I'll affix my signature and provide it to the Clerk.

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'd like to thank the grade 7 students from a Durham District School Board virtual class, led by Alison Ellwood, who sent me this petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the city of Pickering wants to develop a warehouse and parking lot on a protected wetland in Pickering; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry designated this wetland provincially significant and therefore the TRCA would not allow it to be zoned for this type of development; and

"Whereas the city of Pickering, region of Durham and the provincial government avoided consultation by using a minister's zoning order (MZO) to approve the development; and

"Whereas wetlands protect our homes, businesses, roads and infrastructure from flooding and provide a natural filter for our drinking water free of charge; and

"Whereas wetlands are important habitat for plants and animals including migratory birds, endangered species, and native plants; and

"Whereas this is part of the territory of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, who have not been consulted as part of their treaty rights; and

"Whereas there are three other locations proposed by the TRCA where the warehouse and parking lot can be built that won't have such a negative impact on this important watershed;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to revoke the MZO and stop the warehouse development on provincially significant Duffins Creek wetland."

I support this petition and will send it to the table.

1310

OPPOSITION DAY

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I move the following opposition day motion:

Whereas on March 30, 2020, Premier Ford announced an iron ring around Ontario's long-term-care homes to protect vulnerable seniors from COVID-19; and

Whereas decades of underfunding and neglect by Liberal and Conservative governments left long-term-care staff and residents susceptible to the virus, and more than half of all of Ontario's COVID-19 deaths—3,764 as of March 22, 2021—have happened in the province's long-term-care homes; and

Whereas statistics show that there were more COVID-19-related deaths in long-term-care facilities in the second wave than in the first wave, long after Premier Ford's promise of an iron ring around long-term care;

Therefore, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls on the Ford government to issue a formal apology to long-term-care residents, workers and their families for

breaking its promise of an iron ring of protection around long-term care and for its failure to adequately protect residents and staff, and to declare March 30 of each year as a provincial day of mourning for the victims of COVID-19 in Ontario's long-term-care homes.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day number 3. I will recognize her to lead off the debate.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, thanks very much, Speaker. I have to say, it gives me no pleasure to have to have this conversation yet again, but it is important. It is important that we provide the people of Ontario with an acknowledgement of the suffering that people faced throughout the first two waves of COVID-19.

Tomorrow marks, actually, the first time that Premier Ford made the promise around the iron ring that was supposed to be in place for residents in long-term care. In fact, it was March 30, 2020, when Premier Ford said this: "We need to put an iron ring around our seniors and other vulnerable populations, we need to protect them." I would agree; the government needed to do that.

In fact, I can remember watching a particularly horrendous news report where people were dying—I can't recall which particular home it was because, unfortunately, there were many—where there were people with signs that said, "Where is our government?" They were begging for leadership. They were begging for help for their loved ones in long-term care. People who had never protested ever before were on the lawns of long-term-care homes. Yes, they were on the lawns sometimes to try to connect with their loved ones, but often, they were on the lawns protesting the horrendous lack of attention of this government to the pain and suffering that their loved ones were experiencing in long-term care.

On April 15, 2020, Premier Ford said this: "We are fortifying"—pretending that it was already there, and now fortifying, apparently. "We are fortifying an iron ring of protection around our most vulnerable and the people who care for them. Our new, three-point plan will strengthen our existing measures so that Ontarians remain best protected."

Speaker, it never happened. The iron ring never arrived. People in long-term care were left in horrendous, horrific circumstances as their loved ones watched and as workers tried to do everything they could to protect these most vulnerable people, these most vulnerable family members and loved ones in our communities. I can't for the life of me understand how anybody on the government side can live with themselves knowing what was going on.

We watched as temporary workers moved from home to home, unknowingly carrying COVID-19 with them. We watched as workers in home after home after home begged the government for more PPE. In fact, we stood in this Legislature day after day, telling the government that front-line PSWs didn't have the PPE they needed to stay safe and to protect the folks that they were looking after in long-term care from the spread of the virus. And every time, the government got up and claimed that everybody

had all the PPE that they needed, and it was not the case, Speaker. It was not the case.

There were no infection prevention and control measures put in place to prevent the second wave from being worse than the first. In fact, all summer long, while our Premier was on a campaign shtick—kind of like what he's doing again right now—as he was off campaigning, handing out cheques, smiling for the cameras, what the government wasn't doing was putting infection prevention and control measures in each and every home. What they weren't doing was hiring the thousands of PSWs who were necessary to prevent the second wave from becoming worse than the first. What they weren't doing was showing PSWs how much they matter by permanently increasing their wages and by permanently making sure that they had full-time work instead of having to cobble together several jobs. What they weren't doing was protecting our seniors in long-term care. They simply washed their hands of it, and almost 4,000 people lost their lives.

Staffing levels were so low that the Canadian Armed Forces reported that seniors were dying of thirst, left in soiled diapers for hours or days. In fact, here's what the soldiers witnessed: residents left in soiled diapers; roaches, ants; rotten food; significant gross fecal contamination in numerous patient rooms; inadequate dosing intervals for medications for palliative patients. Some workers wore the same PPE for hours while moving between patient rooms. Inappropriate meals were fed to residents with swallowing difficulties. Linen shortages led to residents sleeping on beds with no linen, leading to increased skin breakdowns. These are just some of the horrifying things that the Canadian Armed Forces unveiled in their report. The government did nothing, and then we had a second wave which was worse than the first.

It is unbelievable what happened here in Ontario—that the government had the ability, the access to the resources necessary to prevent this from happening in the first place, and certainly to stop it from happening a second time, and they didn't. They didn't want to spend the money. They didn't want to spend the money to save people's lives, to give people dignity, to give family members the peace of mind they needed, to provide workers with the tools that they required to do what was necessary to keep the residents safe.

Speaker, I want to quote a gentleman I met Friday. His name is Fred Cramer. Fred's mother, Ruth, died of COVID-19 on April 19, 2020—this would be right after the Premier was claiming that he put an iron ring around long-term care, which we all know never existed. "My mother always said, 'Don't put me in a nursing home, I will not go.' After reading the 'gut-wrenching' military report of May 2020, I feel her fears came true." That's something that Fred had to acknowledge, and it's really something that has traumatized him. He's traumatized because he had to make the decision, and he lost his mother to COVID-19 in April of last year.

The motion says "3,764 as of March 22," which is the day we filed our opposition day motion; as of yesterday, it was 3,892 precious lives lost in long-term care—a complete and utter tragedy.

As I said, shamefully, the second wave was worse than the first. People died alone. People died in pain, without families at their side, without anybody to say goodbye.

The government didn't bother to put an iron ring around long-term care; they never did. But what they did bother to do was to protect themselves and the private operators of long-term care from lawsuits. That's what they did. That was a priority for the government—to ram legislation through this Legislature to protect themselves and to protect the private operators, but nothing to give families the answers, the justice they deserve. That's the priority of this government: saving its own bacon.

1320

I've got some more stories, Speaker, because this really is a human tragedy, and it's real people's real experiences that I think we need to think about as we ask the members of this Legislative Assembly to have the government apologize and also put a day of mourning in place.

We all know about Orchard Villa in Pickering, the tragedies that unfolded there. On April 8, nine days after the Premier first declared that there was an iron ring around long-term care, a woman named Cathy Parkes found out that residents were still eating together in the dining room and there was no PPE available for staff. On April 14, her father, Paul, tested positive for COVID-19. She was never told that he tested positive, and her father died the next day, April 15.

Marie Tripp—Orchard Villa, again—her mother, Mary, tested positive for COVID-19 on April 17 and passed away three days later on April 20, 2020. The home did not even call the family to alert them that their loved one had tested positive for COVID-19. They only found out when a nurse mistakenly let the cat out of the bag.

Ballycliffe long-term care home in Ajax: In April, a couple of weeks after the Premier declared an iron ring around long-term care, Matt Smith Johnson's mother was told that, despite a case amongst staff, the home was only doing simple temperature and travel tests of staff. His grandfather died of COVID-19 before the end of that month.

Speaker, many people lost their lives. Many family members saw traumas that they shouldn't have had to see, and the traumas were not only experienced by the residents and by the family members. There's also lots of staff whose lives have changed forever as a result of seeing the horrors that they had to see in long-term care.

My colleague Monique Taylor, MPP for Hamilton Mountain, received a bunch of letters from front-line workers in long-term care at Grace Villa, one of the worst homes in our community:

"Residents lying on bare mattresses soaked with urine. Others waiting 30 minutes for help when choking. Deaths that could have been prevented with better hydration....

"'War zone' conditions" is what the staff described inside of Grace Villa—"44 of the ... 156 residents" died "in less than two months....

"Residents would be falling on (the) floor or choking, and we would have to wait 30 minutes to enter the room while we waited for gowns to be delivered'....

“Another letter described workers seeing nine scarcely clad residents lying in dirty or soaked briefs on bare mattresses ‘saturated’ with urine and vomit. ‘It was obvious that many of them were suffering with fevers,’ the letter said.

“‘Basic hydration could have prevented some of those deaths. But nobody would listen,’ it added. ‘We were forced to neglect our residents’....

“A third letter described the effect on staff. ‘The images of residents, some hanging out of beds moaning, vomiting, crying ... is all too much to bear,’ it read. ‘I still can’t sleep at night.’”

This is what the Ford government allowed to happen during COVID-19. This is the government that forgot to include long-term care in the planning for COVID-19. This is the government that, to this day, will not acknowledge that their claim of an iron ring around long-term care never materialized.

And they had no intention of even putting an iron ring around. How do we know that? Because they actually commissioned a bunch of folks to look at their response to COVID-19, and the commission heard testimony that in fact solutions were being brought to the government, but the government didn’t want to spend the money. In black and white, that’s what testimony to the commission says: The government didn’t want to spend the money.

Speaker, what is the value of a life of a senior, of a vulnerable person in this province? Apparently, the Ford government doesn’t put very much at all in terms of a value on those lives.

“A number of proposals went to the ministry about what could be done; and all of them were deemed by the ministry to be too expensive”—testimony from the commission.

A proposal went in from hospitals in Toronto for mechanisms to provide support for long-term care. I think it went to the Ministry of Health and was rejected.

Dr. Brown also put forward a number of proposals for trying to empty out the four-bed rooms—something that my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane had been advocating for for some time—so that we didn’t have three or four residents in a room throughout the second wave. It was too much money, too expensive.

It goes on to say, from this particular witness: “But I think the sense among my ... colleagues was that there probably wasn’t much point in trying to push those forward”—other ideas—“because there was no hope that anything that cost that amount of money was going to be undertaken.” And yet, the minister says, “We have been working with Public Health Ontario, Ontario Health and medical officers of health within the public health units, looking at measures we can take to address the ward rooms using every possible measure”—it wasn’t the case. They were given the solutions, but they didn’t want to spend the money, and that is shameful.

That is why, Speaker, we are here today, debating this motion. That is why I call on every member of this Legislature to do the right thing here. Tell the cabinet, tell the Premier that he needs to apologize. He needs to

acknowledge that there was no iron ring. And that on March 30, for each and every year going forward, we take the time to mourn the loss—the loss of life, the loss of piece of mind, the loss of dignity, the loss of our treasured senior citizens in long-term care and those most vulnerable amongst us.

Let me just end by saying this: The government had an opportunity last week to show that they actually were going to make a difference with long-term care, that they were actually going to fix the problems in long-term care. But the budget didn’t have any money for resident quality inspections, to try to keep accountability in those homes; no money at all for PSW permanent wage increases; no money to ensure that full-time work is provided to every PSW; no money to remove for-profit operators from the long-term-care system.

Speaker, I have hope for the future, because I know that when the NDP forms government, we will fix long-term care, we’ll get the profits out, we’ll make it a career for PSWs, and we’ll give peace of mind to residents and family members, because no province in this country should ever have a system that operates in such a despicable way, where the pain and the anguish is something that’s just accepted, and where we simply walk away from people who are needing us the most in terms of support and well-being.

Speaker, I ask everybody in this Legislature to do the right thing and support this motion.

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

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I’m pleased to rise and talk on this important issue today. In any discussion of long-term care, it is important that we keep the focus on the most important part of long-term care, and that is the residents. Ontarians deserve to be able to have confidence that they can receive the care they need when and where they need it. They deserve to know that they will receive that care in a safe, comfortable and dignified environment. They deserve to know that the care they receive is not just for their physical needs—that it treats them as a whole person, with mental and spiritual needs. This always has to be the cornerstone of our approach: If long-term care is not fulfilling the needs of residents, it is not fulfilling its purpose. It is that simple.

1330

The Minister of Long-Term Care has spoken on these themes often, and she has been putting in the work, since day one, on our government’s agenda to modernize long-term care. Thank you to the minister for her passion and her dedication for seniors.

Our government has been focused on repairing long-term care since before the COVID-19 pandemic, and the pandemic just underlined the importance of our efforts. The pandemic has come at a devastating cost in long-term care. It is crucial that we not allow the lives of those we lost to be lost in vain. We must make sure that this tragedy never happens again. As a province, we must ensure we come out of this better and stronger than we were before. There is nowhere that is more important than long-term-

care homes. That is the most important way we can commemorate those we lost.

Mr. Speaker, a monument or a day of mourning would be meaningless if we don't learn from what happened and build a better, stronger long-term-care system. Our government is focused on doing just that. While dealing with the crisis during the pandemic, the government has also been making key plans and investments for the future. While it was already clear that staffing in long-term care needed to change, the pandemic underlined it. The average long-term-care resident is now older and frailer than in the past. The vast majority of them have some form of dementia. There is a need for more staff, and we need to be sure that the sector can recruit and retain the right people for the job.

Speaker, I could tell my personal story of my mother's time with dementia, the last three years in palliative care. These are things that are near and dearest to my heart.

Through our government's staffing plan, A Better Place to Live, a Better Place to Work, our government is clearly addressing many of the problems facing the sector and presenting a plan forward. In the 2020 budget, we committed to achieving a standard of an average of four hours of direct care per resident per day over four years. After decades, through successive governments, this is a policy whose time has come. It is being achieved by hard work with sector partners, rigorous benchmarks, and we are backing it up with sustained, unprecedented investment. To ensure we reach that level, budget 2021 commits \$4.9 billion over four years. That standard, which will make Ontario the leader in Canada, will require the education and training of new professionals to fill more than 27,000 full-time equivalent jobs, which will be needed to reach this standard. The work is already under way training the PSWs, registered nurses and registered practical nurses Ontario will need.

Mr. Speaker, just two weeks ago, our government launched a staffing study accelerator group to help implement what will be one of the largest recruitment and training drives in health care in the province's history. This group will help to increase the long-term-care staffing supply by advising us on how to best expand and accelerate education and training for personal support workers, registered practical nurses and registered nurses. It began meeting this month. That's real progress.

Programs like pandemic pay and the temporary wage enhancement have helped recruit new PSWs and keep them in the sector. Pandemic pay alone attracted over 8,600 workers to the long-term-care sector. Speaker, two weeks ago, the government also announced the continuation of the temporary wage enhancement. Roughly 50,000 staff in long-term care will continue to receive an increase of \$3 per hour until June 30. That comes with an increased investment of \$239 million.

Building on these, the government has announced three programs that will train over 9,000 new PSWs through partnerships with both public colleges and private career colleges. The first of these to be announced is a pilot program partnering with Willis College to train 300 new

personal support workers in the Ottawa area. Following a unique delivery model, this program will pair four days of academic instruction with one day of volunteer experience at a long-term-care home per week. The second invests \$4 million in nine projects across the province to train 373 personal support workers.

These programs are not training huge numbers, as members opposite have noted through their selective outrage, but these projects add up, and every community where these are focused must be happy.

The third program announced is a big number. Our government is investing over \$115 million to train up to 8,200 new personal support workers for high-demand jobs in Ontario's health and long-term-care sectors. In collaboration with Colleges Ontario, all 24 publicly assisted colleges will offer this innovative, fully funded program starting in April 2021.

These are all steps moving forward with our government's long-term-care staffing plan, which is one of the largest PSW recruitment and training drives in the province's history. There's still more to be done, and that work will continue.

The staffing plan is more than just throwing money at a problem. It contains paths forward in creating new educational pathways and bolstering existing ones, supporting ongoing staff development, improving working conditions, providing effective and accountable leadership, and measuring effectiveness. All of these need to happen at once to make long-term care a better place to live and a better place to work.

Madam Speaker, we are building on and supplementing our previous efforts. Budget 2021 is a major step forward, with unprecedented investments. The budget invests \$246 million to improve living conditions in long-term-care homes, for items like air conditioning. And to protect our loved ones in long-term care, we are investing an additional \$650 million in 2021-22, bringing the total resources invested since the start of the pandemic to over \$2 billion.

The reactions to that support from the sector are clear. The president of OPSEU called our initiatives "great news."

AdvantAge, which represents many non-profit and municipal long-term-care operators, said, "We are very appreciative of the funding in the budget to get through the immediate pressures brought on by COVID, as well as major investments that will continue the process of rebuilding and transforming long-term care in Ontario for current and future seniors."

The Ontario Long Term Care Association, which represents operators of all types, said, "The commitments in Ontario budget 2021 are the most significant investments in decades in Ontario's long-term-care sector and they will make a meaningful difference in the lives of Ontario's seniors now and in the future.

"The commitments are a critical step forward in addressing the structural and systemic root causes that resulted in devastating and tragic losses through the COVID-19 pandemic. We are grateful to the government for their dedicated efforts to support change."

Our investments in long-term care represent more than 9.6 billion in new dollars being flowed to the sector since we formed government.

Madam Speaker, we had committed \$1.75 billion to build 30,000 new spaces over 10 years. Knowing that these projects take years, our government created the modernized funding model that breaks down historical barriers to the building of new homes. And this month, we supplemented that with \$933 million in 80 new long-term-care projects, which will lead to thousands of additional new and upgraded long-term-care spaces across the province. Those 80 projects will add 7,510 new spaces and upgrade 4,197 spaces.

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The priorities for those projects were:

- upgrading older homes in response to lessons learned around improved infection prevention and control measures, particularly the elimination of three- and four-bed ward rooms;

- adding spaces to areas where there are high needs;

- addressing the growing needs of diverse groups, including francophone and Indigenous communities; and

- promoting campuses of care to better address the specialized care needs of residents.

Those are all very important. The demand for culturally appropriate care has grown, and I hear it in my community and through the residents.

Most importantly, our government is doing the work to eliminate the ward rooms, which was shown to be a major driving factor in the transmission and the severity of COVID-19 outbreaks. Ward rooms have made this difficult. Some homes are built to design standards from the 1970s. We must continue that work. Long-term-care spaces need to be built to modern design standards.

With these newly announced projects, Ontario now has 20,161 new spaces and 15,918 existing spaces being upgraded in the development pipeline. These latest projects—building new beds and upgrading existing ones—in Markham and in York region alone will create more than 3,000 net new spaces in long-term care.

Let's put that in context for a minute. From 2011 to 2018, the previous government created 611 spaces across the entire province. Our government is creating nearly five times that number in York region alone. That is 3,000 new, modernized spaces for our loved ones to call home in York region. I know my constituents are glad to see these projects going forward. The importance of that cannot be understated.

Given all that we have seen during the past year, it is clear that we need to repair and rebuild long-term care. We saw the position the previous government, propped up by the opposition, left us in and the consequences that had, and we know we must do better. Unlike the opposition, our government has a plan to address the long-standing issues in long-term care, issues like staffing, building new spaces to shorten the wait-list that currently has 40,000 people on it and upgrade existing ones to eliminate ward rooms. We are moving forward with that plan; that's what we need to do.

As a society, we need to build a resident-centred long-term-care system that has the capacity for everyone who needs it; that can provide its residents with a safe, comfortable and dignified environment; that has the staff to make that happen. That is how we must come out of this crisis: better and stronger. I would urge members opposite to join us and to do it together. We owe that to our constituents who sent us here, to all Ontarians, and especially to long-term-care residents.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Jill Andrew: Some 3,743 seniors have died from COVID-19. Eleven front-line health care workers and staff have died from COVID-19. And countless families have been broken. They've been fractured and will never be back together again. Where was the Conservatives' iron ring? It wasn't there; it just wasn't there. Over half of the deaths have been in long-term care.

In my community, one of our homes, Meighen Manor, lost over a quarter of its residents. Castleview Wychwood, Cedarvale and Hellenic Care home also lost residents. Our front-line health care workers, nurses, PSWs, staff have been strained inhumanely, past the breaking point. Residents and family members at many homes have reported overworked staff having to leave residents unable to get food, water or assistance, as well as the loneliness of residents cut off from their families by quarantine when they were needed most.

One of our local family members actually had to sit with her mother's dead body overnight alone, because there just wasn't enough staff to come and support her. As an only child with a single-parent mom, that is a nightmare that I couldn't live. I don't even know how she continues to function. How could this government stand by and let this happen? Where was their iron ring?

This is the foreseeable result of a government that values profit over people and a government that doesn't want to spend the money to take care of the most vulnerable. While the government claims to be empathetic over the conditions in long-term care, there's been no action to change.

The families of residents at Rose of Sharon in my constituency were terrified when it appeared that their family's care would be put in the hands of the same for-profit company that oversaw some of the worst outbreaks in the province. I was honoured to present the concerns of Dr. Donald Kim, as well as other activists, in this House, and I am thankful that a deal was reached to allow Arirang Age-Friendly Community Centre, a local Korean non-profit, to run this home instead. However, I remain concerned: Why was giving more responsibility to a company like Rykka, which had already failed and had overwhelming numbers of fatal cases of COVID, even an option for a sale? Again, where was this government's iron ring? It never existed. It was a ploy.

Ontario's seniors and families did not need panicked promises of an iron ring of protection, without any planning or resources to back that up, while they were there lying dying. What they needed was what for 25 years this

Conservative government and the Liberal government failed to do, and that was to listen to our heroes in long-term care and to surround them with love and resources—the human resources and the funding needed so that so many families wouldn't be broken apart.

When we are government, the Ontario NDP will fix long-term care. And Ontario and Toronto—St. Paul's watching, you've got our word.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: I'm pleased to speak to and support this motion, and I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing it forward. I will say I do object to the word "neglect" being used there—building 30,000 new or rebuilt beds and raising PSWs' wages \$4 an hour. There are clearly more things that could have been done, but despite the partisan jab—which is what we do here—I think it's important that we're all united on this motion, because the iron ring never materialized.

There's a thing about using images like an iron ring and expressing empathy: Empathy doesn't work without action. Empathy isn't a salve for all those wounds that people have. It's action that's the salve. Doing the thing that needs to be done is the thing that heals wounds, not just saying we feel for it. Empathy requires action.

When we look at going back to last year and the comment around the iron ring, let's look at the history. It took more than a month to raise the wages of PSWs—a month longer than Quebec and BC—and a month longer to prevent them from working in more than one home. And then we locked everybody down inside those homes even when we knew that isolation was a thing that was going to be the second pandemic, and we didn't move quickly enough to do that. So there's another case of not moving quickly enough.

Then we get into the summer, and long-term-care homes are begging—begging—the minister for a plan for PSWs and staffing in long-term care. Quebec? They're going out and they're going to try to hire 10,000. They get 7,000. What does Ontario do? We make an announcement in September: \$14 million to recruit and retain PSWs, and \$42 million for security guards. That didn't help homes in any way. And then we had a challenge transferring people out of three- and four-bed ward rooms, or as the minister likes to say it, decanting them.

Fast-forward to the vaccine rollout. What's the first thing that happened? While Quebec is in there vaccinating people in long-term care, what does the Ford government do? A Christmas vaccination vacation—no vaccinations—and then takes weeks to get the Pfizer doses into long-term-care homes while other provinces are doing that, ignoring the advice. We're weeks behind and as a result, it takes half a million doses—half a million doses and 60 days—to get to the 70,000 residents of long-term care, their first dose weeks behind other provinces.

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That, to me, is absolutely incredible. Those are the people we knew had to get it first, and now the government is saying, "Look, everybody's living"—like there are no

more gaps in there. It's like, "Too late, folks. You're behind everybody else." Stop patting yourself on the back. Just because you can't say the names of the people who are affected by those poor decisions, or you can't point to them or you can't count them doesn't mean they're not there.

These families, these people deserve an apology. They deserve a day. They deserved so much better than what they got. I'm happy to support this motion, and again I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing it forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Je suis très fier de pouvoir me lever aujourd'hui, et je remercie la chef de l'opposition officielle d'avoir amené cette motion à l'Assemblée aujourd'hui.

Malgré les promesses, malgré les grands mots du premier ministre depuis le début de la pandémie 2020, les aînés de Kapuskasing n'ont jamais vu son fameux bouclier sanitaire pour protéger les résidents de nos foyers de soins de longue durée. D'ailleurs, ce qu'on a vécu est une éclosion, un déclin long et douloureux de six semaines qui a coûté la vie à 16 membres de la communauté. Speaker, the situation was such that 90% of the residents and 19 staff were infected, and 30% of the residents died of COVID-19. Residents were sometimes waiting for hours for their medications, for their breakfasts, days and days for a bath.

I've had care workers calling me, crying for help because they were scared of reprisal and were overwhelmed. They were overworked because the home was understaffed during the outbreak. They were left alone, wondering when they could see their families.

Twice, I requested that the Ontario government send help to this home in the far northeast, and I was told by this government that everything was under control, that it was duplication of services—sounds familiar. Et le ministère des Soins de longue durée n'était pas au courant du fait que ce foyer était désigné francophone selon la Loi sur les services en français et que le personnel remplaçant, qui sont venus porter du soutien lors de l'éclosion, ne parlaient pas français.

Speaker, the outbreak in the Far North home speaks miles about the lack of preparedness and the lack of empathy that this government has for seniors in northern Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am very pleased to be able to stand today in this Legislature on behalf of not only the people of Oshawa, but I'm going to say more broadly across the Durham region who have been brought together—and torn apart, frankly—because of the tragedy in long-term care that we've seen across the province, but that we've seen in our own backyards and in our neighbourhoods.

I can't believe it has already been a year, but it's a year since I stood alongside families at a candlelight vigil

outside of Orchard Villa, where so many had been lost, and at that home where we stood outside, all of us brought together, they were calling for a public inquiry at that time—which they didn't get, Speaker. They are calling to have their voices heard, which hasn't happened and won't happen.

I was alone there as the only MPP. There are seven MPPs in the Durham region, and I was the only elected MPP to be standing there. I'll say that the then Minister of Finance and the President of the Treasury Board could have been there, but as we've heard from the commission, Speaker, there were decisions being made about not funding what was needed.

The families are not alone. And despite the fact that while our leader was talking and sharing about some of those stories, some of the comments from the other side and their—I don't know how they were feeling, but they seemed unhappy about the sharing of stories of people's pain. Well, I would say that ignoring the stories of people's pain is far worse.

I have, on the record, talked about Cathy Parkes and her father, Paul. He was a very caring man, and she hopes that his one final act of caring would be that the tragedy of his death might help to keep others safe.

June Morrison and her father, George—they'll never really know what happened. There were no cooks in the kitchen. It was general staff and cleaning staff making tuna fish sandwiches for days on end. They didn't have what they needed.

It wasn't until the Armed Forces went in—well, Speaker, that galls me too. You've had predominantly female, I'll grant you, health care workers and advocates sounding the alarm for years, but it wasn't until the army went in that it went public and got a little bit of attention. It didn't have action, and we still don't have that iron ring that we were promised.

And the family of Nina wants to know what happened and why no one is listening.

This government didn't want to spend any money. They crossed their fingers that the vaccines would get here soon—what a bungled rollout that has been. They owe the families an apology.

And while those families have to suffer—they are mourning every day—the least that we could do is give them one day when we share in their grief.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's an honour to rise today to debate this important motion.

Speaker, everybody in this province should apologize to the people who lost loved ones in long-term care—3,753 residents and 11 staff—but especially the Premier should apologize, because it happened on the Premier's watch. Everybody in this Legislature should apologize because we all, collectively, as Ontarians, have a responsibility to care for our elders.

Every March 30, we should and we must commemorate and remember the people who tragically lost their lives in

our long-term-care homes. We need to remember, because we can never allow it to happen again.

Words have meaning—"iron ring" has meaning—but you have to back up those words with action, with funding, with commitment, with the sense of urgency that our elders and the people who care for them deserve.

Speaker, the first wave was bad enough. We had time over the summer to prepare for a second wave, which actually turned out to be even worse, but this government let people down.

Quebec promised that they would hire 10,000 additional staff for their long-term-care homes. They didn't quite get there, but they came pretty darn close; they got three quarters of the way there.

Ontario didn't make the same commitment, even though the government's own staffing report that came out over the summer said that we had to hire more staff in long-term care, even though the military—I mean, my gosh, the military report. It reported on conditions in long-term care that I think we all knew—or any of us who had read any of the 32 reports that RAO and other organizations have put out over the last two decades knew—were a problem in long-term care, but the government did not act.

And what makes it so disappointing, Speaker, is that they had \$12 billion from the federal government sitting in their bank account in September—money that could have been spent on additional staff, money that could have been spent on testing, money that could have been spent on an essential visitors policy so seniors wouldn't be so isolated and lonely. But it didn't happen, Speaker.

1400

So then we thought the vaccine rollout would prioritize elders, but it took the government 500,000 doses of vaccine to actually vaccinate 70,000 long-term-care residents. They took a break over the holidays when we knew we were in a race against time. Every delay in getting a vaccine to somebody in long-term care threatens somebody's life. Essential workers in long-term care still aren't given paid time off to get a vaccine. I've heard reports of workers in long-term care who want to get vaccinated and haven't been vaccinated yet because they can't afford to take time off.

In many respects, the government did more to protect long-term-care operators from lawsuits than they did to actually protect residents, our loved ones. These are our grandparents, our aunts and uncles, our mothers and fathers, our brothers and sisters, yet this government has always been behind.

Speaker, we know that this problem predates the current government, but we also know the current government could have done more. I want to tell you a story, because this story has come out in the testimony to the commission. And by the way, we should have had a public inquiry and not just a commission, but at least we have a commission. I've been struck over and over again by how many people have talked about the horrendous food that is served to elders in long-term care. I can tell you, Speaker, before I got into politics, I was part of an organization that

was trying to get healthy local food into public institutions. Fifteen years ago, when I was working on that, we found it impossible to get healthy local food into long-term care, because the budgets were so low that it simply couldn't afford it.

So now the government says, "We will allocate some money in the budget to provide a minimum standard of care, but we're going to make elders and workers wait four years." Four years for four hours of care? People can't wait four years. Our elders can't wait four years. That \$1.9 billion should be and must be in next year's fiscal budget, not after the next election, not in 2025, but in 2021, Speaker. But if we're really going to say that we learned from this pandemic—and it's not even over yet. The Premier might be pretending it's over, but it's not over. If we have learned anything from this pandemic, it is that the money needs to be allocated now.

I remember when I asked the Minister of Long-Term Care on the very first day in September when we were back in this House why the government hadn't hired additional staff over the summer. I remember the minister saying, "You can't snap your fingers and just hire staff," and I'm like, "Yes, you're right. That is exactly why we should have started hiring additional staff over the summer." I don't understand why we're waiting four years. I just don't get it.

Speaker, we need to hire staff now. We need to guarantee them full-time work. We need to guarantee them living wages. It's not even a permanent pay increase in the pandemic pay; it's living wages. We need to guarantee those staff benefits. We need to ensure that our long-term-care homes not only have the money for staff but that our residents have decent rooms, decent food, decent standards of care. That's what we owe people, and that is why, on March 30, we need to commemorate those who were lost so that no government ever forgets what happened during this pandemic. I encourage my—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: It is my pleasure to rise today and speak in support of the official opposition motion to declare March 30 of each year as a provincial day of mourning for victims of COVID-19 in long-term-care homes.

My riding of York South–Weston is home to a great many front-line and essential health care workers. Those workers continue to perform valuable work, trying to do their best to care for our elders despite being forced to work short for years, working several part-time jobs with no benefits, all to gather full-time hours to provide for their families. These health care providers also, in many cases, are not paid nearly enough for the work they do.

This Premier talked about providing an iron ring around long-term care and saying nobody has worked harder than the Minister of Long-Term Care, who was up until midnight worrying about this. Well, Madam Speaker, those front-line health care workers and the families of seniors in long-term care were the ones working hardest around the clock. The workers and families of seniors were the

ones worrying as death tolls in long-term care climbed. For-profit care, in particular, had much higher death rates than public care.

This government seems to have never been prepared for the pandemic and how it affected long-term care. Lessons should have been learned from the first and second waves, but they were not. This government's only solution was to wait for vaccines.

This motion seeks to mark March 30 each year to acknowledge a day of mourning for victims of COVID-19 in long-term care, so that we never forget how our elders were so badly neglected, to honour their memories and to ensure no government ever lets this happen again.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: St. Catharines and Niagara residents have seen over 400 COVID-19 deaths. Worst of all, Niagara saw more loss of life from this terrible virus in the second wave than the first wave. Despite widespread commitments to never allow what happened in long-term care during the first wave of COVID-19, the Ford government allowed for history to repeat itself. It never had to be like this.

A motion for a day of mourning for victims of long-term care is not just a recognition of lives that were lost in the Niagara area and across Ontario; it is not just recognition of the pain experienced by the families that lost loved ones; and it is not just recognition of seniors that did survive, but did so with great personal cost because they had to endure a year of isolation, a year where their basic human needs were unmet.

This motion, if not more than anything, is a reminder of a tragic lesson that this province can never forget. It is a recognition that in Ontario, we will not forget the lessons from the pandemic; a refusal to let history repeat itself; and a reminder of what decades of underfunding by both the Conservative and Liberal governments in long-term care has cost us. It is a reminder that when this pandemic is fully in our rear-view mirrors, when the tragedy of the loss is no longer written in our daily headlines of our local paper and also in our social media feeds, we will remember that cutting corners for seniors in this province to save a few dollars is not just a failure of policy, but indisputably dangerous.

This is a commitment to the residents of St. Catharines, Niagara and Ontario that we will never let history repeat itself and undercut our long-term-care system ever again.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Gates: First, I want to start off saying to the 3,892 people that lost their lives: I'd like to offer my condolences, and also to the 11 workers, essential workers, that gave their lives trying to save people in long-term-care homes and retirement homes.

I'm going to talk really quickly about Lundy Manor, because that happened in the first wave, where we had 20 people die. The family of the ED there called my house and asked me to help him because he didn't have any staffing. They didn't have PPE. And do you know what

happened there? Twenty people died. But you know what was worse? A mom and a dad, a husband and a wife, died within 24 hours—not one set of parents, but two sets of parents, and then you go and you get seven, eight, nine months when you knew people were going to die in long-term care and retirement homes if you didn't do anything. You put something up that was a myth. It was a myth that you put an iron ring around long-term care and retirement homes. We all know it.

1410

Do you know what happened? They got sick in my community, and 374 died. We had one person die every 3.5 hours in January, as you did not give us our Moderna vaccine, knowing full well that they needed it.

In Oakwood, 100% of the residents got COVID-19; 100% of the staff got COVID-19; 40 people died—that was a mom, a dad, a grandparent, an aunt, an uncle. How can you sit over there and not say you want to support this to remember them? And in the home right beside it, owned by ConMed, a private company, 20 people died there.

Do you know the worst of all this? We all know it. We had moms and dads and grandparents, who should have been in our hospitals and our ICUs and in our long-term-care homes and retirement homes—they left them there to die.

I had a nurse call my house—she worked a midnight shift. They took three people out on a midnight shift, and she said to me, “I found one person who had died that I couldn't get to that night.”

That's what's going on in our long-term-care homes. And do you know what? Your government knew it was going to happen. They were collateral damage. There was never an iron ring around it.

We should all be ashamed. They built this great province, this country. We have to do better.

Every one of you should stand up and support this and honour those people who died unnecessarily because your government didn't act—and you certainly didn't put an iron ring around it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: It's always an honour to rise in this House and contribute to the topic of debate. I cannot stress how important the topic of debate is today, that's for sure.

The tragedy that has occurred during this pandemic is undeniable and the desire to memorialize it is only natural. Ontario and the world were ravaged by the pandemic, and we will never forget the events of the past 14 months, nor should we. Though much progress has been made to keep case counts low and protect each other from the potential spread, the pandemic is still ongoing. But I would also suggest that the best means to have a discussion is not a debate called on five days' notice.

Faced with an unprecedented global pandemic, our government has worked hard day and night to keep Ontarians safe, and especially the most vulnerable in long-term care.

I would like the members of this House to think back to January of last year. We were still over a month out before COVID-19 and the first cases in any long-term-care home in Ontario. Speaker, 63% of Ontario's residents resided in shared rooms at that time in long-term-care homes; in British Columbia, 24% did. That's a stark difference.

I could fill my time today and beyond with statistics about what the previous government, propped up by the NDP, did to leave those folks in a vulnerable position. The previous Liberal government left long-term-care residents in our province in a dire position.

We are the first government to create a ministry solely dedicated to this critical file. This, of course, was before COVID-19 became an issue.

The long-term-care wait-list during the previous Liberal government had over 30,000 people. Instead of actually addressing the shortage of beds, they built 611 from 2011 to 2018—seven years with 600 beds in this entire province. How can that be a record anyone can be proud of? So we can't forget that Liberal record.

Speaker, I certainly want to mention, locally, my riding of Oakville, where our government is utilizing a ministerial zoning order to build a 512-bed long-term-care home. That's 99 beds less than the previous government did across the entire province over seven years, just in my town alone.

Residents of Oakville and across the province need access to critical care. My office, and other offices, I'm sure, from both sides, are getting calls from residents about why it takes so long for a family member to get the care they need. I'm proud that the government recognizes the needs of the residents of Oakville and throughout the province by building long-term-care homes, so I will continue, certainly, to fight for the needs of my residents in Oakville and their needs for long-term care every day I'm in this chamber.

On January 31, 2020, our government issued guidance documents to long-term-care homes on how to prevent and contain the spread of COVID-19. The guidance was based on the expertise of our province's Chief Medical Officer of Health and reflected the best available information at the time. It's easy now, with the benefit of hindsight, for the opposition to make a show of pretending they knew better and criticizing the actions of our government. But they would do well to remember this: In the next sitting week of the Legislature, two weeks after our government took our first of many actions against COVID-19, neither the Leader of the Opposition nor a single member of her caucus asked a single question about COVID-19. They didn't even ask a single question about long-term-care homes. Maybe they hadn't been paying attention; I'm not sure. Maybe they just don't like the facts.

Speaker, I want to make it clear: This is an important topic that cannot be dismissed. The pandemic has unfortunately and sadly taken many loved ones, but the fact that our government has worked nonstop from the very beginning of this pandemic, for over a year, to protect long-term-care residents, is critical to remember.

I might add that I know the independent member, as well, mentioned that we've always been behind when it

comes to long-term care. But let's stress the fact again: We were the first government to commit a full, dedicated ministry to long-term care, and we're the first government to actually do anything about long-term-care beds in this province, and, I might add, the first government to make sure air conditioning is mandated in new builds, so let's remember that.

Since that first action on January 31, we've been relentless in our efforts. On February 11, still a month before the first presumptive case of COVID-19 hit our long-term-care homes, we issued updated guidance for long-term-care homes on prevention and screening. By March 11, we had required long-term-care homes to begin more aggressive screening, in line with the medical expert advice, to catch any potential cases among visitors, residents, staff and volunteers. On that day, we also began to test every respiratory test conducted in long-term care, regardless of whether COVID-19 was suspected.

On March 13, still before any presumptive cases in our province, we made the very hard decision to restrict all but essential visitors from entering long-term-care homes. We know the hardship this has posed for many families. Keeping COVID-19 out of our long-term-care homes unfortunately means keeping visitors out as well.

On March 20, recognizing an urgent need for flexibility in long-term-care staff deployment, we amended regulations. This made it easier for homes to quickly bring in more and new staff to prevent potential staffing shortages and to allow staff to spend more time on direct care for residents.

By March 22, the Chief Medical Officer of Health had issued a directive to the sector to limit the number of staff workplaces, wherever possible.

The next day, we issued the first of four emergency orders to support staffing flexibility and eliminate short-stay beds in long-term care, and the day after that, we amended regulations to make it easier for families to take their loved ones home during the pandemic if that's where they wanted to be.

On March 25, our government launched our action plan to respond to COVID-19, a \$17-billion emergency relief package that came with \$243 million for long-term-care staffing, supplies and emergency capacity.

On March 27, we issued a second emergency order, giving homes more flexibility to redirect staffing and financial resources to essential tasks during the COVID-19 crisis.

On April 8, in line with new evidence on COVID-19 prevention, the Chief Medical Officer of Health directed all long-term-care staff and essential visitors to wear surgical masks at all times. Despite global competition for supplies, since that time, our government has been making same-day deliveries, responding to every escalated request for personal protective equipment within 24 hours.

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On April 15, we issued an action plan specifically for the long-term-care sector that ramped up protection through more aggressive testing and outbreak management, and launched new resources for growing our heroic

long-term-care workforce. We launched mobile deployment teams and long-term-care/hospital partnerships that have supported well over 100 homes to date. Two days later, to prevent further asymptomatic spread, we made the decision to restrict staff to one workplace only and provided funding for homes to give part-time workers full-time hours, wherever possible.

On April 22, our government announced a request for assistance from the Canadian Armed Forces. We remain incredibly grateful for the over 250 brave men and women in uniform deployed throughout our province in six homes at a time of critical need. Their support ranged across the country, with over 1,000 personnel supporting 47 homes in Quebec and supporting homes in First Nations communities, as well as in Manitoba. As a nation and as a province, we are incredibly grateful to our service members assisting when we needed them at that critical time.

To further support staffing needs, on April 25, we amended an emergency order to allow health service providers, including hospitals, to temporarily reassign front-line staff to provide services and supports in long-term-care homes. On that day we introduced a \$4-an-hour pandemic premium on top of the regular hourly wages for 100,000 long-term-care staff, plus a \$250-a-month top-up for those working 100 hours or more in long-term-care homes. That program alone brought over 8,600 new workers into Ontario's long-term-care homes.

In May of last year, our government announced an emergency order that allowed the Ministry of Long-Term Care to place a temporary manager at homes that were struggling with an outbreak and needed more robust management. Management contracts are just one more tool to ensure we can do everything possible to get homes through this challenging time.

It was this government that saw the collapse of staffing in some homes during outbreak and requested the Canadian Armed Forces to go into and support these homes. It was this government, our Premier, who received the Canadian Armed Forces report and released it, because we knew that Ontarians needed to know how dangerous staffing collapses are for residents. And it was our government that worked with homes and the Canadian Armed Forces to restore normal operations—with all problems raised by the report resolved or nearly resolved when the Canadian Armed Forces deployment ended.

The claim by the opposition that our government had not adequately prepared for a second wave is categorically false. The government held dozens of lessons-learned exercises with over 300 experts. The Ministry of Long-Term Care engaged stakeholders and the sector. Every home in this province did a preparedness assessment over the summer, which informed decision-making at the IMS table. We spent the months over summer preparing for a robust fall preparedness plan that has shored up our response to the second wave of COVID-19.

Over the summer, our government increased level-of-care funding by 1.5%, deferred long-term-care accommodation rate changes and released the findings of the government's staffing study. We launched the commission into COVID-19 in long-term-care homes—the first

jurisdiction, I might add, in North America to do so. Our government established the recovery and planning table and developed a plan to ensure the health system was prepared and ready to respond to the challenges of the fall.

Voluntary management contracts and mandatory management orders were executed to stabilize homes that were unable to get their outbreaks under control starting in May and throughout the subsequent months of 2020. Every home in the province was mapped to a local hospital to provide support and IPAC hubs were developed.

We worked with the federal government as well to develop a support network from the Canadian Red Cross, and we developed mobile emergency support teams, a rapid-response team that could be deployed to homes in outbreak. That support worked: 29 homes had voluntary management contracts executed and six mandatory management orders were executed. These enabled responsive management structures from the other health care organizations in 35 hard-hit homes. Twenty homes received support from the Canadian Red Cross, and 59 homes received support from mobile emergency support teams.

Throughout the second wave, Ontario had one of the most sensitive thresholds to trigger an outbreak response in the country. British Columbia, for example, considers it an outbreak when a staff member has worked in a long-term-care home while symptomatic. In Saskatchewan, it's two or more positive cases; same in Quebec. In Ontario, if a staff member has no symptoms and they receive a positive test result, they isolate at home and an outbreak is declared.

Each home is partnered with IPAC expertise that is deployed to homes in an outbreak. IPAC compliance is regularly audited by public health and long-term-care inspectors. An escalation structure allowed swifter, enhanced responses to homes with more serious outbreaks. This worked hand in glove with the surveillance testing. The surveillance testing of staff and residents allowed us to identify outbreaks quickly, and our government developed the testing capacity to do these tests essentially from scratch. These measures were developed based on the experience of the first wave and to provide an enhanced response structure. I haven't even included the countless memos sent to the sector with guidance and direction, the use of our health matching portal, or the day-to-day, around-the-clock work the Ministry of Long-Term Care has had with homes to support them in this very struggling fight.

It's also important to note that the second wave was longer than the first wave. In the first wave, most cases occurred in March and April and began trailing off in May. In the second wave, case counts began increasing in September and finally trailed off in January and February. That's a comparison of two to three months compared to four to five months. This mirrored the experience, by the way, in the rest of the world. This was systemic throughout the world. It was no different.

In the second wave, almost every home saw lower infection rates and lower mortality rates. At least one of the homes which saw a high infection rate and a high

mortality rate had a more virulent strain of the virus, one of the variants of concern we remain focused on fighting today.

All of the measures that have been put together here have saved lives, and our government has backed those up with real funding. Without factoring in the budget tabled just last week, our government has invested \$1.38 billion into COVID-19 response to protect the residents, caregivers, staff and volunteers in long-term-care homes. These investments include:

—\$786 million to help homes with operating pressures, including IPAC, staffing and PPE;

—\$61.4 million for repairs and renovations in homes to improve IPAC, which may include updating HVAC systems or replacing furniture and equipment;

—\$40 million to support homes that have stopped admissions of third or fourth residents in larger rooms;

—\$30 million to allow long-term-care homes to hire more IPAC staff, including \$20 million for 150 new personnel and \$10 million for training;

—\$26.3 million to support PSWs and supportive care workers.

We continue to flow funding to homes to meet their needs. On top of that, our government is investing \$461 million to increase PSW wages. That's a \$3 raise for 50,000 PSWs, which will help homes recruit and retain PSWs. We continued that increase to June 30 of this year, with an additional investment of \$239 million.

Once passed, the 2021 budget, Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy, will bring more unprecedented investments to long-term care. These include \$4.9 billion over the next four years to reach a standard of an average of four hours of care per resident per day—that commitment that will make Ontario the leader in Canada as we create 27,000 new PSW positions and nurse positions—and \$246 million to improve living conditions in long-term-care homes for items like air conditioning, which is absolutely critical. To protect our loved ones in long-term care, we are also investing \$650 million in 2021-22, bringing the total resources invested since the start of the pandemic to over \$2 billion.

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Speaker, the Liberal government, propped up by the NDP, had no problems with the conditions of long-term care before our government was elected. It was never brought up. They never had a ministry dedicated to it. They had 15 years—15 years—to improve the conditions and nothing—nothing—was done. Our government saw many areas that needed to be improved, including standards of care for each resident, staffing and, of course, that horrendously long wait-list.

Across the world, and here in Ontario, long-term-care homes became the front line in the fight against COVID-19. Our government has used every option at our disposal to prevent and contain the spread of this virus and to protect our most vulnerable, and we will continue to do that.

With that, Madam Speaker, I conclude my time, and I thank you for allowing me the time to speak today.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I know it is hard for a government to admit that they have failed—that they failed our loved ones in long-term care. They failed 3,892 residents. They failed 11 workers in long-term care who died of COVID.

There is no denying that these residents and these workers are gone. They died of COVID. Many died of starvation, died of dehydration. They died covered in bed sores, infected from their own excrements of urine and feces.

What should a government do? Do what my leader is asking for. First, apologize to the people who are mourning the loss of their loved ones; apologize to the workers who have lost their friends, their co-workers at work; apologize to the people of Ontario. That's first.

Second, you show respect; you show empathy. You acknowledge the trauma, and you declare a day of mourning—a small but meaningful action.

I want to bring you back to 1984 in Sudbury. United Steelworkers Local 6500 decided to adopt a Day of Mourning in the memory of the workers who died, were injured or became ill in the course of their work. They wanted change. Every day, thousands of miners would go underground, and every year four of them would not come back up.

The Day of Mourning for workers motivated change and has protected hundreds of thousands of workers all over Ontario, Canada, and all over the world.

What should the Ford government do now? They should vote in favour of the motion from my leader to establish a day of mourning for long-term-care residents on March 30, starting tomorrow and every year after that.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: To put it mildly, I'm disappointed to see this craven political opportunism from the opposition. Sadly, I'm not surprised. It's been typical of their approach throughout the pandemic to exploit this tragedy for crass political gain. Frankly, I'm appalled by this approach. Residents of long-term care, their loved ones and the staff who care for them deserve better.

I would put it to the Leader of the Opposition that she owes residents an apology. When our government received the report from the Canadian Armed Forces that showed how bad conditions got at several long-term-care homes, the Premier's reaction said it all: It's "heart-breaking ... horrific ... shocking that this can happen here in Canada. It's gut-wrenching, and reading those reports is the hardest thing I've done as Premier...." And then we set to work on fixing those problems.

The Leader of the Opposition chose a different approach. She chose to sign a fundraising letter using the tragedy to raise money for the NDP. She thought her party's coffers should be filled on the backs of the long-term-care workers struggling with outbreaks and residents who were suffering. I find that in very poor taste, to say the least. But it's a piece of her record and her approach.

It's very telling when the Leader of the Opposition thought it was appropriate to use the tragedy that has unfolded in our long-term-care homes as a backdrop to launch her election campaign, a full 22 months before the election, at the height of the second wave. On October 9, 2020, when she was holding a campaign-style event and focused on getting votes, here's what our government was focused on: the 56 homes that were in outbreak that day. On this side of the House, we know that there are some things more important than partisan politics.

I'd like to take a moment to discuss the so-called plan that the NDP launched that day. I say "so-called" because it's an uncoded cobbling-together of ideas, many of which have already been done by our government. Their uncoded ideas come before factoring in promises like four hours of care or a permanent wage increase, both of which come with a hefty price tag.

As the NDP talked about four hours of care, it was our government that actually did something about it. We've committed a historic \$4.9 billion in the next four years to achieve that. If they truly were hell-bent on eliminating the private sector, they haven't factored in a dime of what that will cost, which would be enormous and wouldn't replace a single ward bed or build a single new space for a senior on the wait-list.

What the NDP proposed would actually leave long-term care in our province dangerously underfunded. They propose \$3 billion in spending by 2028. Our government, with the commitments made in previous budgets and budget 2021, is putting in over \$9.6 billion—new dollars—by 2024-25. That's funding the Liberals or the NDP never flowed. The opposition should get their facts straight and then try and explain that gap to Ontarians.

Through years of dedicated advocacy for four hours of care, the member for Nickel Belt and her predecessor, Shelley Martel, kept the issue alive during successive Liberal governments, but the opposition couldn't bring themselves to support our government in implementing it in the last budget. Then they tried to make us believe Bill 13 called for a different standard of care. As recently as Friday, three days ago, the Leader of the Opposition said, "I keep hearing the Minister of Long-Term Care and the Premier talk about an 'average' of 4.1 hours." She continued, "That's not what we're talking about." Despite it being on her desk since July 31, 2018, it appears the Leader of the Opposition hasn't read Bill 13—especially ironic since she tabled a previous version of the bill on April 11, 2018.

To eliminate the apparent confusion, I'll quote from the text of that bill:

"Minimum standard of daily care

"(5) Every licensee of a long-term care home shall ensure that the average number of combined hours of nursing services and personal support services offered at the home each day is at least four hours per resident, or if a higher minimum average is prescribed, the prescribed amount."

It proposes the same standard our government will implement. Where it differs is that Bill 13 contains no time

frame or plan to achieve four hours of care per resident per day.

Our government does have a plan. We have put hard targets over the next four years to achieve this standard by 2024-25, and we're backing those targets up with \$4.9 billion in new funding over four years. Progress against these targets will be measured and reported.

From 2011 to 2014, the NDP propped up the minority Liberal government. They could have made their support conditional on improving long-term care in Ontario, but they didn't. We found ourselves in the position that prior to the start of the pandemic, 63% of Ontario residents were living in shared rooms, while in British Columbia only 24% did. This failure by the former government to develop our long-term-care homes left our seniors vulnerable. The science is clear that shared ward rooms have been a driving factor for transmission.

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If the members for Don Valley West, Don Valley East, Scarborough–Guildwood and Steven Del Duca had used their time at the cabinet table to build and upgrade spaces, we wouldn't be in this position. If the NDP had demanded that the Liberals upgrade and build capacity, we wouldn't be in this position. But they chose other priorities, and only 611 net new spaces were built between 2011 and 2018.

Speaker, over the last year, the Liberals and NDP could have supported our government's good-faith efforts to shore up long-term care during the pandemic. Instead, they chose the path of politics as usual and voted against crucial government measures. The opposition had the opportunity to support staffing measures with Bill 124, the reopening Ontario act, and they voted against them. The NDP and the Liberals voted against extending regulation 210/20, allowing for the change of management of homes in outbreak. They voted against regulation 77/20, which allows for staff to be deployed to priority areas. They voted against regulation 146/20, the one-site order that reduced travel between homes. Through measures enabled by these regulations, we were able to provide resources, often staffing supports, to homes to stay stable during outbreaks.

Now, the staffing crisis will not be solved overnight, but we have a plan—a plan based on expert advice that the previous government had on its desk since at least 2008. We are transforming long-term care. The opposition voted against prevention and containment funding to support outbreak response, including additional staffing supports. The Leader of the Opposition voted against \$10,800,000 in additional funding to homes in the city of Hamilton and \$3,600,000 to homes in her own riding of Hamilton Mountain.

Their long-term-care critic, the member from Brampton Centre, voted against \$10,600,000 in additional funding to Brampton homes. That meant \$941,000 for Grace Manor and \$998,000 to Faith Manor, both operated by Holland Christian Homes. She voted against \$1,030,000 in support for Tullamore Care Community. Those homes all had outbreaks. Those homes all needed support.

Here's what the CEO of Holland Christian Homes had to say: "Without the funding assistance from the provincial government, our ability to make these investments would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible.

"Additional nursing and PSW staff were brought in, along with screeners and extra housekeeping and dietary staff."

Evidently, the member for Brampton Centre thought differently.

The member for University–Rosedale voted against \$6,300,000 in additional funding in her constituency and against \$1,500,000 in increased support for the St. George Care Community. She, her caucus colleagues and her leader would have been better off voting for this vital prevention, containment and capital funding instead of standing on the lawn of St. George Care Community, protesting.

The member for Humber River–Black Creek opposed \$2,300,000 in additional support for Hawthorne Place Care Centre.

The NDP and Liberals voted against \$7,062,000 in additional funding to support homes in Windsor and against a whopping \$28,700,000 of increased funding into Scarborough, including \$861,000 to Tendercare Living Centre. The member for Scarborough Southwest should explain to her constituents why she voted against \$9,800,000 to homes in her riding. The member for Hamilton Mountain owes an explanation to her constituents as to why her caucus opposed new funding of \$3,024,000 for homes in that riding, including \$904,000 for Grace Villa.

Residents of Niagara Falls are owed an explanation by their MPP as to why the opposition voted against \$7,005,000 in supports for homes in Niagara Falls, including \$678,000 for Millennium Trail Manor and \$513,000 for Oakwood Park Lodge.

The member for Ottawa South voted against \$18,300,000 in funding for homes in the city of Ottawa—\$3,300,000 of that in Ottawa South—and for the four homes operated by the city of Ottawa. This also included \$1,984,000 in supports to the Perley and Rideau Veterans' Health Centre. Their CEO said, "The government's responsiveness has supported a robust response through the purchase of extra PPE, scheduling extra staff to help with care and implementing weekly testing clinics. Our residents, families and staff are all grateful for the additional funding provided during these difficult times." The member for Ottawa South should explain to the residents of that home why he thought otherwise.

The member for Ottawa South today in his debate stated that empathy doesn't work without action. Our government took action. Where was his Liberal government?

Likewise, the member for Scarborough–Guildwood should explain why the Liberals voted against \$28,700,000 to the city of Scarborough, including \$4,300,000 to her riding. Among the funding for homes hard hit by outbreaks that they voted against were \$2,012,000 for Extencare Guildwood, \$1,074,000 for Extencare Scarborough and \$1,200,000 for Seven Oaks, owned and operated by the city of Toronto.

The Liberals owe an explanation to residents of Don Valley East, and why they voted against \$2,300,000 for funding to homes in that riding. Our government supported those homes and voted to fund them.

We also funded the homes most in need of support during the pandemic: \$670,000 to support Roberta Place; \$2,083,000 to support Eatonville Care Centre; \$1,100,000 to support Westside; \$2,188,000 to support Downsview long-term-care home; \$1,772,000 to support Carlingview Manor; and \$1,960,000 to support Orchard Villa.

Opposition members in the debate today also mentioned Sunnycrest, but they voted against funding of \$731,000. They voted against \$1,038,000 for Isabel and Arthur Meighen Manor, and they voted against Extendicare Kapuskasing, for funding of \$321,000.

So, today, I have a message to members opposite: Take a long, hard look in the mirror. Across Ontario, people have come together to fight COVID-19 and have done a great job. Health care workers, paramedics, PSWs and essential care workers came together to fight COVID. The only place, it seems, where this hasn't happened is in the Legislature.

All Ontarians, and especially long-term-care residents, deserve much better than the opposition's grand-standing. Our government has made the commitment and is delivering, because our seniors deserve nothing less, and we care about our seniors.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Speaker, when they go low, we go high.

Look, nobody saw this pandemic coming, and here in Ontario, nobody in authority was prepared for it. Supplies of personal protective equipment left over from the SARS epidemic back in 2003 were useless. Their shelf life had long since expired. None of it had been thrown out and replaced with new equipment. Speaker, to put it in vernacular, they were caught with their pants down, and it wasn't just here in Ontario. Canada no longer had the medical labs and facilities to produce vaccines. To save money, governments had contracted out supplies of personal protective equipment to China and other countries. Politicians at all levels were scrambling. Countries were in a bidding war for supplies.

COVID-19 was spreading. People were dying, and they were dying in long-term-care homes faster than anyplace else.

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Because many of these facilities were owned by private companies, shareholders expected a return on their profits. Residents were placed in shared rooms or wards separated by curtains as opposed to private rooms; airborne infection spread easily in such conditions. To save money, for-profit homes hired part-time employees, paid them lower wages and didn't provide them with medical benefits or pensions. This meant they had to work several jobs. If they caught a virus at one workplace, it came with them when they reported to work at other locations. Ontario was slow to stop that and remains slow to this day.

Look, mistakes were made. There's no harm in admitting to a mistake, but when we say we're going to do something, we should do it. If we promise to protect our most vulnerable citizens and if we're failing to do that, we need to apologize, face the situation head-on. Stand on principle and support this motion so that when you go home tonight, you can look yourself in the mirror.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: One year ago tomorrow, the Premier stood up at the podium during one of his daily pressers and promised the people of Ontario that an iron ring would be placed around Ontario's long-term-care homes.

On April 14, 2020, the Premier reiterated that promise. But only 10 days later, the Canadian Armed Forces were called in to take over five private long-term-care homes in Ontario experiencing deadly outbreaks, including Hawthorne Place in my community, where 51 seniors were lost to COVID-19.

That very same day, Myrelyn, who lives in my community, lost her sister Daisy, a resident of Downsview long-term-care centre, to COVID-19. In total, the lives of 64 residents were lost in this outbreak there. It also claimed the life of Sharon Roberts, a 59-year-old personal support worker.

The Canadian Armed Forces report revealed shocking conditions at five private long-term-care facilities, and Speaker, those conditions go far, far before this pandemic.

During this pandemic, nearly 4,000 seniors and 11 long-term-care staff have been lost to COVID-19. It is said that hindsight is 20/20, but despite the Premier's promise to put an iron ring around our long-term-care facilities, even more lives were lost during the second wave than in the first wave.

We must declare March 30 as a provincial day of mourning for the victims of COVID-19 in Ontario's long-term-care homes. We must make a real commitment to never allow such a tragedy to ever happen again. And we must fix long-term care in Ontario, which has been neglected for years. We must take profit out of long-term care. Enough is enough. Our parents, our grandparents and everyone living in long-term care deserve better and are counting on us.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: It's an honour to rise and speak on this motion on behalf of our NDP party as well as on behalf of the citizens of Brampton North.

This government owes an apology to long-term-care residents, workers and their families. The Premier promised an iron ring of protection around long-term care after the first wave. This government often says, "Promises made, promises kept," but like many of their other promises, they did not keep this one. It was tragic that there were more deaths in the second wave than there were in the first, because experts stated this wasn't inevitable; it was a lack of preparedness.

We saw many of these deaths in my city of Brampton, in Brampton North, where we have some of the highest per cent positivity as we were not given enough resources to deal with this pandemic. The long-term-care workers weren't given paid sick days to be able to stay home when they were sick. The warnings from health experts were ignored, and we were left unprepared. Almost every long-term-care home in Brampton has had an outbreak and deaths, like Tall Pines, Hawthorn Woods, Peel Manor, Burton Manor, Extencicare Brampton and Grace Manor, where the military was called in because there were so many staff who fell ill.

The government's inaction and mishandling of the pandemic just made matters go from bad to worse for Brampton. For example, their decision to reopen the province while we saw many variants spreading, their decision to vote down paid sick days—particularly in Peel region, where we know we have many workers who are essential workers. Voting down these paid sick days in Peel region were the member from Mississauga–Erin Mills, the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore, the member from Mississauga–Streetsville, the member from Mississauga Centre, the member from Mississauga–Malton; the Mississauga East–Cooksville member also voted it down; the Caledon member voted down paid sick days, as well as Brampton South and Brampton West members.

I had many of my constituents reaching out, concerned about their parents and grandparents in long-term care. Many constituents were looking for more information on how to get their loved ones vaccinated.

While the finance minister spent his time in the Caribbean, we were asking for funding and we were not getting it.

One person I want to remember is one of the first PSWs to die, Arlene Reid. She was 51 years of age, and she leaves behind five children.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the opportunity to address this issue this afternoon.

Speaker, my colleagues have already spoken about the deep commitments made by the Premier to put an iron ring around seniors and preserve them, protect them, do whatever it takes to make sure their lives were protected. I have to say to everyone in this chamber—because many of us had the same experience in the spring of 2020, when we had constituents come to us and say, “I have an aunt,” or “I have a father,” or “I have a grandfather who’s in that nursing home. People are dying, and I can’t get anything from this government to protect those people. I can’t get anything to happen. How can my parents, my aunts, my uncles be abandoned this way? Why on earth aren’t they sending in the army?” To say that people felt betrayed by a promise of an iron ring and doing whatever it took is to grossly understate what was going on.

We found out why the army didn’t go in earlier—because when the army went in and reported on the conditions in those homes, it was a scandal across this province.

That was a terrible, terrible spring. We all remember that. We thought, maybe naively, that those who had the authority to protect lives over the summer would take the steps necessary to ensure that we didn’t go through it again, but we did. More people died in the second wave than in the first in those homes. Was nothing learned?

Did people listen to or read what Allison McGeer had to say to the long-term-care commission about the proposals they brought forward to protect lives, to save our parents, our grandparents? They were turned down time after time after time. Finally, they realized, “No money is going to be put forward. This is not going to happen. These people are going to be left to their fate,” and that is indeed what happened.

Speaker, an apology is a small thing—but recognizing that you allowed people to die, that you betrayed your word, an apology is the very least that can be done.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Jamie West: Speaker, tomorrow will be March 30. Today is March 29. Tomorrow will be the one-year anniversary since the Premier promised an iron ring around long-term care.

How did that work out for us? Well, in the military report, some of the key words out of that are “vomit,” “fecal matter,” “spoiled food,” “cockroaches,” “crying” and “moaning.”

How did that work out? Well, when it came to priorities, we found out this summer that 10 Conservative staffers became lobbyists for private long-term care. When it came to priorities, what we found out was that their priority was to protect for-profit long-term care from liability. That was their priority.

How did that work out? Well, we called for a public inquiry. They had a commission, and when the commission said, “We don’t have enough time to get everything. We didn’t receive all the documents. We need more time,” the Conservative government said, “Too bad.” In that commission, they talked about how they needed more time. The government had options but, quite frankly, the government, the Conservatives, decided they didn’t want to spend the money. I come from a mining town, and we check the price of nickel on a regular basis. It’s \$9.36 right now. That’s pretty good. That’s good for negotiations. Iron is four cents a pound. They don’t want to spend four cents a pound to protect their seniors. That’s shameful.

We need, we deserve to have a long-term-care iron ring, and they failed to deliver it. The people who were affected by it, the numbers of people—the 3,892 people who died, the 11 workers who died—deserve an apology from the Premier, who promised an iron ring and didn’t deliver. We deserve to remember this, every single day, so we learn from it and it never happens again, Speaker.

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The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: London observed a grim anniversary this weekend, with March 27 marking one year since the first reported COVID-related death in our community.

Today, 186 grieving families in the London area are mourning the loss of a loved to COVID-19; 92 of those deaths were in long-term-care homes and another 14 were in retirement residences.

Just days after that first death in London, as the devastation of the first wave began to take its toll on vulnerable seniors, the Premier announced that an iron ring would be placed around long-term care, yet months after that promise a deadly second wave ripped through long-term-care homes, claiming more lives than the first.

It turns out there was no iron ring. There was no swift and urgent action to apply the lessons learned from the first wave. There was merely waiting for the vaccine, the government's only strategy to prevent the heartbreak and suffering of the 3,892 seniors who died in long-term care without family members and sometimes without even a staff member to comfort them.

At least 11 long-term-care workers also lost their lives, including nurse Brian Beattie from London. Many of their co-workers are struggling with PTSD after the horrors they experienced on the front lines of COVID-19.

Ontarians are learning the truth about the war that these workers fought through, about the chronic understaffing, the shortage of PPE, the lack of IPAC training, especially in for-profit homes. They are learning, as the Ontario Nurses' Association told the long-term-care commission, that "long-term-care homes were starved of funds after decades of neglect and were utterly unprepared to face the storm barreling towards it."

Speaker, these conditions could have been fixed, deaths could have been prevented, but the government didn't want to spend the money. Every long-term-care resident, every worker deserves an apology from this government. Support this motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Miss Monique Taylor: I have the riding of Hamilton Mountain that is the home of Grace Villa, where we've seen the worst outbreak in our city with over 247 cases and over 40 deaths. I received letters from the workers, and so I'm going to try to get through one because this one's quite extensive, but it tells quite the picture of what was happening.

"This is not a Third World country, a war-torn country, but inside you'd have thought it was. The chaos, confusion and outright neglect that took place, all the while we begged and cried for help, tried to advocate for our residents was surreal to watch and to be a part of. It was heartbreaking, traumatizing and it was criminal...."

"We had no leadership, no training or instruction on how to manage a full-blown COVID outbreak on a locked unit with over 60 Alzheimer's residents and we certainly didn't have the manpower to give them much of our time.

"We were no longer getting reports at the start of our shifts, we were just told that there were positive COVID cases on both wings of the unit and to assume that everyone was positive. The three of us got right to doing a quick round and quickly realized that we had walked into a war zone. The previous shift had been just as short-

staffed. We received nine residents laying in soiled and/or soaked briefs, wearing little or no clothing or bedding on bare mattresses that were saturated with urine, two of them saturated with vomit and urine and it was obvious that many of them were suffering with fevers.

"We had not been receiving linens regularly as staffing in laundry was a problem, and when laundry was done the carts of clothes and linens were just pushed off of the elevators on to the unit for the front-line staff, who were already drowning, to deal with. It was only a few days previous that we had been using pillowcases and sheets to do care, including peri care, because that was all that we had. We eventually ran out of sheets so we cut up a queen-sized blanket. When I told a supervisor we had no linens at all, his reply as he walked away was, 'Yes, you do.'

"We did not have a single face cloth, peri cloth or towel of any sort on the unit. Every single room was trashed, overflowing with cardboard boxes full of dirty PPE, soiled briefs and food trays, many of them untouched. Some residents still had food trays"—I'm out of time, Speaker.

As you can see, this is an absolute catastrophe. The least the Premier can do is apologize and find a day of recognition on March 30.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate? Further debate?

I recognize the leader of the official opposition for right of reply.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thanks, Speaker. I appreciate that.

I want to start by saying that I've never really been so horrified by what I heard today in this discussion—horrified, of course, by the way that the government side is characterizing the work that we are trying to do on behalf of people who lost loved ones in long-term care. I have to say, that's kind of indicative of the way that they've approached this all the way along, which is what led to 4,000 people losing their lives in long-term care. It is all about saving the money. It has been all about the spin and the way that this government thinks that talking a good game actually makes a difference in people's lives, and it doesn't. We saw that no more clearly than we did with the loss of life in long-term care.

But the record exists, Speaker. The government can spin however they want, and the government can change their narrative however they want, but the Hansards exist, Speaker. The Canadian Armed Forces report exists, Speaker. The images of people protesting outside of long-term-care homes exist. The newscasts that we saw on TV every week of the second and first waves exist. The family members, heartbroken, the family members left to wonder how everything could have gone so wrong for the people that they love, those folks exist, Speaker. The commission's documentation of witnesses exists. These things all exist. The government has to acknowledge that the Premier did not put an iron ring around long-term care. The workers and residents lost their lives because the government didn't want to spend the money. The very least we can do at this point is to institute a day of

mourning for lives lost and apologize to family members who lost loved ones in long-term care.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day number three. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

All those opposed to the motion will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the nays have it.

A recorded vote being required, the bells will ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes. Prepare the lobbies, please.

The division bells rang from 1509 to 1539.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): The vote was held on opposition day number 3.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 26; the nays are 42.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTING THE PEOPLE OF ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2021

LOI DE 2021 VISANT À PROTÉGER LA POPULATION ONTARIENNE (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Mr. Calandra, on behalf of Mr. Bethlenfalvy, moved second 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 Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I look to the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I think I'll have an opportunity to speak on this in subsequent readings of the bill, so I think, with that, I will just let you know that I'll be splitting my time with the member for Willowdale and the member for Pickering-Uxbridge.

With that, I will yield the floor to the member for Willowdale.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I recognize the member for Willowdale.

Mr. Stan Cho: I'm honoured to rise today and speak in support of Bill 269, the Protecting the People of Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2021.

Speaker, over the past number of months, I've had the great privilege of working with the Minister of Finance to set out our government's next steps in the fight against COVID-19. This past Wednesday, we outlined the third phase of our action plan to protect the health and safety of Ontarians, and to protect our jobs and our economy. In total, we invested more than \$16 billion to protect our

health care system and wage war against COVID-19, and we've invested more than \$34 billion to support Ontario families, communities and business during perhaps the most difficult period in our lifetime.

When our fight against COVID-19 began a little over a year ago, the government took swift action. We made \$17 billion available in response. Last summer, that response grew to \$30 billion. And in November, we continued to support the people of Ontario with \$45 billion in spending in response to the pandemic.

Speaker, the third phase of our plan proves, yet again, that this government will spare no expense when it comes to protecting the lives and livelihoods of Ontarians by bringing our pandemic response to \$51 billion in total supports.

I'm also proud to say that our government is continuing to invest in the future, in the programs and services Ontarians rely on today and that will be there for them in our post-pandemic world. In addition to the \$51 billion to fight COVID-19, our government is increasing year-over-year spending for every ministry. We are continuing to strengthen our world-class public education system, build 21st-century infrastructure from transit to broadband, and strengthen our public health care system.

In tabling our budget last week, we also provided transparency to the people of Ontario, showing them, even in this time of great economic uncertainty, exactly how the government is spending taxpayer dollars responsibly to combat the virus. We are the only government in Canada to provide this level of accountability and honesty. It's what Ontarians expect and what Ontarians deserve.

Speaker, I know later this afternoon the minister will speak in detail about this government's number one priority, protecting the health and safety of all Ontarians, and as he says often, we cannot have a healthy economy without healthy people. So today, I want to focus my remarks on the unprecedented supports the government is providing to families and job creators.

We recognize that just as we must make sure that people are healthy, we also must safeguard our economy. That's why protecting jobs and preparing for Ontario's economic recovery is the crucial second pillar in our plan, alongside our unwavering commitment to protect people's health.

The people and employers of our province have gone far above and beyond the call to protect each other from COVID-19. While no one could have predicted or prevented this global pandemic, people in Ontario understand that their personal actions can lower the risk of transmission and help protect their families and communities.

Speaker, I've seen first-hand in my community the sacrifices people have made to keep their neighbours safe—sacrifices they've made even when it impacted their own livelihoods. While these sacrifices have come at a cost, Ontario will continue to be there to support people, to support jobs, until we can put this difficult period behind us.

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 in direct supports. Through the 2021 budget, we are taking further steps to support many families—the many families, workers, employers, who have given so much of themselves to help Ontario withstand the pandemic. The measures proposed in Bill 269 represent significant steps forward in our plan to protect our economy, not only to get through COVID-19 but to emerge on the other side even stronger.

This legislation proposes three changes to the Taxation Act, 2007, that will bring direct relief to people and businesses. To provide additional support to parents for child care expenses, the government is proposing a 20% top-up to the child care access and relief from expenses tax credit, or CARE tax credit, for 2021. Our government introduced this tax credit in 2019 to help Ontario families with child care costs while letting them choose the care that is right for their children.

Speaker, my mom, Sandy, worked as an early childhood educator for nearly 20 years, running O Happy Day Daycare in Toronto. She saw first-hand the challenges faced by working parents in finding child care that worked for them. My mom stayed open late to help those parents who didn't work typical 9-to-5 jobs, like nurses and shift workers. She recognized that daycares, even her own, wouldn't work for every family in Ontario. The CARE tax credit recognizes this challenge. Parents can use the child care that works for them—a babysitter, a nanny, a summer camp or a private daycare—and get back up to 90% of the costs in the form of a refundable tax credit.

The top-up proposed in Bill 269 would increase support for parents from \$1,250 to \$1,500 on average. Total support provided by this temporary top-up would be about \$75 million to more than 300,000 families in Ontario. If passed, it will help make child care more affordable for those families struggling to make ends meet during this very trying time and during a time when child care has become even more important and even more of a challenge for working parents.

This support will also help parents get back into the workforce. We recognize that COVID-19 has created challenges for working parents. Many parents have had to leave the workplace and need the support to rejoin it. Unaffordable child care should not be a barrier to getting back to work, and we know that while COVID-19 has impacted everyone, women in the workforce have been disproportionately affected.

Many of the sectors that suffered heavy job losses and are experiencing a slower recovery are female-dominated. Our government fully recognizes that supporting increased participation by women in the workforce will be critical to Ontario's economic recovery. We know that a key factor in enabling that participation is having access to affordable child care.

Along with access to affordable child care, people should have access to the training and development that will help them succeed. We know that COVID-19 has had a significant impact on Ontario's labour market, and some of its impacts may be long-lasting. Many workers lost their jobs and are still unemployed. This is why Ontario is

providing a range of training and employment supports to ensure workers have the skills required to support economic recovery.

Bill 269 aims to help people connect to jobs by proposing the Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit. This would be a temporary refundable personal income tax credit that would ease the burdens on people looking to shift careers, retrain or sharpen their skills. The Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit would provide an estimated \$260 million in support to about 230,000 people in 2021. This credit would provide up to \$2,000 in relief for 50% of eligible expenses, including graphic design programs, heavy-machinery training programs and post-secondary courses that provide credits toward a degree, diploma or certificate. It also includes personal support worker training.

Our government is committed to training and hiring more PSWs as part of our plan to fix our long-term-care system after decades of neglect under the previous government. The dedicated men and women who serve our seniors as PSWs have performed heroic work across Ontario during this pandemic. Ontario is initiating the largest recruitment and training of PSWs in our province's history to reduce unreasonably long wait-lists and provide better care for long-term-care residents. It is our hope that people interested in becoming PSWs will take advantage of the proposed Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit to help with their training costs, because the people of Ontario need them more than ever.

1550

Speaker, I want to say again that our government wants everyone in Ontario to not only weather COVID-19 but to be able to participate in and benefit from our eventual recovery.

Ontario's prosperity is built on the strengths of its regional economies. While the province as a whole experienced positive employment growth between the last recession and the outbreak of COVID-19, the pace of regional market growth has varied. Areas in and around Toronto and Ottawa experienced more rapid employment growth compared to other areas of the province.

Ontario introduced the Regional Opportunities Investment Tax Credit, the ROITC, in the March 2020 economic and fiscal update to help encourage businesses to invest in areas of the province where employment growth lagged the provincial average between 2009 and 2019. This corporate income tax measure is a 10% refundable tax credit for eligible corporations that build, renovate or purchase eligible commercial or industrial buildings in a qualifying region of this province.

Speaker, the third tax measure proposed in Bill 269 is to enhance the ROITC by doubling the tax credit rate from 10% to 20%. At a critical time, when many businesses are looking to reopen or transition their operations, enhancing the tax credit would provide opportunities for economic growth and job creation. The enhanced tax rate would, if Bill 269 is passed, apply to eligible expenditures on assets that become available for use on or after March 24, 2021, and before January 1, 2023. This enhancement would

double the available tax credit support for regional investment from a maximum of \$45,000 to a maximum of \$90,000 in a year. Qualifying investments include expenditures for building, renovating or acquiring eligible commercial and industrial buildings and other assets. This represents an additional investment by our government of \$61 million, resulting in total tax credit support of about \$155 million by 2022-23.

Speaker, we're sparing no effort in safeguarding the health and livelihoods of the people of Ontario through our action plan. And while that remains our top priority, we are also taking steps to support long-term growth in our province. An important factor in that growth is a strong and modern capital markets system that attracts businesses and competes for investment and talent worldwide. Ontario is taking action to make our province a leader in the capital markets sector.

In January, our government was pleased to release the report of the Capital Markets Modernization Taskforce. Our government created the task force to find innovative solutions that would make Ontario a leading capital markets jurisdiction. The task force consulted with over 100 stakeholders about the challenges they face in the market.

Despite rapid changes in the global economy, the Ontario Securities Act has not been reviewed in over 17 years. And modern capital markets need modern capital markets legislation. So in response to the task force's recommendations, Bill 269 includes legislative amendments to strengthen the capital markets sector.

Through this bill, we are proposing a new Securities Commission Act, 2021, to continue the Ontario Securities Commission, OSC—the province's capital markets regulator—and make it more effective. We propose to establish a new Capital Markets Tribunal as a division of the OSC, to be headed by a chief adjudicator. The tribunal would ensure a clear separation between the regulatory and the policy functions of the commission and its adjudicative function. That separation will result in greater transparency, more efficient oversight and increased consumer confidence.

Bill 269 would also expand the mandate of the OSC to include fostering capital formation and competition in the markets, which could boost economic growth and create a level playing field for all market participants.

In order to facilitate a strengthened OSC, the government is moving forward with the separation of the position of chair and chief executive officer into two distinct roles. This measure would support stronger corporate governance and effective management of the OSC. In the interim and to provide stability, the government is renewing Grant Vingoe's appointment as the OSC's chair and chief executive officer for up to one year.

Almost 70% of Ontario's capital market participants are small and medium-sized businesses. Our government's proposed measures will help make them more competitive.

Bill 269 also includes measures that would strengthen Ontario's financial securities regulator. Our government

established the Financial Services Regulatory Authority of Ontario, FSRA, in 2019. It's a new, modern, independent and self-funded regulator of financial services and pensions. It has the mandate to be innovative and promote strong financial services and pension sectors while protecting the public interest.

As one of the measures our government took to respond to the pandemic, the Ministry of Finance, through the Ontario Financing Authority, provided FSRA with a \$2-billion line of credit designed to give the province's credit unions and *caisse populaire* sectors strengthened emergency liquidity support. To avoid triggering the increase in fees paid by credit unions and *caisses populaires* for this additional support, the government proposes to allow FSRA to pay some costs associated with the line of credit from the existing sector-funded Deposit Insurance Reserve Fund instead.

Speaker, I've spoken to dozens of credit unions throughout every corner of this province, from Guelph to Sudbury to Waterloo, even in my riding of Willowdale. Credit unions are going to be a key piece in part of our economic recovery. These are sophisticated financial institutions, and in many rural communities and in the north, they are the only financial institution that people have access to. These credit unions are focused on the community. As we've seen through our many discussions and travels throughout this great province, the needs of the people of my riding are not necessarily the needs of the people in Windsor or in Kapuskasing. They are greatly varied, so we should have financial institutions that are best able to serve these unique needs.

The last credit union/*caisse populaire* act had not been updated since 1994. That's 26 years while the world continued to innovate and move on. Yet because of dated legislation and outdated regulations, unfortunately, the *caisses populaires* and credit unions were left behind. Certainly, Bill 269 understands that these credit unions are going to be a key piece of our recovery and proposes measures that would strengthen the regulator's capabilities to enforce compliance with rules in the insurance sector, as well as enable the establishment of an oversight framework for financial planners and advisers. I'm proud of the changes that we are making to modernize credit union legislation here in the province of Ontario.

Positioning the province as a top-tier destination for investment and job creation is critical to supporting long-term economic growth. We know that in the global economy, however, there is an increasingly fierce competition among jurisdictions to attract business investments. We also know that Ontario struggles to match the investment attraction performance of its peers.

So to help make Ontario more attractive, more competitive and to transform its approach to business attraction, the government has created Invest Ontario, an agency dedicated to attracting investors to our great province. Invest Ontario will promote the province as a key investment destination, making Ontario more competitive and sending a strong signal to investors that our province is indeed open for business. It will be a one-stop

shop for businesses and investors that will be able to be agile and responsive to the changing needs of business. Invest Ontario will drive greater economic growth, support domestic firms and attract businesses from around the world to create good jobs in Ontario.

As part of the 2021 budget, the government is committing \$400 million over four years to create the Invest Ontario Fund, which will support Invest Ontario and encourage investments in the key sectors of advanced manufacturing, technology and life sciences. The agency will provide expertise and investor services that are responsive and customizable to support investment opportunities. Services include identifying available financial assistance, talent support, advisory supports and concierge services. Invest Ontario will also include greater business development and deal structuring expertise. The agency will showcase to potential investors the many benefits of setting up shop and expanding operations right here in Ontario. This includes, of course, our excellent quality of life, a highly skilled talent pool, a strong and growing innovation centre and a pro-job creation climate that can help businesses thrive.

1600

Bill 269 proposes to continue Invest Ontario and expand its current objectives. Invest Ontario will be a key driver of investment and will help the province position itself for growth as it begins to recover from the effects of COVID-19 in a highly competitive global marketplace, because as we know, as the world struggles with COVID-19, the world will very much be competing for an edge once COVID-19 is behind us. We must position Ontario today to be in a position for that success tomorrow.

In addition to Invest Ontario, our government supports businesses through a wide variety of programs and initiatives. In fact, in the 2021 budget, we are expanding our support for businesses through measures such as providing a second round of Ontario Small Business Support Grant payments of \$10,000 to \$20,000 to eligible recipients. Small businesses who are confirmed eligible recipients of the Ontario Small Business Support Grant will be automatically entitled to a second payment in an amount equal to the first payment that they received, saving them from the red tape of another application form. As of the latest statistics that I saw on Friday morning, over \$1.4 billion has reached the hands of these small businesses, with an average waiting time of 12 days to receive those funds. That will be once again repeated, providing the much-needed support for small businesses to be able to get through these difficult times. These two rounds of support will deliver an estimated \$3.4 billion to approximately 120,000 small businesses in Ontario, helping them weather this difficult time and protecting jobs.

Ontario is also investing more than \$400 million over the next three years in new initiatives to support Ontario's tourism, hospitality and culture sectors, which have been among the most heavily impacted by COVID-19. We are also introducing the new Ontario Tourism and Hospitality Small Business Support Grant, which will provide an

estimated \$100 million in one-time payments of \$10,000 to \$20,000 to eligible small businesses. In addition, the 2021 budget is investing an additional \$10 million in the Digital Main Street program in 2021-22 to help more small businesses achieve a digital transformation and serve customers more effectively online.

Speaker, in creating these initiatives, Ontario has made sure to place accountability and transparency at their heart. We know that Ontario businesses rely on those values, and those values guide everything that we do. For this reason, Bill 269 proposes an amendment to the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade Act that would enhance the accountability and transparency of the business support programs our government provides through the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. This amendment would require that the outcomes of the business support programs be accessible through an annual Ontario investment prospectus report. This would be included in the annual report the minister submits to the Legislature. The report would provide timely information regarding public spending and help ensure that funds are used for the benefit of businesses and communities across Ontario.

Lastly, this bill includes a new act, the Ontario Loan Act, 2021, which, if passed, would authorize the government to finance up to \$40.1 billion in new borrowing in fiscal 2021-22, because, as Premier Ford has said, we will spare no expense to protect Ontarians.

Our response to the pandemic has required extraordinary measures. These measures have resulted in a growing deficit, and while those deficits are neither desirable or sustainable, they are absolutely necessary right now to protect the health and safety of those we serve. That's why, Speaker, this government has put so much emphasis in our first two years in office in reducing the deficit. Against the strong objections from the members opposite, this government cut the proposed Liberal \$15-billion deficit in half. It's this fiscal prudence that has allowed us to have that ability to spend today.

Speaker, members opposite may roll their eyes, but any family, any small business knows that when times are good, you have to save for a rainy day. That's exactly what this government did, and now, the rains are here. We have the fiscal firepower to do everything that needs to be done to protect Ontarians' lives and livelihoods.

I want to reiterate how honoured I am to speak to my esteemed colleagues gathered here today about our government's plan and the important measures in Bill 269 that support that plan. I also want to thank our Minister of Finance, the President of the Treasury Board, who has worked tirelessly. I want to thank him for his passion and commitment to bettering the lives of all Ontarians, and working around the clock to make sure that those priorities were met for this budget last week. Thank you, Minister.

We are committed to working hand in hand with the people of Ontario to get through the pandemic, to chart a course for recovery and for growth. From the front-line workers who give so much of themselves to help people in need to the small business owners doing their part to keep

people safe, even at the expense of their own balance sheets; to the people on the street, in stores or on public transit who are taking extra steps to wash their hands, wear masks, maintain social distancing measures and not visit with loved ones; to the teachers who go above and beyond to help their young students—like my wife—navigate the changes in the classroom in person and online; to every single one of the 14.7 million people in this province who have made these sacrifices, thank you. Our government is grateful to them and to so many others who embody the Ontario spirit. Our government will keep working for them, doing everything we can to protect the health and jobs of people across this beautiful province.

That's why, Speaker, despite our differences, the reality is this budget outlines the measures necessary to finish the fight we started a year ago, the necessary supports to protect our health and safety, our number one priority, and the necessary supports to protect our jobs and our economy. This third phase is a crucial step in making sure that we get to the hope that is on the horizon, that we make sure that COVID-19 is nothing but a distant memory, and that we will always look back on these times and remember that this government was there for the people of Ontario, that this finance minister was there for the people we serve.

So it is with sincere hope that I look across the aisle, that the members opposite, despite our differences, will vote in favour of Bill 269, the Protecting the People of Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2021.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I recognize the President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you very kindly to the MPP from Willowdale for those gracious words. I know he, too, feels very passionate about this province—also has his family coming from another country, who could build their lives in this great province, in this great country. Thank you for your very heartfelt words and everything you're doing for the citizens of your riding, but also all Ontarians.

Madam Speaker, I'm honoured to rise and speak about Bill 269, the Protecting the People of Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2021. This proposed legislation is a key component of our government's ongoing efforts to defeat COVID-19 and help people, businesses and communities emerge from the global pandemic stronger than before.

Premier Ford and I have spoken with people from every region and walk of life—including Niagara, this morning—to make sure that this budget reflects the priorities of the great people of this province, who have sacrificed, endured and supported each other during these exceptional and trying times.

1610

The people of this province told us very clearly what they expect from their government during these dark days. As I said when I introduced the 2021 budget, Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy, people told us they expect their government to do two things right now: First and foremost, they expect

us to protect people's health; and second, they expect us to support the economy. That is exactly what this budget does, and that is supported by the measures in Bill 269. Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy takes us closer to the day when people no longer have to worry about a virus that can harm their health, take away their jobs or undermine the future of their small businesses.

Our government's second pandemic budget focuses on protecting people's health with our plan to defeat COVID-19 and protecting people's jobs and economic well-being as we continue to face the pandemic—because, as I've said many times, without healthy people you cannot have a healthy economy.

Le deuxième budget de notre gouvernement en période de pandémie met l'accent sur les mesures prévues pour protéger la santé de la population grâce à notre plan de lutte contre la COVID-19, et pour protéger les emplois et le bien-être économique de la population à mesure que se poursuit la pandémie—parce que, comme je l'ai dit à maintes reprises, pour avoir une économie en santé, on doit avoir une population en santé.

The truth at the heart of our budget is that: It guides the measures included in this bill.

The 2021 budget measures bill will help move us forward to the next phase of Ontario's action plan—a plan that brings our COVID-19 response to \$51 billion. That includes \$16.3 billion to protect people's health, the top priority of this government. Because it is the top priority of the people of Ontario, protecting people's health is the first pillar of our plan, and that plan starts with vaccines. Right now, at this very moment, doctors and pharmacists are vaccinating people. The vaccines were developed in record time, thanks to the drive and ingenuity of scientists and health care workers. They provide not only the very real protection from COVID-19 but also a sense of hope that we're finally turning a corner after a year of fear and uncertainty.

Our government is pulling out all the stops to help people get vaccinated as quickly as possible. We are making more than \$1 billion available for our province-wide vaccination plan. The plan has three phases and activates every available health care resource to get the job done. For example, 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.

We are also supporting community-led vaccination efforts in First Nations and urban Indigenous communities, with \$50 million to support the vaccine rollout, including more public health capacity and greater access to testing. Nobody will be left behind.

To execute a rollout of this size, we have brought together health care professionals, medical experts and front-line workers across the province. All of us have a role to play: from the drivers who transport precious vaccine shipments to our communities; to the front-line health care workers who put the shots in our arms; to the volunteers helping to set up appointments; to the friends,

family, work colleagues and neighbours encouraging each other to get the vaccine.

Along with the vaccines, our government is supporting increased testing. Anyone who needs a test can get a test, and they can get the results quickly. Well over 14 million tests have already been completed, and as vaccines roll out, testing will only increase. Our government is investing \$2.3 billion more for testing in 2021-22. This brings our total investments since the beginning of the pandemic to \$3.7 billion. In particular, we are deploying rapid tests, a key part of our strategy. 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 such as manufacturing, warehouses, construction and food processing. Vaccines and testing will help stop the spread, help save lives and help bring peace of mind to people in Ontario.

Madam Speaker, COVID-19 has put a significant strain on our health care system, and one of our greatest fears during this pandemic has been, "What if we run out of hospital space?" Fortunately, we have prevented that from happening, and we are continuing to take action to make sure it won't ever happen again. 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.

One of the effects of COVID-19 has been to create a deeply worrying backlog of surgeries and other procedures. That's why our budget makes more resources available to clear the backlog. We're keeping operating rooms open late into the night to make sure that people who have been forced by the pandemic to wait longer than they would or should have can get the procedures and care that they need. That care is being administered in new, state-of-the-art, bigger and better hospitals. The government is accelerating its plan to invest more than \$30 billion to build, expand and enhance hospitals across the province over the next decade.

The staff and residents in long-term-care homes have been deeply affected by this virus, and they are the ones who have suffered the most from this pandemic. Here in Ontario, nearly every long-term-care resident has been fully immunized, and cases and deaths in long-term-care homes have declined substantively. But there's still so much more to do.

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.

Madam Speaker, what happened in long-term-care homes during the pandemic exposed a tragedy that was decades in the making. But after years of neglect and underfunding in long-term care, we say, "No more." Our government is building 30,000 new beds. In contrast, the previous government took nearly 10 years to build just 611

new beds. With this budget, Ontario is investing an additional \$933 million to make those beds happen. That brings the total investment in beds to \$2.6 billion.

We are also building four new long-term-care homes on an accelerated basis. In addition, we are investing \$246 million to improve living conditions in existing homes, including ensuring air conditioning for residents so that our loved ones who have done so much for our communities and our province can live in comfort, with safety, dignity and respect.

Ontario is also taking action to make sure they get the care they need and deserve. This government 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. But we also know we need more of those crucial front-line heroes. That is why we are investing over \$121 million to support the accelerated training of almost 9,000 personal support workers.

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. We are investing \$160 million in the community paramedicine program to bring care and services to the homes of seniors in 33 communities, from Rainy River to Prince Edward county to Toronto to Chatham-Kent.

Madam Speaker, the fear, isolation and uncertainty created by COVID-19 has led to new and worsened mental health and addiction struggles for people across this province. Our government was already taking action to address mental health and addictions with Roadmap to Wellness, our \$3.81-billion, 10-year commitment to mental health and addiction funding, but we are also providing more psychology treatment to patients and creating the first centre of excellence for mental health in the province's history.

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COVID-19 has intensified the need for action. To help thousands of people struggling with mental health and addiction issues, our government is making record investments. That includes an additional \$175 million in 2021-22 to provide more and better care for everyone who needs it. It 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 make sure people in crisis get the right support when they desperately need it; and investments to help those who serve and as a result can experience particularly troubling mental health pressures, including veterans and OPP staff.

Just as the pandemic has exacerbated mental health and addiction challenges, it has also led to a disturbing rise in domestic violence. Our government firmly believes that women and children have a fundamental right to feel safe in their home. The 2021 budget takes steps to make that a reality, with new investments to bolster support services for women and children in need. We are investing an additional \$8.2 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 over three years to support victims of domestic violence and human trafficking survivors who find and need a safe place to live. We remain committed to supporting victims of domestic violence, human trafficking and other violent crimes, and putting violent offenders behind bars, where they belong, because every law-abiding citizen deserves to be protected.

Madam Speaker, MPP Cho spoke about our plan to protect the economy, the second pillar, and the measures in Bill 269 that support our government's action plan. I'd like to now speak about our province's fiscal situation. To be frank, Madam Speaker, the pressures we are taking to protect people's health and our economy come at a cost. But since the very beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have made a simple promise to the people of Ontario: Your government will do whatever it takes to protect you.

The Ontario government is projecting to spend \$173 billion in 2021-22. Clearly, our government has spared no expense to defeat the coronavirus. Of course, this spending has resulted in significant deficits. It's a scenario faced by governments all around the world. Our government projects that the deficit will be \$33.1 billion in 2021-22. Now, this level of spending is neither sustainable or desirable forever, but these are unprecedented times which require an unprecedented response. Our government recognizes that this level of spending is not only necessary to pull Ontario through the dark days of the pandemic, it is also necessary to put our province in a position to recover stronger. There is no doubt that a return to fiscal sustainability will take some time, but the path would be longer and harder if action is not taken now to safeguard people and jobs.

Even in the midst of this pandemic, our government's commitment to transparency and accountability is unwavering. That is why in this budget we once again outline three economic and fiscal scenarios to be straightforward about the uncertainty that the global economy faces and the risks it could pose to our province's finances. We will continue to be transparent, with regular updates as the struggle of COVID-19 continues.

Some say tax hikes or cuts to public services will be necessary due to COVID-19, but they are wrong. There is a third way. Our financial recovery will be driven by economic growth instead, to get people back to work and businesses to open their doors again, to create opportunity for people, for families and employers to grow.

Since 2018, we have worked hard to confront Ontario's competitive issues. We have strengthened the foundation of our province's economy, and to build on that, later this year our government will release our plan to create the conditions for stronger, long-term economic growth, but our government respects and never forgets that while we create the conditions, it will be the people and employers of our province who will create the actual growth.

But I go back to that fundamental truth: For the economy to be healthy, we need the people of Ontario to be healthy. Only by beating this virus will we get on the road towards economic recovery—and it will recover. For

now, as we deal with the third wave, our focus remains protecting health and jobs threatened by COVID-19.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, our government remains steadfast in our commitment to beat this virus; we will not rest until we do, and we remain laser-focused on protecting every person and every job that we can in this great province. The 2021 budget outlines the historic commitments our government is making to keep people safe, to strengthen our health care system in the face of the pandemic and position it to better support Ontario's growing health needs for the future because even after the pandemic is over, the health of people in Ontario will continue to be our government's highest priority.

We have seen the bravery, compassion and generosity of the people of Ontario during these trying times. We've seen people doing right by each other and not taking the easy way out.

If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it's that the 14.7 million people of Ontario can accomplish incredible things when we work towards a common goal.

La COVID-19 nous aura appris au moins une chose : les 14,7 millions d'Ontariennes et d'Ontariens peuvent accomplir des choses incroyables lorsqu'ils travaillent à atteindre un but commun.

I know that their 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 the country.

The Premier calls it the "Ontario spirit," and the Ontario spirit is hard work and sacrifice, kindness and respect. The Ontario spirit will get us through COVID-19, of this I have no doubt, and when that time comes, those same people who have sacrificed so much during the pandemic will unleash growth in our province to a greater extent than we've ever witnessed before. Until then, with grateful hearts, our government expresses its profound admiration and respect to the people of Ontario.

We know the road back won't be straight, nor easy, but the people of this province have shown time and time again that when we work together, nothing is impossible. As I said last week when I introduce the 2021 budget, hope is on the horizon, and we remain absolutely committed to seeing people through these trying days and into a better future.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: It's an honour to rise and speak to Bill 269 on behalf of the folks of Brampton North.

My question is to the MPP for Willowdale. He spoke about PSWs in his speech. As we all know, PSWs have been the champions in long-term care. However, the government has failed to put an iron ring around PSWs as well as the patients. They worked through the lack of adequate resources and the privatization the government has been pushing ahead instead of taking care of our seniors. They deserve to be acknowledged.

The member from Willowdale said that he knows that reducing the deficit is important and saving for a rainy day. So my question is, will this government commit to increasing PSW wages beyond June 30?

1630

Mr. Stan Cho: Again, I appreciate that question from the member from Brampton North.

Long-term care is a hugely important priority for this government, and that's why not just base funding has increased, as you can see from the budget—and I can refer specifically to page 175, where you can see that—but also to achieve that nation-leading standard of four hours of care. I know the members opposite criticized our last budget, saying, “Well, where are the dollars?” The dollars are clearly listed here, on page 43. You can see that the \$4.9 billion breaks down to half a billion dollars this fiscal, \$1 billion next fiscal, \$1.5 billion in 2023-24 and \$1.9 billion in 2024-25. Part of those priorities will go towards, for example, the \$121 million to support the accelerated training of almost 9,000 personal support workers.

Speaker, the member talks about wages, and certainly we've provided the wage boost for the personal support workers as well as additional incentives in training and tax credits, as well as incentives for the PSWs to stay in the much-needed field as long as possible.

So it's a comprehensive problem, but the government is up to the task.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I thank the member for his work on this budget.

He talked about many things in this budget that are going to help small businesses, the health care sector and much more—but I want to get a sense from him in terms of our overall economy. I think a lot of young people like myself and those who are being born into this generation also want to make sure that they're not left behind, that we're not going into a recession—and that this current spending is going to be on the backs of the new generation. I just want to ask the member what he is doing within the budget to support economic growth so that not only this current generation is benefiting, but those to come.

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you to the member from Barrie—Innisfil for a very important question.

One thing that we've said from the beginning of this pandemic, back in March of last year, was that we need to listen to the experts as data becomes available. Thankfully, more clarity has arisen throughout this pandemic, and now we see that that uncertainty amongst the private sector forecasting GDP growth and job numbers has dissipated somewhat. There's still a discrepancy, and you can see on page 148 that we have a fast-growth projection and a slower-growth projection, but to be prudent and to build additional safeguards into our plan, we have taken that middle-of-the-ground approach.

It's crucial, also, when speaking with the private sector and those who believe we can stimulate job growth, to put that foundation in place for supports, with a series of temporary supports as well as permanent reductions to doing business in Ontario—because remember, these are job creators—today, so that we will succeed tomorrow.

Thank you for the question.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to ask the Minister of Finance about the 230 not-for-profit organizations that

provide home and community care to 750,000 Ontarians to help them remain safely in their homes and communities. The sector's front-line staff and support staff are exhausted and feel undervalued. They need more than just thanks. The PSWs, the RPNs, the RNs in that sector need decent, sustainable, competitive compensation. Without it, not-for-profit agencies will be unable to retain and deploy adequate staff to meet the needs of the clients, who will end up going back into our hospitals.

My question is: How come there is no money in the budget to help the home and community care sector to keep people in their homes, where they want to be, rather than being admitted into the hospital and then placed into a long-term-care home, where they don't want to be?

Mr. Stan Cho: The home and community care act—in our first year in government, is when we addressed some of these issues, but understanding that COVID-19 has made these pain points deeper, we are expanding home care. You can see that in the macro, with our overall increases to the health budget year over year, hard stop, every single out year, but also with our targeted support measures of \$16.3 billion announced during this budget. This is not a problem that will be fixed by resources alone—but resources are an issue, and they haven't been there in the somewhat fragmented health care system that was inherited.

There's no point in pointing fingers at this point. The dollars are there. Now it's time to get the work done, and we are willing to work with the opposition to get those important initiatives met.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Parm Gill: I want to thank my colleague the member for Willowdale for a very passionate speech and for all the work he has put in to making this budget successful. I have gotten lots of positive comments in my riding, especially when it comes to the investments we'll be making in education and our future generations, of course; small businesses; health care; broadband, which is huge and very, very important in my riding.

My question to the member opposite is if he can speak to some of the consultations leading up to—and I know a lot of our colleagues on this side of the House put in a great deal of hours leading up and listening to Ontarians, and I know the PA to the Minister of Finance, the member for Willowdale, also spent countless hours listening to Ontarians. I'm wondering if you can share some of the stories and some of the ideas that were gathered during the consultation process.

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you for the important question from the member from Milton. Yes, consultations were a crucial part of getting this right. Of course, these are extraordinary times. We didn't know what this pandemic was going to look like when it first hit us. That's why consulting was a crucial step. As we moved through and supports were announced—the original support program, you'll recall, was \$17 billion. Of course, there were gaps in that program. We worked with the opposition, we worked through the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and through the consultations that many

members on our government side went through individually to form those supports as we moved through. Those supports were increased to \$30 billion and then \$45 billion in our last budget—most recently, \$51 billion.

Many of those support programs—the business support grant program, for example—came about by the very consultations that the member from Milton alludes to. Support measures for property tax reductions; permanent measures, whether the EHT reduction, eliminating the tax on jobs for the smallest of small businesses—again from the many consultations. And we're not through this yet, so we're going to continue consulting with the individuals and hard-working small businesses in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I think members on both sides of the House will agree that women have been disproportionately affected by this pandemic, and their economic livelihood and security were definitely affected. In this budget, we see a tax credit for child care, but we see nothing about creating child care spaces. Even essential workers in Thunder Bay today have no spaces to put their children, even through the DSSAB program, and so they are forced to stay home and affect their incomes. What is this government, and what is this member thinking? How can we get a credit for child care that we can't even access?

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you to the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan for bringing up this important issue. It's why our government was committed to creating 30,000 additional child care spaces before the pandemic, and we're committed to that. In fact, we've included 10,000 spaces in schools, and as of the winter of 2021, over 20,000 spaces have been approved, which means these are actually—

Interjection.

Mr. Stan Cho: Yes, it's on page 72 of the budget, where you can see the crucial update.

But in addition to the CARE tax credit program—which I'm thankful the member mentions—which has been topped up to 90%, we've introduced the jobs training tax credit, which will allow women to retool, if they were hard hit, for example, from the hospitality sector, as well as \$117 million to assist women in removing barriers to training to getting into these jobs for whatever the new reality looks like.

It is a big problem, and yes, women have been disproportionately affected. That's why our government is continuing to tackle that problem in a multifaceted approach to make sure that women can get back into the workforce.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): We don't have time for another round of questions. Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to join the debate today on the budget bill, Bill 269. It is interesting to see what's actually in this budget bill. There are 10 schedules. Schedules 1 and 2 deal with credit unions; schedule 3, the Electricity Act; schedule 4, financial professionals; schedule 5, the Insurance Act; schedule 6, Invest Ontario—and I think this will be something that we peel back the layers

on and deal with, perhaps at another time—and then the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade Act; schedule 8 is the Ontario Loan Act; schedule 9, interestingly enough, deals with the Securities Commission Act; and then schedule 10 is the Taxation Act, which I think will actually form quite a bit of interest for us today, because this is actually the part of this very long bill—which, of course, doesn't mention anything that the finance minister has referenced to date.

But schedule 10 specifically deals with the tax credit for child care and the Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit. Of interest, the Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit—and this is right here in the bill: “Only an individual who has a positive federal training credit limit for the year is eligible for the credit. Eligible expenses for the credit are based on expenses that may be claimed in respect of the Canada training credit under the Income Tax Act of Canada, which is obviously federal in nature.

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My colleague from Thunder Bay–Atikokan referenced the child care tax credit. I'm going to delve into that in a little bit, but she's absolutely right: Providing a child care tax credit to women or families who are trying to re-enter the workforce when those child care spaces do not exist is not helpful.

I'm going to be focusing a great deal, actually, on what is not in the bill. I want to reference, though, where we are right now in the province of Ontario with regard to today's stats.

Today, the Ontario government has reported through the Ministry of Health that we have 2,094 new COVID cases. There have been 10 new deaths. The total deaths thus far over the past year in the province of Ontario are 7,337 deaths. We now have a positivity rate in Ontario of 6.1%. There's an alarming trend right now that we should not be ignoring, and this budget bill, of course, did not reference the third wave, which was of great concern to us on this side of the House.

The total cases from the weekend—and this trend should hold some relevance for the government. Of the 4,901 cases that were reported on Saturday and Sunday, those 60 and over were 715 cases; those between 40 and 59, 1,384 cases; those between the ages of 20 and 39, 1,923; and under the age of 20, 977 new cases of COVID-19.

We are in a third wave in this province with five days now running a total of over 2,000 COVID-19 cases. We should be able to pivot as a province to respond to these cases and to the demographics, which are greatly different than the first wave and the second wave because of the variants. This called for urgent action and urgent investment in the people of this province in keeping people safe. It also required an acknowledgement that the variants are winning the race right now in Ontario.

This is our third Minister of Finance in three years—fairly unprecedented in the history of this province. I don't need to get into why it's going so poorly for the Ministry of Finance, but the Minister of Finance who, to his credit, reached out to me prior to the budget—I provided some

feedback to that finance minister; that feedback is not contained in this budget, but he certainly made the effort.

He said, though, on the day of the budget, “Don’t bet against the people of Ontario” to recover from COVID-19 and the variants, and while I also have great faith in the people of this great province, as do we all in this Legislature, I want to say that it does appear that this government itself is gambling with the health and the economy of this province, throwing the dice and hoping that they win at the slots, without putting the appropriate resources in place to keep people safe in Ontario.

I want to say at the outset, budget 2020-21 called for a courageous and bold plan that invested strategically in a caring economy, ensuring that people have the resources they need to stay safe in this pandemic, and that is key, obviously, to our economic recovery. Given all that we know, Madam Speaker, all that the people of this province were expecting from this budget, this budget, unfortunately, in this third wave of this pandemic, missed the mark. It’s actually continuing a theme that we have seen from this government. They are out of touch with Ontarians. They’ve significantly missed opportunities—opportunities, actually, of disruption, to change this wave of COVID-19 and to address ongoing inequities that have existed in this province as a hangover essentially from the Liberal government.

For those who have already been struggling, the message is to continue struggling, and for those who have benefited, like the big box stores, the government has their back. For those on the front lines, keep standing, but you’re on your own. I think that there’s a genuine sense of betrayal, that those essential workers and front-line health care workers who have kept this province going feel let down, especially when you dig down and pull back the layers of this budget.

There’s an interesting dichotomy also happening with the federal government—and I want to be really clear about this. Kevin Page just wrote in the Policy Magazine, “Meanwhile, we are battling an epic war with mother nature; a novel coronavirus that is killing people. In this context, debt can save lives and businesses while public health systems struggle to give us immunity”—the point being that if there was ever an opportunity, if there was ever a time for a government to recognize this is the time to invest in keeping people safe strategically—like paid sick days. There was overwhelming support in this province for that gesture, for what we have been asking for for over a year. We have the research and we have the evidence to support funding that fundamental policy change to get us through this ongoing third wave. Relief must continue as infections spread, new variants develop and the vaccination process rolls out.

Now, I want to be really clear: Vaccinations are not going well in the province of Ontario. Nobody in this province thinks that the government of the day is handling the vaccination rollout with competency, with accuracy, not addressing the inequities that exist across this province on this front. When the Premier was asked about this today in Niagara on his campaign tour—we’re in a pandemic;

he’s out campaigning. He stumbled because I feel like there’s finally acknowledgement that this Premier is out of his depth with dealing with this virus. You can see that it is growing out of control, Madam Speaker.

Five days, over 2,000—this is exactly where we were prior to the last shutdown. Businesses in all of our communities have said to us, “Do everything you can to prevent another shutdown of our economy.” Hamilton rolled back to grey today. Other jurisdictions are having to make adjustments, while also the Premier is saying, “But you can still do outdoor fitness classes.” There is a walking contradiction in this province, and his name is Premier Ford.

Tonight, I’m having a town hall on the vaccine rollout. The response has been astounding. I am shocked by how many people want to be part of this vaccine town hall. It’s not the politicians who are going to be giving out advice, but we do have a doctor and we have an administrator who is familiar with the rollout in Waterloo region.

I think that the sense of frustration across the province is not just because of a shortage of vaccines—and this really isn’t the time or the place to be pointing fingers at the federal government in this blame game. There are 340,000 vaccines in freezers today. We need to get them in the arms of Ontarians. All of us want that. Understanding where the barriers are in this rollout is an important part of solving the problem, Madam Speaker.

Also, the other missed opportunity in this budget which, given the research and given where the outbreaks have happened—that this government does not have a safe workplace strategy in place with sick days and financial support to actually get a vaccine is an astounding missed opportunity.

Some of the feedback on the budget I wanted to get on the record, because these are folks who know the sector well and who were hoping to see a new relationship with this government—we started this pandemic in this mode of “We’re all in this together.”

SEIU Healthcare says their “health care workers have been calling on” the Premier “to make the initial \$4 per hour ‘pandemic pay’ available to all front-line heroes fighting COVID and to make it permanent,”—this budget only makes it temporary—“yet his budget ignores their demand for respect and economic security.” SEIU Healthcare’s Sharleen Stewart says that the lack of paid sick days amid the pandemic has resulted in 67% of her members taking home less pay.

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CUPE Ontario said, “After all the people of Ontario have been through this last year, this budget is just classic trickle-down economics.... They’ll spin this, but the reality is the budget promises a gush of massive tax cuts and subsidies for big businesses and the wealthiest Ontarians, with just a trickle going to the chronically underfunded public services....” CUPE Ontario president Fred Hahn says the pandemic calls for bold action, not rehashing tired strategies.

This actually is very surprising. This government had licence to really step outside of their comfort zone, and they obviously made an intentional decision not to do that.

Environmental Defence said of this budget—and this is especially important, given the Supreme Court ruling on the carbon tax last week—that the budget “asserts that relatively minor spending on data-gathering will see that ‘flood risk is reduced,’ even though the government recently undermined the ability of conservation authorities to stop dangerous development in flood plains and hazard areas.” Environmental Defence’s Keith Brooks said the budget is full of contradictions.

There was a joint statement from the five teachers’ unions—and I’m going to spend a fair amount of time on the education file. They said, “As the province enters the third wave of the pandemic, the Ford government is delivering a budget that fails to even keep education spending in line with the rate of inflation and enrolment growth. Obviously, education is not a priority for this government.” They called the lack of new education funding “callous.”

I entered politics through education, as did the Speaker, and I believe that there are many people in this Legislature who understand that if you get education right, so much else falls into place, including—as the Minister of Finance has said, the path back to balance is by job creation. Education investment is the key to job creation, so we know that cheaping out on education is not the best plan.

What we see very clearly with this budget is that—what a missed opportunity it was to actually take action on the education piece, on the sick days component, on the caring economy, matching job creation with keeping people healthy so the economy can stay open. The return on investment on those kinds of public services, be they in a hospital, be they in mental health, be they in long-term care—those investments are good for the economy, and they’re good for the people of this province. So you can understand why we would be frustrated at this point in time.

The municipal partners in this province have been in a very uncomfortable place for the last little while, because they have had to go cap in hand to this government on a number of occasions, asking for funding, asking for clarity around guidelines on how to deal with COVID-19. Of late, the member from Peterborough said that perhaps the city of Peterborough doesn’t want the government’s money, because they weren’t grateful enough. So there is an uncomfortable relationship and a tension that is growing between our municipal partners and between our school boards and this government, and that is a very unhealthy culture that I wanted to get on the record.

That said, in this budget, the ministry once again fails to recognize where these hot spots are, where marginalized communities are, where transmission of COVID-19 happens at greater rates.

The region of Waterloo, in February, passed a motion asking this government to recognize that they have limited resources as a municipality.

What Thunder Bay is going through right now—I can’t imagine the stress and the tension of that community. There are higher rates of transmission right now in Thunder Bay than there ever were in Toronto, and this budget fails to recognize that.

Chair Redman goes on to say, “Waterloo region, being designated, is requesting that they be recognized as a high-priority community.” This isn’t the only letter from a municipality. I know that Peel, Mississauga and Durham have also been part of this.

They give data, which actually should inform public policy. They say, “The analysis of select indicators, including COVID incidents, COVID testing rates and per cent of population that are visible minority, low income, non-official home languages and recent immigrants, for Waterloo region were compared to those other five public health units identified as high-priority communities as well in the new strategy by the province of Ontario. Overall, Waterloo region values tend to be more concerning than those of Durham and Ottawa.”

Actually, now, you have municipalities saying, “No, we’re worse. We’re in a worse state of affairs here,” and they shouldn’t have to do that.

I took this letter over to the Minister of Health, and I said I think the region of Waterloo has a compelling case to be made that they require additional resources. We’re the fourth-largest draw for refugees and new immigrants. There’s a lot of manufacturing going on in our region, and transmission in workplaces is now very well documented across the province. So they want to be regarded as a high-priority community. They required some additional supports for marginalized communities, including mobile testing, and this budget does not address this very sincere and very honest and transparent and compelling case.

On education, I have to say, right now, and I want to reference—earlier today, I was watching the press conference with the Minister of Education. He was asked a very straightforward question by the media on the current caseload of COVID-19 cases right now and where exactly were higher cases right now when the Minister of Education decided to defer the March break into April. So he was asked straight up, “Given the circumstances that you deferred the last March break over into April, what are you going to be doing now?” Quite honestly, there wasn’t a straightforward answer at that press conference.

Families want to know what is going to be happening with the spring break. I will tell you that the overwhelming feedback I’m receiving in my riding is that a break is needed. The students need a break, the parents need a break and the educators need a break. Bumping it further, I think, would actually be a very rash decision to be made.

The education budget now includes non-classroom expenses like the CARE tax credit and the Support for Learners grant. I want to be really clear about this: When we’re talking about investment in schools, cash in a parent’s pocket is not an investment in the classroom.

There’s a chart on pages 7 to 9 of the budget that shows that other sectors will also have below-inflation increases over the next decade. That is something I want to be really clear on with regard to this budget: If you are not building the rate of inflation and those inflationary costs into the education funding, into the health care funding, into post-secondary, then you are underfunding those sectors. We’ve seen first-hand what school boards had to do this

year to make ends meet with regard to their operational budgets.

So the PressProgress article caught my attention:

“Ford’s 2021 Budget Confirms Over \$1 Billion in Cuts to Education, Ontario School Boards Say

“Future spending increases will be below the rate of inflation.”

Then it goes on to say, “Ontario’s 2021 budget confirms Doug Ford’s government is cutting \$1.6 billion from education.

“As PressProgress reported earlier this month, a Ministry of Education memo to Ontario school boards warned that a \$1.6 billion funding cut was in store for schools heading into September 2021.

“The memo, titled ‘2021-22 School Year,’ shows Deputy Minister Nancy Naylor acknowledged the ‘extraordinary steps’ educators have taken to support students during the pandemic”—my sister’s a teacher, my husband’s a teacher; I can confirm extraordinary steps have been taken—“but emphasized boards should expect \$1.6 billion less in support heading into September 2021.

1700

“The Ministry of Education characterized the funds as ‘temporary’ in the memo, however, it also indicated the cuts would eliminate thousands of jobs for principals, teachers, early child educators and custodians.”

Now, the government will come and they will say, “Listen, this is one-time funding,” and they will say, “This was meant for this one year.” This assumes that the impact of this pandemic is like a one-stop-in-time event, when, in fact, what we know is that students in our system have experienced great learning disruption over this year, whether they’re online or in their classroom.

The mental health piece and the challenges that students and staff actually have felt over the course of this year: This is real. It’s documented. Pulling that money out and removing resources from a system that has experienced, I would say, great trauma and strain is poorly thought out, and we certainly will be making the case for an increase in funding in the Grants for Student Needs, because that is the major funding mechanism that schools will need.

Right now, school board trustees are sitting around their horseshoe, and they’re all trying to say, “How can we minimize the damage on a go-forward basis? Usually it’s sacred cows. What do we want to fight for? What can we save? Is it outdoor education? Is it the Nutrition for Learning program?” Right now, they’re just trying to focus on getting kids back in schools, making sure that those students are safe.

When you put money into the pockets of parents and say, “This is an education investment,” you’re forgetting that you’re actually pulling, potentially, \$1.8 billion out of investing in the infrastructure of our public education system. And as I have said, this is an investment worth coming to the table. The Premier says, “Everything’s on the table.” I keep saying that table keeps getting smaller and smaller, because everything is not on the table. It clearly isn’t. But going to bat for education, that is why we got into politics, Madam Speaker.

So this is very worrisome for us. I know that it’s creating great strain and tension in the education system. Musing about potentially cancelling spring break, the one week where people can regroup, is an added pressure that we do not need now. We don’t need this.

I have to say, over the next three years, the province’s reported education spending increases will likely be below the rate of inflation as well. So if you’re looking for places to save money, education is not one of those places. I want to say that straight up, especially given the complex needs that we’re going to be seeing from students.

OPSBA: I used to be president of OPSBA; the Speaker used to sit around that horseshoe as well, with those other 70 boards. The education funding sector for 2021-22 is expected to be \$31.3 billion. With COVID-19 spending, the overall spending for 2020-21 was actually \$33.7 billion. This funding will go largely flow through the Grants for Student Needs, but what’s important for folks to remember is that boards already dipped into their reserves to see them through this challenging time. They used the reserves, and so now those reserves are not going to go to that resource room or that arts program. The boards spent their reserves, and the government has sort of left them hanging out there.

This is a quote from Cathy Abraham: “We were hoping to see a distinct continuation of funding that’s required for pandemic expenses, and we are disappointed that we are not seeing a replenishment of the reserves.... We need to use those funds for what we were saving them for.”

So I think it’s worth noting that the boards have spoken up, even though I’ve referenced this culture of—people are a little bit reticent to challenge the government; otherwise, they will get a letter like the mayor of Peterborough did that said, “Oh, well, maybe you don’t want this.” That is not how we should be operating in what we should acknowledge is a pandemic budget. This was the time to invest in keeping people safe.

Now, for the last two and a half years, I was the economic development critic, jobs critic, and research and innovation critic, and now I’m just the finance critic, so it should be simpler, you would think. But over this year, I’ve learned so much about the challenges that small businesses are experiencing, and so this was another disappointment that businesses expressed to us when the budget bill was presented.

Let’s just take stock of where we are right now in Ontario. One in six businesses have closed. Businesses that have survived thus far owe an average of \$170,000. Meanwhile, the goods and service economy is hurting from the pandemic. We acknowledge this. This is real. Output remains well below levels of a year ago, and the unemployment rate is uncomfortably high.

We spent a whole year fighting for rent support and tax relief and any measures that actually could keep businesses viable. Businesses are just fighting to survive—not to thrive, just to survive.

There are businesses that are thriving. The big box stores are doing very well.

The \$100 million that has been set aside, finally, for hospitality and tourism is good. They waited a long time

for that. Many of them are no longer in play. I would say the \$100 million that has been set aside is not an appropriate amount of money. Folks were really feeling hopeful, if we could get vaccinations in arms by the summer, that we might have a full tourism season. To date, of course, that is not going well, as I mentioned. So the government finally included tourism and hospitality. They finally recognized that the \$10,000 or \$20,000 in the small business grant is not sufficient, and so the businesses that qualified for that won't have to apply for it again. That's good, because many of them had serious issues applying for it the first time, and they shouldn't have to go through the same pain and anguish for \$10,000.

But the big miss on supporting small businesses is that you didn't change the criteria for businesses to qualify for the small business grant, so you knowingly, intentionally, left a whole swath of businesses out. You've basically said, "You're out of luck. We are not going to come to your support."

I have one of those companies, which I've been working with for almost a year—I have a great deal of respect for them. They're called Overflow Brewing Co. They're a company in Ottawa—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: You know them.

I've been telling their story to, hopefully, inform what was going to be in the budget bill, but to no avail.

Overflow Brewing Co. deferred their beer taxes at the beginning of the pandemic to stay afloat. When the deferred taxes came due this past October, their revenue situation had not changed. As you will recall, they supply restaurants, and restaurants were not fully open or operating at levels that were profitable. They were nowhere near their pre-pandemic sales levels. They asked the Ministry of Finance for assistance in paying off their debts through a payment plan or any other assistance. They were able to receive a payment plan and were assured that the Ministry of Finance would not place a lien on their business—but they did. To add insult to injury, the ministry is charging 7% interest on the deferred taxes.

We're still in a pandemic. It's totally unacceptable for the ministry to be making money off of a struggling small business. It's disappointing to see that tax relief for small businesses was not in this year's budget. If you measure the value of providing some tax relief and keeping businesses open so that they can keep people employed, and then there's a return on investment for those businesses staying open by providing some tax relief—this doesn't seem like rocket science to us, especially when it's the state that has negatively impacted those businesses, to be fair.

I wrote two letters—actually, I'm sure I've written 200 letters over this year—to two different Ministers of Finance about this particular company, and to no avail.

This is what the business owner, out of frustration, sent back to me: "Our business was disqualified from the energy credit because we had paid our energy bills and other small, private businesses but held back on the tax repayment. Our business was excluded from the \$10,000

to \$20,000 business grant because we are a brewery—zero explanation, just simply targeted as a company that is not included. Why? We don't know. We've been waiting for over a month just for a simple response to the PPE credits we applied for, and still nothing. But we've continued to spend over thousands on mandatory equipment."

1710

This is a theme that we have heard from businesses in all of our ridings: inconsistency in the application of the rules, a lack of clarity around guidelines, and a true lack of transparency about who gets money and who doesn't. This is of great concern for the business community.

The owner of Overflow Brewing Co. says, "We set up a payment plan last month. The PC government asked us to do this in order to claim the relief that we so desperately needed. Once this was completed, we were told we will be taking profits off our tax debt to them while they continuously shut down our business—not to mention we have had to shut down voluntarily in order to maintain cleanliness and sanitation."

This is the kind of stress that businesses have been going through. It's not insignificant. It is real. These businesses—this is their dream, and they were doing very well. Then the pandemic happened, and then the government was very selective about what measures you would do to actually help small businesses, even though your whole mantra, your whole branding is "open for business." This is a business that's fighting each and every day to stay open for business, and the Ministry of Finance is charging them 7% interest on the deferred taxes. It really defies all logic.

This particular owner has lost faith, and he is not alone in this. Knowing that this story has replicated itself thousands of times across this province, the budget bill would have been a very good place for you to acknowledge that these small businesses have gone through great turmoil and to say, "Do you know what? We're going to increase the criteria. We want more businesses to stay viable." The Minister of Finance has said the path back to recovery is through job creation. These are the job creators. They need to stay open. It seems, especially in this case, that the Ministry of Finance is actively working against this business, and that makes no sense.

We also heard in the budget speech a good deal about women and the economy and how this government has sort of seen the light and recognizes that 51% of the population are women, and they'll throw out the "she-cession" and "she-covey" as they see fit. But what a missed opportunity in this budget to actually include women in an inclusive economy plan going forward.

This is from a Toronto Star article: "Women—who bore the brunt of job losses, layoffs, reduced hours and child care during a year of COVID-19 lockdowns—worry what the return to a post-pandemic workforce will hold for them," and for good reason. We will have to make up 30 years, Madam Speaker, so our work is cut out for us. The government needs to acknowledge that we need to be part of that solution on a go-forward basis.

But what did we get from this budget and this government? The Ontario budget bill promises to launch "a

gender equity task force to study the economic barriers disproportionately faced by women and racialized people during the pandemic.” I can pull six strong, female economists together tomorrow morning. By the end of the day, we could have your report for you. There is no sense of urgency from this government to include women in the solution. We don’t need another task force. We don’t. We know what the barriers are for women to re-enter the workforce.

What else did we get? The budget proposes a temporary 20% top-up to the Ontario Childcare Access and Relief from Expenses tax credit, and this is a top-up of \$250, so it goes to \$1,500. Ontario has the highest child care costs in the country. On average, in the city of Toronto, it is almost \$3,000 a month—if you’re lucky, if you can get a space. I remember I became a child care advocate 22 years ago when my son was down here at Orde Street child care and I realized I would have to work for two and a half weeks of take-home pay as a settlement worker to pay that child care cost. Things have not improved in those 22 years. Aside from the cost, aside from the fact that a tax credit, especially a tax credit which provides so little support, is not the way forward for women, having a tax credit for spaces that do not exist is not the solution.

Also, the other pieces that I did speak with the finance minister about are around retraining women to re-enter the workforce. Listen, over 200,000 workers in Ontario have been out of the workforce for 27 weeks now. So what we are going to see is a stalling of people re-entering the workforce, because they have been out of the workforce for so long. Also, they have additional—either caring for parents or caring for children. This child care tax credit will not solve that issue. What a time to be bold and create jobs and build the infrastructure that we need for child care. This would have been a job creator in and of itself, by creating more child care spaces around capital builds.

The temporary jobs training tax credit for those seeking training and employment in a new industry is also part of this package, but, as I mentioned, it’s tied to the federal program, and you need to qualify for that federal program in order to enter into a job training program. In essence, and somewhat ironically, you’ve actually put up a barrier right in your budget for women to retrain. Why do that? I know that this government, for many months now, has been hiding behind Justin Trudeau from the federal government, but there was no need.

I’ve talked to the finance minister about so many not-for-profits in all of our regions who are dedicated to retraining, reskilling, upskilling—the trades, for instance. What an opportunity to really address these inequities in all of our communities. And the good thing about the not-for-profit sector is that there’s really very little red tape; I know you’re very focused on the red tape. These are not-for-profit agencies in all of our communities across the province, and they are ready to go. They want to be put to work. They know their community, they know the resources in their community and they know the gaps in their community. This, again, is another missed opportunity.

There are a few things that do need to happen, though, to get women back into the workforce, and Pamela Jeffery, who is the founder of the Prosperity Project, which is “an initiative that tracks COVID-19 economic impacts on women and girls, says women need to get back to work not only to help themselves but to shore up the country’s drooping financial health—but they can’t do it without supports.”

She goes on to say, “‘We can’t have an economic recovery if we have got huge numbers of women on the sidelines,’ says Jeffery, who collaborates with more than 60 female leaders across Canada in the ... Toronto-based not-for-profit organization.” So it’s a win-win right here.

A national survey found that “working mothers were ‘frozen’”—and that’s exactly their quote—“by their circumstances during the pandemic.” They “had higher rates of anxiety, depression and stress than working fathers, and” they were more “worried about life after lockdown.

“‘In order for us to have a recovery, we need to have jobs. We need to be creating jobs,’ says Jeffery. ‘And in order for women to move into those jobs, which is part of the recovery, we need to have child care so women can get to work.’”

She also recommends, or some other folks recommend “the idea of ‘danger pay’ or hazard pay for those who face risks in the workplace. Such a financial top-up was provided, outside of front-line health-care workers, for retail workers by companies ... at the beginning of the pandemic....

“‘Danger pay could also benefit those providing services from cleaning and custodial work to medical services outside of hospital settings.’”

Really, there was no acknowledgement that there was great risk for primarily women-dominated jobs in the beginning of the pandemic, in the middle of the pandemic, in the third wave of the pandemic, and it’s certainly not recognized by this budget bill.

Nadine Spencer, who is the president of Black Business and Professional Association, says that “when we look at systemic racism and barriers in business, anti-racism training needs to be implemented ‘from the mailroom to the corporate boardroom.’”

1720

I want to touch on racism, because in this budget, there is so little to acknowledge. Listen, racism doesn’t stop because there’s a pandemic. In fact, just the opposite: What this pandemic has demonstrated and has shone a light on is the fact that systemic racism is found in all workplaces, but particularly where there’s a huge power imbalance. Our critic, the member from Kitchener Centre, as well as members from our Black caucus have been very vocal on this. This budget bill, which references racism—all of the funding is through the Black Youth Action Plan; of course, we’ve had some difficulties navigating that funding, which apparently is \$60 million. My colleague from Kitchener Centre, MPP Lindo, says, “For anti-racism work, this government is sticking to their plan: talk a good talk, but do nothing to invest in the work.” Their minimal

investment in an Anti-Racism and Anti-Hate Grant Program doesn't even mention anti-Asian racism, which is literally on the rise during this pandemic, even though this is labelled a pandemic budget.

This just happened last Wednesday. The rise in anti-Asian racism shouldn't catch you by surprise. It's very real and it's very dangerous. It's dangerous from a health and safety perspective, but I would also argue from an economic perspective. But I guess I shouldn't be surprised, because when the Premier was asked about this, he said, "It's like day and night between Canada and the US. Thank God we're different than the United States and we don't have systemic, deep roots they've had for years."

When you have a Premier who doesn't acknowledge that racism exists, any kind of racism—anti-racism initiatives focusing on anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia and now anti-Asian racism—if you have a Premier that doesn't accept it and acknowledge it, then you won't address it. Certainly, the pandemic highlighted and shone a light on racism in our province, and this budget shrugs its shoulders at institutional racism.

As I've mentioned prior, when you are dealing with a time of disruption, as we currently are, this is the time to be bold and to be brave and to recognize and acknowledge that these circumstances exist.

Back to the economy, though: Nadine Spencer, as I said, from the Black Business and Professional Association, references parts of the solution. This is something that I wish the government would listen to. She goes on to say, "The solution has to be access to financing." She is also a global marketing CEO. "I think that mentorship and access to networking is also a very important response to how do we reduce the barriers facing Black entrepreneurs and Black women entrepreneurs."

Finally, how we get women back in the workforce, if you really wanted that to happen, is to install intersectional policy work—humans first and workers second—looking at the health care sector and the caring economy and recognizing how important that work is. Prior to this budget debate, our leader brought forward a motion to at least recognize what has happened in our long-term-care homes during this pandemic—to acknowledge it, to apologize for it so that we can all move forward. Some of the terms that I heard in this House during that debate—I have to say, I felt like we went to the lowest place in that debate, Madam Speaker. You can't hide from the truth, with over 4,000 deaths in our long-term-care homes, so the work is real.

One economist that I pay attention to is Armine Yalnizyan. She's an economist and the Atkinson Fellow on the Future of Workers. She says, "One of the pandemic's employment-related consequences is that employers who are primarily men are seeing the importance of care work and whether it is paid or unpaid." So everyone is starting to realize that, oh, yes, we're humans first and workers second, and then they adapt to it differently.

"On the other side of the pandemic, we're going to be dealing with massive labour shortages, so the employers

that get it, that we need to balance our lives as well as our paid work will be the ones that can attract and retain the best employees."

This is a time of great change in the nature of work, how we go to work or how we don't go to work—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Stop the clock. I apologize for interrupting the member for Waterloo. I'm going to ask the government side: There are several side conversations going on. It's very difficult for me to concentrate on what the member for Waterloo is saying. If you could either turn your own personal volumes down or take it out into the lounge, please, I'd appreciate it. Thank you.

Back to member for Waterloo.

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

So since most care work has fallen on women, a government-funded child care program is crucial for women to return to work, along with financial help and business help. She says, "I have been saying since last March, no recovery without 'she-covetry' and no 'she-covetry' without child care. Child care has got to be at the top of the list for the provincial government."

Unfortunately, a child care tax credit is not leadership. It is not top of mind. It does not demonstrate the level of respect that women in this province deserve in order to be part of the economic solution. I will remind the government that if you were looking to invest strategically, which we had hoped we would see in this budget bill, for every dollar you invest in child care, the return on investment to the economy is \$7. That's a smart investment. You actually can't go wrong with early learning and care, and we really would have liked to have seen some of that infrastructure funding there as well.

The not-for-profit sector was ready, willing and able to come to the table and be part of the solution on housing, on skills training, on child care. The Working Centre has a financial literacy program here in Waterloo region—huge difference to be made in that. And these are not big-ticket items, even. Those investments, for instance, in the YWCA's program In Her Shoes, to inspire future female entrepreneurs—they were looking for \$350,000 over two years, and that would have created almost 100 jobs. That's a good investment. That's a good investment for the province of Ontario.

I will also say that in the budget speech, the finance minister referenced procurement. Usually when I start to talk about procurement, people's eyes glaze over, and not that long ago my eyes did as well, until I realized how important it was as an economic driver for the economy, especially during this crisis. We have learned some important lessons around self-sufficiency on the procurement file.

I've brought the story of Canadian Shield to the floor of this Legislature, as well as Eclipse in Cambridge. They pivoted—I guess that was the word of 2020—and they moved from being a 3D printing company to creating personal protective equipment and shields. Their shelves

are full, Madam Speaker, because they can't get their product into our health care system. Their product is not keeping our education workers, our health care workers, our essential workers in grocery stores safe. That product is coming in from other jurisdictions, namely China.

I want to say, first off, that Canadian Shield, from a price point, is competitive with China. And I would argue, and compellingly so, that the product is actually a better quality product and that they shouldn't be having to let go 47 employees in a pandemic. I mean, they did exactly what the government of the day asked them to do. Even the Premier went there and stuffed a box filled with masks and shields, and that box is still sitting on a shelf. Now they are trying to get their product out of this country. They're looking at an exporting strategy.

Why are we creating jobs elsewhere, Madam Speaker? We should be solely focused on ensuring that those small businesses in our local communities have access to that \$29 billion worth of procurement in Ontario. We would have loved to have seen that kind of leadership in this budget bill—a signal in one of these schedules, these 10 schedules that do not actually address much of what the Minister of Finance referenced in his initial speech. I will say that this is also a call from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. Let's diversify the supply chain. Let's use every tool in our tool box to make sure that procurement is a part of that solution and that those small businesses that are looking to supply goods and services to communities actually have a customer in the government, and then we never have to rely on the USA for PPE again.

While we're at it, we should probably reinvest in research and innovation so that we never have to wait for vaccines the way we have been as well. In the province of Ontario, we often invest hundreds of millions of dollars in the start-up and the research stage, and often the commercialization of research and innovation, especially in the health care sector, and then those companies go elsewhere and create jobs elsewhere and we lose not only the jobs, but the product, Madam Speaker—so much to be said about that.

1730

I think the biggest miss, though, in this budget bill is the lack of sick days. The finance minister has said that the health and well-being of our population is first and foremost on the front of the agenda of this budget bill. I would argue that it is not, because they have intentionally and purposefully once again left paid sick days off the radar. This falls well within the purview of the provincial government; it falls under the Employment Standards Act, Madam Speaker. And I would argue that without made-in-Ontario paid sick days, we are going to be going through this cycle of transmission and high spots of transmission again and again and again. We have the data; we have the proof that this is what's going to happen.

Before the government starts to say, "Well, we work with our federal partners"—first of all, we know the Premier of Ontario was never one of those Premiers that supported sick days. It's like a "pull your bootstraps up even though you don't have any boots" kind of a

mentality. But the federal program is undersubscribed. The government brags about that. There's still \$700 million in that fund. You know why it's undersubscribed? Because it's administratively burdensome, it is not enough money, and when you work paycheque to paycheque, you can't afford to go through this rigmarole at the federal level and apply for a few days off, and so it's a flawed plan, just like the CECRA program was flawed. The federal rent support program was flawed, and this government never responded to that—never. They just hid behind the federal government.

It's important for us to acknowledge that almost 60% of workers don't have access to paid sick days, especially if they are low-wage or racialized. When they get sick or their kids do, they can't afford to stay home because losing pay means they won't be able to make ends meet. We know that, in Waterloo, for instance, in Kitchener-Waterloo, the asymptomatic testing is undersubscribed. And you want to know why? It's because if one of their family members does test positive, they all have to stay home; they all have to isolate. And they can't afford to do that. They can't afford for this federal program to actually kick in and give them an insufficient amount of money so that they can live even further under the poverty line.

These are essential workers who deliver our packages, our bags of groceries; they care for our children and our seniors; they prepare our meals—they keep the economy going. The government knows where the outbreaks are happening. So I feel like this is just such a perfect example of privilege, Madam Speaker. When you are sitting around a cabinet table and you can't even conceive of not having enough money to pay your rent, to buy your groceries, to stay home if you are sick, that is privilege, and that is why we need people with more diverse experiences sitting around a cabinet table, I can tell you that much.

The Premier is very fond of saying, "Listen, I listen to everybody on this"—well, not everybody, Madam Speaker. We have three pages of experts who have begged, who have called on this government to please bring in paid sick days because they've looked at the research, they've looked at the data and they know where the outbreaks have happened—and I'm going to get to that in one second. In Peel, for instance—and our members from Peel and Brampton have been very strong on this and have been raising their concerns, because these are their constituents and these are real-life stories, these are real people. In Peel region, 66% of the confirmed community outbreaks from September to December 2020 occurred in workplaces. A Peel public health study found that 25% of the workers with COVID-19 symptoms still reported to work, including workers who had tested positive for COVID. Of close to 8,000 workers who had COVID-19 symptoms between August and January, about 2,000 reported to their jobs. Of those, 80 had tested positive for COVID-19.

The finance minister says that he's relying on the people of this province to fight COVID-19. You can't fight COVID-19 if you have no licence, if you have no agency, if you have no power and if you have no ability

and are not supported to actually take paid sick days off, to get tested, to get the vaccine. How could you miss this opportunity to demonstrate that you actually understand this province?

Interjection: Out of touch.

Ms. Catherine Fife: So disconnected. And the federal program—thank goodness that our federal partners, our federal brothers and sisters, fought for a better program, but listen, they can only get Justin Trudeau to do so much.

With the very little bit of time I have, I just want to say that almost everyone, every medical officer in the province of Ontario, has called for made-in-Ontario paid sick days; Peterborough was one of the last ones to come on. The Globe and Mail had their editorial, “There’s No Way Out of this Pandemic without Paid Sick Days.” CP24: “All of Ontario’s local medical officers ask Ford government to reinstate” paid sick days. “Even Small Businesses Are Now Asking Ontario to Legislate Paid Sick Days”—that’s the Toronto Star from February 10. ““Small Investment; Big Payback’: Business Owners Call on Ford Government to Legislate Paid Sick Leave”—that was the CBC in February. “Legislating Paid Sick Days Is the Right Thing to Do”—Toronto Star, February 3. “Politicians Must Realize Paid Sick Leave Isn’t About Entitlements, It’s Smart Economic Policy,” and it goes on and on and on.

Did this government listen to that? No. This Premier has very selective hearing when you’re listening to experts, and unfortunately we are right back in a worse spot in the province of Ontario, knowing full well that these variants are more aggressive and more easily transmitted, and that workers are very challenged in these circumstances.

Finally, I just want to say that it is very disturbing to see our ICU numbers at the rate that they are right now. When I read that Ontario’s hospitals and doctors could soon be forced to use an emergency triage protocol that includes an online calculator to help decide who gets life-saving care and who does not—I have to say, this is a turning point. The protocol has been distributed to hospitals. People who know better than all of us see what’s coming their way, and these are ethical decisions that are going to be made in our hospitals because we have not put enough measures in to keep people safe, to protect workers in the province of Ontario.

This government has been cavalier in the application of public health policies, and often contradictory in those policies, and I think that it is a sad day that we are where we are right now, a full year ahead, having learned very few lessons around where COVID-19 is transmitted, who is vulnerable and why this government has not applied an equity lens in the application of safety protocols for workers in Ontario. It is an intentional decision that you have made which will actually compromise the overall health and well-being of the entire province and our economy, and so it really is astounding to me where we are.

If we had designed this budget—and listen, I hope one day to have that opportunity—there would be significant investments in asymptomatic testing, in the vaccine rollout

and in a coordinated approach to make sure that everyone in this province has the opportunity to go to work if they are healthy, but stay home if they are sick. Shame on this government.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions? The member for Willowdale.

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you, Speaker. “By continuing to advance two-way, all-day GO service along the Kitchener line, the Ontario government is demonstrating its confidence in Waterloo region as one of our province’s key economic engines. This is a transformative project. Keeping us well-connected ensures that the economic benefits accrued to this region can be shared with the rest of the province.” That’s Karen Redman, chair of the region of Waterloo.

Speaker, I know that member has heard through many consultations in the KW area that two-way, all-day GO service is crucially important for business development and the small businesses in the area, so my question is a simple yes or no: Will that member vote in favour of two-way, all-day GO service, or not?

Ms. Catherine Fife: The member from Willowdale is quite right: I’ve been fighting for two-way, all-day GO service for nine years. I’ve heard everything under the sun on this two-way, all-day GO. In fact, I remember Glen Murray, in this House, promising KW a bullet train and service every 15 minutes.

1740

The thing about two-way, all day GO is that there has to be a train that leaves Toronto in the morning and comes to KW in the afternoon—because we have 2,000 jobs that are unfilled in KW.

So, in essence, I would like to say that I’ll believe it when I see it. In fact, that’s what the people in KW said to me. They said, “This sounds great. I’d love if it was true. But I’ve heard it all before.”

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you to the member from Waterloo for her great speech.

You mentioned Thunder Bay and the dire situation we have there. People are desperate to get their vaccines in northern Ontario.

Today it came to light that the Thunder Bay District Health Unit had to put this out: “For those booking vaccines, if your confirmation code you received in your email does not start with a ‘W,’ then you are fine; you’re booked. If it does start with a ‘W,’ it means you’re on a wait-list and you’ll have to try again to continue.” It was already a disaster. I’m wondering, do you have the same disaster in your riding?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much to the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

That’s chaos. That is not wildly successful, as we heard this morning. That is not a vaccine strategy and program that are easily navigated by seniors across the province. It is not equitable. It is not fair. It’s just a mess right now.

In KW, that’s why we’re having the town hall tonight in response to some of the frustration that people have been experiencing.

I want to be very clear: Public health units have been doing their best.

You finally put some money in the budget for vaccinations. Why it took so long, when you knew that the ultimate goal was vaccinations, defies all logic.

We're going to continue to fight for an equitable vaccine program across the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Stan Cho: I didn't get a yes-or-no answer to the last question, so I'll try it again.

As we move through this pandemic, we've stacked our supports for small businesses—whether that was broadband infrastructure investment; permanent reductions to the EHT; permanent reductions to the small business property taxes, on the provincial portion; Ontario's Digital Main Street program to help businesses retool—and the member opposite voted against every single one.

However, as of Friday morning, 646 business in Waterloo region have been able to access over \$9.6 million in direct support grants. That's not including the tourism grant program. That's not including the additional \$2.8 billion in infrastructure investments.

It's never too late to do the right thing. My question—another yes or no—to the member opposite is, will she vote against that additional infrastructure investment? Will she vote against doubling the \$9.6 million for the 646 businesses in Waterloo, or will she finally support small businesses in her actions as well as her words?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Well, I hear from the businesses other than those 646; I hear from the other thousands of businesses that you've intentionally left out of the small business grant because you never addressed the criteria. The chamber asked you to do that. The CFIB asked you to do that. They said, "Stop picking winners and losers. Be open. Let's give every business in this province a chance to be successful." But what did you do? You decided, "Oh, we're just going to keep the same model because it's working for us, and we're going to basically say to those other businesses, 'You're on your own.'" Well, that isn't good enough.

Do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to fight for all the businesses in Waterloo region; I'm not going to just pick winners and losers like you guys are.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank the member from Waterloo for her debate. It was great. One of the things she talked about was inflation. She said that if you're not building inflation into the budget, you are cutting.

I think back to the election and going door to door, and the number one issue, along with long-term care, along with Hydro One, was hallway medicine.

I think of every single year, when the head of Health Sciences North, our hospital, would have to sign with this cheque that wasn't keeping up with inflation and stand there like a schmuck, like it was going to do things for them. I think it's important to talk about inflation and marking to inflation. We have to keep up with inflation. I want to know, from the member from Waterloo, what

areas do you think are being most drastically cut by not keeping up with inflation?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much for the question. I have to say, I'm sort of going back a little bit to 2019, before the last Minister of Finance presented that good-news budget, which had cuts in it. Then they realized that when you don't build those inflationary costs for goods and services into a budget, people see it for what it is. You are underfunding public services.

I have to say, even the former finance minister's deputy minister, Karl Baldauf, actually wrote a piece talking about how you use public service, public sector investment to support the economy. These are health care dollars, these are PSE dollars and these are education dollars. Don't cheapen out on the public services. They're good for the economy.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mrs. Robin Martin: This government recognizes that parents are best placed to make decisions about their children's care. That's why, in our budget, we've got the Childcare Access and Relief from Expenses Tax Credit, which we've increased for Ontario families with child care costs, letting them choose what is best for their children. Why does the member opposite oppose putting money directly into the pockets of parents, as we are doing with this initiative and with the initiative to give more support directly to parents through the Support for Learners benefit, which we've paid now three times?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Listen, if you are saying that a \$500 or \$400 cheque in a parent's pocket is going to help a special education student in a school, then you are so disconnected from the education system, you have no good excuse to actually even pose that question to me. The public education system requires \$1.8-billion worth of additional special education funding. A \$500 cheque so, as the Minister of Education said in question period, a kid can go to camp does not help the learning needs of students in our system. Shame on you for even asking that damn question.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Wayne Gates: First of all, I'd like to thank you for your presentation. I just want to say to that: Sister, you are one of the reasons why we need more women in politics.

I want to say that I just came across a rally that was held at the finance minister's office by SEIU, Unifor and CUPE. Sharleen Stewart, president of SEIU, said the budget "missed the mark when it came to recognizing" our health care workers. Pandemic pay—\$4, permanent—wasn't in the budget. Paid sick days weren't in the budget. Lack of respect; it wasn't in the budget. Twenty thousand health care workers contracted COVID-19. Unfortunately, 20 lost their lives. Why do you think the Conservative government does not support workers?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'd have to say on this—I also quoted Sharleen because these are the very people who have been on the front lines of a health crisis and have had to listen day in, day out to the unearned media of this Premier saying how much he values them, but he is not

willing to actually demonstrate that value. Unfortunately, most of those workers are women, and women deserve so much better from this Premier and from this government. One day, they're finally going to get acknowledged for the value that they have to this economy and this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you.
Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, I think if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to see the clock at 6. Agreed? Agreed.

There being no further business, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1749.

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Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	

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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	
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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
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Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
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Kusendova, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre	
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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

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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
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Parsa, Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
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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	
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West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
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Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
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