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(Hansard)**

G-52

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des débats
(Hansard)**

G-52

**Standing Committee on
General Government**

Supporting Recovery
and Competitiveness Act, 2021

1st Session
42nd Parliament
Monday 17 May 2021

**Comité permanent des
affaires gouvernementales**

Loi de 2021
sur le soutien à la relance
et à la compétitivité

1^{re} session
42^e législature
Lundi 17 mai 2021

Chair: Goldie Ghamari
Clerk: Isaiah Thorning

Présidente : Goldie Ghamari
Greffier : Isaiah Thorning

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GENERAL GOVERNMENT**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES
AFFAIRES GOUVERNEMENTALES**

Monday 17 May 2021

Lundi 17 mai 2021

The committee met at 0900 in committee room 151 and by video conference.

**SUPPORTING RECOVERY
AND COMPETITIVENESS ACT, 2021**

**LOI DE 2021
SUR LE SOUTIEN À LA RELANCE
ET À LA COMPÉTITIVITÉ**

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 276, An Act to enact and amend various Acts /
Projet de loi 276, Loi édictant et modifiant diverses lois.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Good morning, everyone. The Standing Committee on General Government will now come to order. We are here for public hearings on Bill 276, An Act to enact and amend various Acts.

We only have myself in the room, and the following members are participating remotely: MPP Bailey, MPP Bourgouin, MPP Crawford, MPP Glover, MPP Harris, MPP Skelly, MPP Tabuns—and we also have MPP Lindo joining us as well via Zoom.

Have any other members joined us? I see MPP Schreiner. Welcome. MPP Schreiner, can you please confirm that you are present and in Ontario?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Hi, it's MPP Schreiner. I'm at Queen's Park.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much.

We are also joined by staff from legislative research, Hansard, and broadcast and recording.

Please speak slowly and clearly and wait until I recognize you before starting to speak. Please take a brief pause before beginning and, as always, all comments should go through the Chair. Are there any questions before we begin?

Our presenters today have been scheduled in groups of three for each one-hour time slot, with each presenter allotted seven minutes for an opening statement, followed by 39 minutes of questioning for all three witnesses, divided into two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the government members, two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the official opposition members and two rounds of 4.5 minutes for the independent members of the committee. Are there any questions?

NORTHERN ONTARIO
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE FACULTY
AND STAFF ASSOCIATION
INCOME SECURITY ADVOCACY CANADA
LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): I will now call upon our first set of presenters, beginning with Northern Ontario School of Medicine Faculty and Staff Association. Please state your names for the record, and then you may begin. You will have seven minutes. Thank you.

Mr. Brian Ross: I'm Brian Ross.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. You may begin.

Mr. Geoff Hudson: Hi, I'm Geoff Hudson. Good morning. We thank the Standing Committee on General Government for this opportunity. I'll be giving the presentation; Brian will be available for questions. We're both founding, full-time faculty at the school, hired in 2004. We're also members of the school's faculty and staff association, founded 16 years ago, which includes a faculty bargaining unit, which joined OPSEU in 2008; a support staff unit joined the OPSEU local and association thereafter. In addition to our two bargaining units being in OPSEU, our association is a member of both the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations and the Canadian Association of University Teachers. I'm chief negotiator for the faculty unit and the vice-president; Brian is the president. He recently returned to the ranks from a stint as academic head of the undergraduate medical education program as associate dean, UME.

Our collective agreements are mature: The faculty unit is on its fifth collective agreement since 2006; the staff unit is on its fourth since 2010. We have a professional and productive relationship with our employer, the NOSM board of directors.

We're here to argue for two changes to the NOSM University Act. Firstly, as with all other university acts, such as the recent act for Algoma University, it is critical that the composition and powers of the board and senate be mandated in the act itself rather than left to regulations. This necessitates changes as outlined in the amended NOSM University Act in our written brief. This is needed to protect the autonomy and independence of the new university, a value recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada as fundamental to a lively democracy, as outlined in our written submission.

We are suggesting the Algoma University Act, a recent northern Ontario university act, is a good model for the language for the composition and powers of the two bodies that will govern the new university. It provides for some representation of employees and faculty on the board, as well as establishing that elected teaching staff on the senate shall be at least twice the total number of all other members of the senate, securing collegial governance of the academic programs. Further to this, it provides that the two governing bodies are given the power in the act to make bylaws, resolutions and rules for the conduct of their affairs.

The autonomy of the new university, its collegial governance and its commitment to academic freedom are essential components for future success. We need all these to ensure accreditation of our medical and academic programs, acknowledgement of the necessary environment on the part of research agencies and funders, and recognition by colleagues and society of the good reputation of our faculty, students and future physicians. It will provide the sound foundation necessary for the growth and expansion of our academic programs so we can respond to the health needs of northern Ontario.

Recruitment and retention is also a concern. Having the composition and powers of the board and senate subject to change by regulation undermines our future as a new university at its birth. The Algoma University Act is an excellent model to adopt for its new neighbour with respect to governance.

We're also arguing for the removal of the reference to collective agreements being subject to change by regulation and instead argue that the act needs to explicitly state the opposite. This necessitates changes to the act as per our written brief. Allowing, in the act, for changes in the terms of existing collective agreements by regulation would trigger operation of the charter of rights. Specifically, the Supreme Court of Canada and all levels of courts in Ontario have repeatedly confirmed that the protection for freedom of association enshrined in section 2(d) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms includes the right to bargain collectively and protects collective agreements, the product of that bargaining.

Sections of the draft legislation purport to create a regulatory power to address the obligations and liabilities and the benefits and burdens of collective agreements. Such regulatory powers infringe on freedom of association, and as such, violate the charter and are constitutionally invalid. The draft legislation must therefore be amended to remove these provisions and to explicitly state that no regulations shall in any way affect or limit the operation of a collective agreement between the university and the bargaining agent.

Thank you from your consideration of these remarks.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much. We'll now turn to our next presenters. We have the Income Security Advocacy Centre. Please state your names for the record, and then you may begin. You will have seven minutes.

Ms. Devorah Kobluk: Devorah Kobluk. Good morning. I am a policy analyst at the Income Security Advocacy Centre. ISAC is a specialty legal clinic funded by Legal Aid Ontario. Our mandate is to advance the rights and interests of low-income Ontarians with respect to income security and employment. We carry out our mandate through test case litigation, policy advocacy, community development and public education. I would like to thank the Standing Committee on General Government for the opportunity to appear before you and speak to Bill 276. I will focus my comments on schedule 21, which amends the Ontario Works Act.

The first change to the act I will address is the use of the term "life stabilization." While on the surface this is an acknowledgement that many who find themselves on Ontario Works may not be ready for employment and may require wraparound supports, life stabilization is impossible without addressing the extreme inadequacy of Ontario Works rates, which are currently \$733 per month for a single with no dependents. Since 2017, these monthly rates have increased by only \$12. With no increases for inflation or at all in the previous three fiscal years, rates are effectively being reduced in real terms.

Further, the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted Ontario Works recipients who were already living in deep poverty. As the recent McMaster study on the impact of COVID-19 demonstrates, those who only had social assistance and could not access CERB had higher rates of not only having not enough food to eat or going days without food, but they also experienced higher rates of physical and mental health decline. If the goal is to achieve life stabilization to prepare recipients for employment, ensuring rate adequacy is paramount and a matter of recovery from this pandemic.

There are also concerns amongst social assistance recipients that the proposed amendment to embed life stabilization in section 4 of the act could translate into these services being required as a condition to receive benefits. While the breadth of life stabilization services is not defined in the act—and we do suggest clarification on this issue—these presumably include housing, mental health and addiction services, child care, language learning and other supports for newcomers.

Could recipients, for example, be compelled to attend mental health support sessions with service providers who may not provide culturally appropriate services or who do not follow a treatment model that is of the client's choice? There's a real fear that, if this is the case, the already punitive and intrusive social assistance system will become even more so, despite the government's intention to improve client outcomes. ISAC urges the committee to include safeguards in the bill to ensure that this is not the effect of the act.

0910

Second, schedule 21 follows Recovery and Renewal: Ontario's Vision for Social Assistance Transformation. Part of this vision will allow the province to assume administrative functions and continue to download service delivery to municipal partners and district social services

administration boards, or DSSABs, by making them delivery partners in the proposed new section 50.1 of the act. The question that must be asked is: For what purpose is this realignment if, as it is well known, there is a lack of supply of services?

It is significant that in the question-and-answer memo from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, it states that the act “does not entitle clients to receive new or distinct life stabilization services. Rather, the act aims to enable greater connections to accessing human services.” To what services will clients be connected?

Some examples of inadequate services are a wait-list for subsidized housing of seven to 10 years in Toronto. The average market rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Guelph is \$1,212. In the Waterloo region, wait times for mental health services can be close to a year or more. And that was over a year ago, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only increased the demand for these services.

As recently as 2018, there were eight cities known as child care deserts, meaning 95% of children in Brampton, 87% in Kitchener and 65% in Mississauga are unable to access child care. This creates significant challenges for parents who are trying to work.

In 2021, food price increases are expected to be 3% to 5%, with the highest increase being up to 6.5% for meat and vegetables. During the first five months of the pandemic, reliance on food banks—which is not food security—increased over 50% in Toronto and 307% in Waterloo. The situation is worse in northern communities. Many must skip a meal to afford the cost of digital services, which are an absolute necessity now more than ever.

There is also a need for ethnocultural-specific services for newcomers to Ontario, culturally appropriate services for Indigenous people, and access to services in rural and remote communities.

The question then becomes: If the act provides for no new services and connects people to services with long wait-lists in municipalities, what kind of stabilization can we expect? There is also a lack of clarity around the standards that will be required for the delivery of these services. The metrics that will be used to measure life stabilization outcomes are unknown. One support group for addiction treatment and 12 sessions of therapy or a referral to a housing wait-list or a language course are not enough.

While the proposed new section 50.1 refers to performance standards, these have yet to be outlined in the regulations and through agreements between the municipalities and the province. ISAC views it as crucial that the standards and funding agreements are developed with full transparency to ensure accountability to the diversity of clients they are meant to serve, as well as to ensure consistency of service provision across the province.

Clear, realistic and fair benchmarks, both in terms of length of access and quality of services, must be established through consultation with people with lived experience and through an equity, diversity and inclusion lens.

Most importantly, the province must provide a significant investment—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Ms. Devorah Kobluk: —to ensure robust and quality services. We will look to the regulations authorized by paragraphs 37 to 39 of the amended section 74 for this investment.

Third, let us not forget that the phrase “life stabilization” is being inserted in section 4 as a qualifier to assistance “to help a person become and stay employed.” ISAC recommends that this committee continue to consider the fundamental and systemic forces that contribute to poverty for workers: the rise of precarious, short-term and unsafe work that can lead people back on social assistance. These low-wage jobs have been among the hardest hit during the pandemic, and ISAC urges this committee to consider the challenges of the current job market against the aims of section 4.

I would like to reiterate that no progress can be made without an immediate, significant raise to Ontario Works rates. Only with income adequacy do stabilization and future meaningful employment become a real possibility.

Again, I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to speak to Bill 276.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much. That concludes our time.

We’ll now turn to our third presenter, from Lakehead University. Please state your name for the record and then you may begin. You will have seven minutes.

Ms. Moira McPherson: My name is Moira McPherson. I am the president and vice-chancellor of Lakehead University. Good morning, Madam Chair, and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Bill 276, schedule 16, severs the Northern Ontario School of Medicine from its current partnership with Lakehead and Laurentian Universities. I’m here to detail the far-reaching and negative impacts this will have on students, medical education and Lakehead University and to tell you why it should be struck.

The current innovative partnership between the two universities and NOSM was forged over many years through the collaboration, commitment and support of hundreds of dedicated local partners working together with the university. The benefits are significant. The partnership is responding to the unique and complex health care needs of the people of northern Ontario. It has resulted in a growing network of health care professionals in highly skilled positions and has been recognized as a model of best practice. Almost half of all NOSM northwest graduates were prepared through a Lakehead University pathway, with 11% of those being Indigenous. Nearly 70% of NOSM’s graduates who attended Lakehead are now practising in northwestern Ontario, one of the central goals of the medical school.

I want to be clear that this partnership has created significant benefits and cost savings for NOSM and learners. Lakehead University currently provides the academic supports to NOSM students, faculty and staff. Critical

supports and services such as registration, student health and wellness, student accommodations, Indigenous supports, athletic space and housing are all provided in kind or subsidized. In addition, Lakehead provides access to a whole suite of research services and world-class facilities that have fostered innovation and discovery. The partnership has enabled NOSM to attract millions in joint research grant funding.

Unfortunately, Bill 276 would establish NOSM as its own stand-alone degree-granting institution. While it is being presented as part of the red tape bill, this change is not simply a benign administrative amendment. We know that it will have far-reaching impacts. First and of the utmost importance is the fact that our current academic partnership has helped to support successful quality assurance and accreditation outcomes. This means that positions developed in the region, for the region, are graduating with accredited degrees from credible, research-intensive academic universities. The legislation will eliminate the current standard of academic oversight and supports upon which these were granted. There are no assurances at this time that the MD degree would retain accreditation.

The proposed legislation presents the severing of NOSM as being cost neutral. This is absolutely not the case. Developing a stand-alone university is incredibly expensive. The costs could amount to millions and millions of dollars, reflecting not only one-time capital costs but also significant increases in administration costs and duplication of services that will be directly borne as annual operating costs by students and Ontario taxpayers.

It has been suggested that Laurentian's CCAA proceedings are a primary reason for severing this partnership, and I also want to be clear that Lakehead is and has always been a reliable partner that has operated with a balanced budget policy with sound practices. This has positioned us to continue to serve all of our faculty's interests, including those of NOSM, to the highest level. We believe that establishing NOSM as a stand-alone medical university presents unnecessary risks to government and to taxpayers, disrupting a model that is working well and is well positioned for expansion.

And there are real and material risks to Lakehead University. A faculty of medicine is critically important to a university. It elevates the reputation and desirability of the school, attracting high-calibre students, faculty and staff. It is of particular importance in attracting international students, who contribute to the strength, the talent and the financial help of an institution. A faculty of medicine elevates the value of the degree that every student receives from Lakehead. It gives them better access to research and teaching opportunities while also enriching our academic environment.

Further, we cannot continue to chip away at the programs that northern universities offer, creating niche institutions to serve one particular need. It will serve to slowly but surely erode our northern universities and detract from the innovation and learning opportunities that come from a broad range of disciplines and perspectives.

0920

Over 2,000 letters from across the province have been sent to ministers, and local MPPs, Indigenous leaders, mayors, universities and many other organizations, each with unique perspectives and interests, are united in their deep concerns about the impacts of this decision. Lakehead is integral to the success of NOSM in northern Ontario, and NOSM is critical to Lakehead.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: One minute left.

Ms. Moira McPherson: We believe there are alternative options available to the government that would avoid all of the concerns that I've outlined today. In the north we are stronger when we work together. It is my sincere hope that you will carefully consider this matter and strike this section from the bill. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much. Before we turn to our first round of questions, MPP Piccini, can you please confirm that you are present and in Ontario?

Mr. David Piccini: Hi, Chair. It's MPP Piccini, and I am in the Legislature in Toronto.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much. This first round of questions will begin with the government, for seven and a half minutes. Who would like to begin? MPP Crawford?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Good morning, Chair, and good morning to all three guests for participating in the hearings today. We really appreciate that.

I have a couple of questions to start off. I certainly want to start at the outset by just mentioning that establishing NOSM and Hearst as independent degree-granting institutions I think demonstrates the Ontario government's commitment to post-secondary education in northern and northwestern Ontario. It's something I know our government firmly believes in. I personally believe in the importance of it and I think they can play a key role in the communities that they are located in.

My first question is to the president of Lakehead—a great university. Thank you for being here today. I didn't go there myself but I know many graduates and they have spoken very highly of the university, so my kudos to you at the outset.

Your university did start out as a technical institute, evolved into a college and finally became a university. My question, really, is: Do you not agree that post-secondary institutions should be empowered to offer degrees and make decisions based on what they feel are reflecting the needs of students and the communities that they're involved in?

Ms. Moira McPherson: Thank you for that question. Let me reframe it just a little bit. First of all, when we look at the NOSM model, this model was intentionally developed by Lakehead and Laurentian and by the hundreds and hundreds of community leaders across the north to ensure that they would realize the academic benefits, the cost savings and the academic oversight that only comes when you marry a medical school with strong universities. That was the intention of how NOSM was first constructed all those many years ago.

And in fact, over the years, that's exactly what's happened. The model has been celebrated. It's cost-effective. The administrative services and the rich opportunities that are provided for students come because of that affiliation and that oversight from the university senates and the community that is provided. Really, in my view—and I think for thousands of people—there's no comparison. We're talking about a medical school that is enriched because of the relationship with a comprehensive, research-intensive university.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I know you mentioned something to the effect that—your view that the medical school being associated with Lakehead attracted international students. I think that's what I heard. To that point, what percentage of the school's medical students are international students and what percentage of the school's university students are international students?

Ms. Moira McPherson: First of all, that's absolutely true: Medical schools are so important to universities. As I said in my opening remarks, they enrich the university. They attract domestic students. They help attract international students. They promote the synergies between faculty and staff through reciprocal faculty agreements, through opportunities to supervise graduate students and to apply for tri-council funding. So it's through all of those things that you have a really strong and productive academic environment. There's no question that this affects the profile of a university, and that the profile, the branding of a university is what attracts, in part, international and domestic students.

Right now at Lakehead University, around 15% to 17% of our student body is international. This is an incredible growth over the past decade, and it's certainly part of the mission of Lakehead University to continue that growth to 20% of our student population. We know that by doing that, it brings the talent to northwestern Ontario, it brings the diversity we're looking for at the university and it creates the environment that continues to make a university like ours thrive.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Sorry, that percentage was for the overall university?

Ms. Moira McPherson: Yes. I'm talking about Lakehead University. Between 15% and 17% of our student population is currently international, and we're on a growth curve to 20% of our total student population.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay. Thanks.

Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Two minutes, 20 seconds.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay. Thanks.

I'll go to NOSM. Thank you as well for being here today. I'm just curious—I know that the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association has stated—and I'll quote, actually. They say, "We do appreciate there may be something to be gained by NOSM's separation including autonomy to expand their programming and grant degrees."

That's the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association. So obviously they may respectfully disagree with you on this, and I'm just wondering what your thoughts on that

statement are and what you disagree with with that statement?

Mr. Brian Ross: Thank you for your question. I think it's our association's duty to act responsibly to ensure ongoing quality of academic programs for our northern communities. We need to ensure we have all the capacity and ability to expand the medical programs—this is what we want to do—and, as part of that responsibility, to work in a way that protects the jobs and working conditions of our members, who have made the school a success.

We are of the opinion that we can work with our employer to transition to any system that is going to be coming along—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Forty-five seconds left.

Mr. Brian Ross: —in a way that's consistent with our mission. So we anticipate that with the change the government is proposing—we're very committed to the growth and expansion of the university so we can flourish to support the health of northerners.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay. Well, I think my time has expired, so thank you, Chair, and thank you to the presenters.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much. We'll now turn to the official opposition for seven and a half minutes. MPP Lindo, you may begin.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you so much, Chair. I'm actually going to be speaking to NOSM and to Dr. McPherson from Lakehead, but before I do, I just wanted to say a very big thank you to Deborah for your presentation. I have a lot of people in Kitchener Centre who have spoken to me about the substandard amount of money that they had access to on social assistance prior to the pandemic, and now they feel silenced and left out of the recovery plan. I just wanted to thank you for the advocacy and let you know that I do totally agree with the push to increase that amount on social assistance, so thank you for that.

I'm going to start with Dr. McPherson at Lakehead. Thank you as well for your presentation. I was particularly taken with—I wrote it down very quickly, so I hope I didn't misquote, but you had said the medical school is enriched because of the relationship with the research-intensive universities. I've been told since the CCAA process that there was something unique in the medical school, the embedding of Indigenous knowledge and wisdom within the workings, which, to me, was part of what that relationship was, and there are a lot of concerns that we'll lose that as we sever these kinds of relationships.

0930

I'm just wondering if you could take a little bit of time to speak again about why that connection is so critical and what it has done differently for northern communities.

Ms. Moira McPherson: Thank you for that question. Yes, I'll answer that from a couple of different perspectives.

First of all, you're absolutely right that the Northern Ontario School of Medicine has, as part their mission, a commitment to not only Indigenous learners but also to

improving the health outcomes of Indigenous communities, rural and remote. That's absolutely true. They've been working very hard under the relationship that we've been part of for 17 years. That has absolutely been a goal and will continue to be a priority for the medical school.

Lakehead University also has, as one of its core priorities, a commitment to Indigenous learners and to the relationships with Indigenous communities. We continue to grow the percentage of Indigenous students at our university by really nurturing the relationships with Indigenous communities, from just providing a plethora of cultural supports and services through our Office of Indigenous Initiatives, and looking for pathways that will bring Indigenous students and position them for success. In fact, what has happened is exactly that: Students are brought to Lakehead University because they want to be part of our university and they see the pathways and possibilities. They're supported in that journey and in pursuing those dreams on to medical education. Students have then gone with those supports through to be students at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine.

We know that those students on the northwest campus come back and receive cultural and student supports from our Office of Indigenous Initiatives and take part in the activities and the mentorship of other Indigenous students at the university. This relationship and the intersection between the university's relationships and support with Indigenous communities—that consultation that is critical—and then the relationship between the university and the medical school is just absolutely critical to the success of reaching the goals for northern Ontario.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you so very much, Dr. McPherson.

Chair, can you let me know how much time we have?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Three minutes.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Ooh, awesome. I'm going to move over to NOSM right now, and sort of along the same lines. One of the things that spoke to me in your presentation was your first request for amendments to make sure that it's critical for the composition powers and duties of the university board of governors and senate not be left to regulations. I wrote down a quote from you folks as well, where you said, "It would undermine our future of the institution at its birth." I'm wondering if you can speak a little bit more about why there is a concern about leaving that to regulation, and why it is that it's so important to advocate to have that put into the actual act. So over to you.

Mr. Brian Ross: Thanks for the question. In essence, universities need to be autonomous from government with their collegial governance and academic freedom. This was actually established by the Supreme Court back in 1990. They said that even though Legislatures may determine much of the environment that universities operate within, the reality is that they function as autonomous bodies within that environment.

And the composition of the board and senate, including the power to create bylaws, is a foundation of autonomy in our university. If the composition and the power of the

two bodies, the board and the Senate, are in the act, any change must be introduced into the Legislative Assembly and be subject to debate. Universities really need to count on that stable governance, that it's not subject to the possibility of regulatory changes that don't need to go through any form of scrutiny.

The senate engages in long-term planning. It must be stable. The board established—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Mr. Brian Ross: —and created long-term fiscal plans, and I would say that things like accreditation, which my colleague mentioned—the medical school's academic side must be seen to be run by the faculty. That's a requirement of accreditation, so that any changes that can be made by the government through regulation are not compatible with accreditation of a medical school, and so it must be enshrined in the act. Thank you.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Thank you so much for that. I think my time is up, but Geoffrey, you can always jump in for 20 seconds. I made the time up.

Mr. Geoff Hudson: Thank you very much, Brian. It was a good answer and a good question.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): We'll now turn to the government for the next round, seven and a half minutes. MPP Piccini, you may begin.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you to all of the presenters today. My first question is for President McPherson. I reviewed transcripts of conversations that you had with Minister Romano. The records of those calls indicated that you referenced that NOSM was indeed ready to be independent. I'm wondering, did you mislead the minister then, or has your position changed now?

Ms. Moira McPherson: Thank you for that question. I think you must have a mixed-up transcript, because that is certainly not what I said in that conversation.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): My apologies. I see MPP Glover has raised his hand. MPP Glover?

Mr. Chris Glover: Yes. Point of order, Madam Chair: I just want to point out that we should maintain parliamentary decorum, especially when we're addressing questions to our guests.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. MPP Piccini, you may continue.

Mr. David Piccini: Okay. Thank you very much, President McPherson. My next question is with respect to this legislation. What specifically in this legislation would force or incentivize NOSM to leave northern Ontario?

Ms. Moira McPherson: Again, I'm going to reframe that. The question isn't about leaving northern Ontario; the legislation severs—

Mr. David Piccini: Sorry to interject, but have you not suggested they would leave?

Ms. Moira McPherson: —the university's degrees, the faculty of medicine, from the two universities, and it is that that we are opposing. Severing the faculty of medicine from the university is what puts the government at risk. It puts the medical program at risk related to quality assurance and accreditation. It puts a lesser medical school

in place for students, and it absolutely puts Lakehead University at risk.

Mr. David Piccini: So, President McPherson, just quickly: What is different about NOSM than a faculty of medicine, let's say, at U of T?

Ms. Moira McPherson: NOSM is a corporation that was written into the letters patent under the auspices of two universities. It was formed. The structure that was put in place was under the auspices and the affiliation and the support of two universities, and in fact, all of the quality assurance and the accreditation that is being provided to date has been based on that affiliation with the universities. The universities also do support the student experience; the faculty, staff experience; the research—

Mr. David Piccini: Sorry, President McPherson. This is a limited time to ask a question. You spoke about the partnerships. You have partnerships with Confederation to offer nursing. You have partnerships with Georgian to offer electrical engineering. Should we assume a concern over those programs? Because those are independent institutions with their own boards of governors. Should we be concerned about the accreditation of those programs and those partnerships?

Ms. Moira McPherson: I think what we're speaking about today is taking a faculty of medicine that has been successful, has had excellent outcomes, and changing that relationship and severing it to achieve some outcomes. There's no need to fix a model that isn't broken. We look forward to expanding on the foundation that we've provided with this relationship and the strengths that we bring to medical education in northern Ontario.

Mr. David Piccini: You said just what that can offer, so I'll quote two quotes. The MPP for London West, when talking about Huron, said that aligning administration with other post-secondary institutions is important to enable Huron to better serve students and the community and to continue its long-standing tradition of academic excellence. So was that member incorrect when talking about better enriching? Or—I'll quote the president and CEO of NOSM. She said, "We will continue to strengthen relationships with those cities and across a pan-northern community-based environment."

0940

So, that independence didn't inhibit Huron. It hasn't inhibited Confederation or Georgian from forming partnerships with you. Why are you suggesting that this would, and quite frankly, concerning students in the north and that quality, if it hasn't affected any of the other partnerships?

Ms. Moira McPherson: The current NOSM model was intentionally developed by the universities with government and based on massive consultation and input from communities across the region to realize the academic benefits and cost savings, the academic oversight that comes with being part of two research-intensive, comprehensive, successful universities. This model has been celebrated for being cost-effective and for providing rich opportunities for students. So why would we want to break that model to do something else? Let's build on the successful model. Let's use the foundation that has been

put in place for excellent health care programming and a very great MD-accredited program that is part of a really strong university.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you. Just quickly on partnerships, there are a number of research partnerships between institutions across Ontario. There are partnerships, as I just mentioned, between your institution and others across Ontario. So again, my question is: What in this legislation would prevent those important academic partnerships? Just quickly, what in this legislation would, specifically?

Ms. Moira McPherson: Well, when we talk about partnerships—I'll focus for a minute on research partnerships. Right now, Lakehead and Laurentian as well provide NOSM with the physical space to run programs, conduct research, access a full suite of research services and world-class research facilities with fostered innovation and discovery, and of course it also—

Mr. David Piccini: Would you pull those partnerships, President McPherson?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Ms. Moira McPherson: Excuse me. I'll just finish, because I also want to—

Mr. David Piccini: I've just got a minute left and this is my time to ask you questions. So, just quickly: Would you pull those partnerships with an independent NOSM, yes or no?

Ms. Moira McPherson: I think we're not—that's not the question. We are really, sadly, looking at a situation where the reality will be that by following this legislation, you in fact will silo the faculty of medicine and silo NOSM. It will be absolutely the opposite of what was intended when NOSM was put together with the two universities.

Mr. David Piccini: So is your nursing program siloed, your partnership between Confederation and Lakehead?

Ms. Moira McPherson: I think the comparison is not appropriate to the discussion.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you, Chair. No further questions.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. We'll now turn to the official opposition for 7.5 minutes. Who would like to begin? MPP Tabuns, you may begin.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you very much, Chair. I appreciate the opportunity.

Ms. Kobluk, I'll be focusing on your presentation in my time. First, I want to thank you for making it. I thought it was very coherent and very pointed, frankly. One of the questions that I want to ask you—this whole idea of "life stabilization." Have you seen this concept introduced in any other jurisdictions? If you have, have there been any elements in it that we should be aware of? If you haven't seen it in other jurisdictions, do you have any sense of where it's come from?

Ms. Devorah Kobluk: I think there's an understanding that with past workfare programs, where you went straight to work, there were things that were not working.

I can't, unfortunately, speak for other jurisdictions at this point, but I think at its best there's an understanding of the wraparound services that I spoke about. You heard

about them in the road map that was prior to this change of government. But the idea that it can substitute for rates is impossible. Unless the rates go up, you can refer to people as much as you want to, but if they don't have the money to actually buy the food, meet the rent and actually do the work of seeking employment, which itself is a job, there's only so far it can go.

I would also say that life stabilization at this point is relying on the fact that we have a set of services that can stabilize people and some of the services are not available. There's long wait-lists, as I mentioned.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Right. Okay. I may go back to that, but the question I do want to get in—there's been a lot of talk that the province is going to be expecting a sizable increase in social assistance caseloads with federal pandemic-related benefit programs coming to an end in the next few months. How concerned do you think we should be regarding this expected increase in caseloads?

Ms. Devorah Kobluk: Thanks for that question. What I'm hearing from various ministry talks is that this is unaffordable and we can't manage the amount of caseloads that are going to be coming down the pipe. But if you actually look at the last year of caseloads, pre-pandemic Ontario Works had approximately 241,000. That was the number of caseloads. We're now at 196,000, I think, which is way deflated, and that's because we've had a shift to people on some federal benefits, but also because our borders have been closed and we have less newcomers and refugees coming.

The estimate I heard was 250,000, which when you think that it was previously 240,000, it's not that big of an increase to what is a normal caseload—and I just want to emphasize that word, “normal.”

Mr. Peter Tabuns: So you don't see any substantial expansion beyond that when the federal pandemic programs come to an end?

Ms. Devorah Kobluk: That's the ministry's own estimates of 250,000.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Okay. Fair enough. So if this life stabilization program is one that is not actually going to solve problems because, as you've noted, there are actually not the programs in existence to provide people with life stabilization—there aren't enough affordable housing units; there are not the income supports to let people get enough food so their lives are stabilized—what's the strategy that should be pursued in the alternative for what's put forward in this bill?

Ms. Devorah Kobluk: Number one, you raise the rates. And then if you want to partner up with other services to assist people, other wraparound services, excellent, but you will not see any benefit from the money put into life stabilization services. If the government were to dump a lot of money in, you're not going to see the benefit that you want until the rates reach—I mean, let's peg them to inflation to start; that would be a significant improvement.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Right. Is there an expectation that the government actually will put money into life stabilization when you say that?

Ms. Devorah Kobluk: Thank you. That's actually a fair point. One thing we don't see in this bill is, as it's going to the municipalities and DSSABs, the funding agreements. We don't know if there's going to be a significant investment, and that's why I use the word “downloading.”

Municipalities are strapped, as we know, and if it were to work as well, we'd have to see a significant financial investment in many of these services, so that municipalities could actually deliver.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Right. So there's a proposal for a life stabilization strategy without any indication there actually will be money to put in place the supports that may be problematic, but may not even come.

One of the things that struck me, and I think a few others when we read this legislation, this relevant schedule, is the potential for privatization in the delivery of services. Do you have a similar reading of what's before us?

Ms. Devorah Kobluk: We have heard this as well, and right now, I think section 15.1 puts it to municipalities and DSSABs; however, there's nothing preventing further contracting out there. We know Employment Ontario is using a pilot program and we're definitely wondering if, on the social assistance side outside of Employment Ontario, that's going to be the next thing coming down the pipe.

I think it's something that ISAC is firmly against, obviously, not just because—there are Indigenous communities that I've spoken to and people who work with them have said there's no longer a duty from the crown to Indigenous communities, so that would be a problem. But, also, there's no need for a for-profit company to be making sure that they're servicing people the same way a government should.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Ms. Devorah Kobluk: Right now it seems limited, but there's also no safeguard—it doesn't seem like it's privatized right now, but there's also no safeguards to prevent it, if I can answer your question directly.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: That's fair enough. You talked about the impact of COVID on those on Ontario Works and, in particular, the food destabilization. Were there other elements that were obvious to you in terms of dealing with people on OW during the peak of COVID?

Ms. Devorah Kobluk: I think every single element that you can think of has been exacerbated: more isolation; inability to go to drop-in centres; libraries are closed; less contact through Internet that they would get at drop-in centres; food insecurity; cost of transport with delivery is going up for those who are isolating; inability to work part-time because those jobs are cut; and, I would add, just informal supports that people actually rely on are gone.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much. That's all the time that we have. I'd like to thank our presenters and committee members.

At this point, the committee is now in recess until 2 p.m.

The committee recessed from 0951 to 1400.

ONTARIO CLEAN AIR ALLIANCE
ONTARIO TRUCKING ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Good afternoon, everyone. The Standing Committee on General Government will now come to order. We are here for public hearings on Bill 276, An Act to enact and amend various Acts.

At this point, I'd like to call upon the Ontario Clean Air Alliance. Please state your names for the record, and then you may begin. You will have seven minutes. Thank you.

Mr. Jack Gibbons: Madam Chair, can you hear me?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Yes, we can.

Mr. Jack Gibbons: Great. Thank you. I'm Jack Gibbons from the Ontario Clean Air Alliance. In the past, I have been a Toronto Hydro commissioner and a member of the staff at the Ontario Energy Board. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with you this afternoon about the government's proposals to repeal the sections of the Electricity Act and the Ontario Energy Board Act that promote and prioritize renewable energy.

Members of the committee, it is true that Ontario paid very high prices for wind and solar energy when Dalton McGuinty was our Premier, and it's true that the McGuinty government's decision to pay high prices for wind and solar energy pushed up our electricity bills. In fact, according to the Ontario Energy Board, the contracts for wind and solar energy have pushed up our cost of electricity generation by 28%.

But, members of the committee, let me tell you what is also true. It is also true that Dalton McGuinty hasn't been our Premier since 2013, and during the past eight years the cost of new renewable energy, new wind and solar energy has fallen dramatically. As a result, according to the International Energy Agency, wind and solar are now our lowest-cost sources of new electricity supply, and as a result, the International Energy Agency is forecasting that, on a global basis, 95% of the world's new electricity supply during the next five years will be renewables. That's 95% will be renewables. Unfortunately, here in Ontario, we're going in the wrong direction.

The government of Ontario is planning to meet 100% of our need for new electricity supply during the next 20 years by investing in polluting fossil gas and by investing in high-cost nuclear energy. As a result, the greenhouse gas pollution from our electric power plants is forecast to rise by more than 300% by 2030 and by 500% or more by 2040. In addition, Ontario Power Generation's price of nuclear electricity is going to rise by more than 40% by 2027 to pay for the rebuilding of its aging nuclear reactors. And to add insult to injury, Ontario Power Generation is hoping to build a new nuclear reactor in the GTA, despite the fact that wind and solar energy can now keep our lights on at less than half the cost.

Members of the committee, this simply does not make sense. Ontario is going in the wrong direction. If we want to meet our climate targets, and if we want to lower our electricity bills by 12%, then we must promote and

prioritize clean, safe and low-cost renewable energy, not polluting fossil gas and not high-cost nuclear energy.

Thank you very much for your attention, and if you have any questions, I'll be pleased to answer them.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much. We'll now turn to our next presenters, the Ontario Trucking Association. Please state your names for the record, and then you may begin. You will have seven minutes.

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Thank you very much for having me today, Chair and members of the committee. I'm Stephen Laskowski, president of the Ontario Trucking Association.

Just a little bit by way of background of who the OTA is: We've been the voice of the Ontario industry since 1926. Our industry, as we've all seen throughout this pandemic—and it has come to the fore—is extremely important. The whole Ontario economy relies on our industry: 70% of Ontario's trade with the United States moves by truck; 90% of all consumer goods move by truck. As we like to say, if you've got it, a truck brought it.

With regard to who OTA is in terms of who we represent, we represent carriers of all sizes across Canada—and in Ontario, obviously. Our board is made up of 70 carriers from across Ontario. These range in size of trucks—fleets as small as 10 all the way up to the largest fleets in Canada. But it is important to remember for everyone that the bulk of OTA's membership have 25 or less trucks, so primarily our members are small businesses.

Before I get into the specifics of Bill 276, the OTA would like to thank the government of Ontario for its incredible support during the COVID crisis. It has been greatly appreciated, so thank you very much to everyone involved in assisting our industry throughout this crisis. As it relates to Bill 276, we'd like to thank both Minister Sarkaria and Minister Mulroney for the two measures in this specific bill that I'm bringing to your attention today.

First of all, the renewal of provincial commercial licence plates: As everyone on this committee knows, when you go to renew your license, you can do that online. When your birthday comes, you go online and renew your licence plates. For the trucking industry, that hasn't been the case up until this bill. What we will have is the ability of trucking fleets to renew their provincial plates. There are two types of plates: There are international plates or interprovincial plates and domestic plates, Ontario only. The domestic only is going online; the IRP is being worked on. Both are great measures; both will greatly assist all businesses. It just streamlines the process and makes it easier for all of them. We applaud it.

With regard to the second measure, there are going to be modifications to special trucking permits that are limited to certain carriers that meet certain safety tests. Ontario is making changes to the double-trailer permit program. Basically, this permit program greatly assists the auto sector, the retail sector and food sectors through its double-trailer program. It's limited to carriers of certain levels of safety.

The changes that are introduced in this bill deal specifically with workers' compensation permits and dangerous goods permits, which will ensure once again that this safe program becomes even safer. It will also introduce a configuration staying within the parameters. But as some of you may be aware, the trucking industry has different axles under the trailers, and these axles will be allowed to be moved somewhat. Again, it will just assist particularly the auto, food and retail sectors.

Those are our closing remarks. Madam Chair and committee members, we would like to thank the Standing Committee on General Government for the opportunity to present today, and we strongly recommend the passage of Bill 276. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much. Our third presenter has cancelled, so at this point we will turn to the independent member for the first round of questions. MPP Schreiner, you have 4.5 minutes. You may begin.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thanks to both presenters for coming to committee today.

I'm going to direct my first question to the Ontario Clean Air Alliance. Jack, thanks for coming in. What I gather from your presentation is that the previous Liberal government bought a little bit of renewable energy at a pretty high price, and now that we're at a low price, the current government wants to get Ontario out of renewable energy. I always thought most investment advice was "buy low and sell high," but Ontario seems to be doing the exact opposite, buy high and sell low right now, which doesn't seem to make a lot of sense to me. I'm just wondering, could you dig in to a little bit more detail of what is the market price for wind and solar versus gas and nuclear, just to give us some concrete numbers that you presented in your presentation?

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Mr. Jack Gibbons: Thanks for that question.

I did send to the Clerk our fact sheet about Ontario's electricity options, a cost comparison. Hopefully, you've all received it electronically. It has bar graphs of our various carbon-free electricity options. The lowest-cost option by far is energy efficiency investments. The IESO has been able to procure energy efficiency savings at an average cost of only 1.7 cents a kilowatt hour.

In terms of solar power and wind power, we've used the estimates from Lazard, which is the largest private investment bank in the world and is the expert on the prices of electricity technologies. According to them, utility-scale solar now costs between 3.8 and 5.5 cents a kilowatt hour, and onshore wind costs between 3.4 and seven cents a kilowatt hour.

In contrast, at the moment, Ontario Power Generation's price of nuclear power is 9.6 cents a kilowatt hour, much higher. And Ontario Power Generation has told the Ontario Energy Board that it needs to raise its price of nuclear power to 13.7 cents a kilowatt hour by 2027. Of course, Ontario Power Generation is also proposing to build a new nuclear reactor in the GTA, and according to

the nuclear industry, that will cost 16.3 cents a kilowatt hour.

So we have the wind and solar options that are one third to one half the cost of a new nuclear reactor. Clearly, if we want to actually lower our costs, we need to now be investing in energy efficiency and renewables, because they are our lowest-cost sources of new electricity supply.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you, Chair.

Thanks for outlining that for us. I think those are important numbers for us to know.

So here we have a bill that's saying, "Let's get rid of providing priority access to renewable energy. Let's maybe even put some roadblocks in the way." What you're saying is that outside of retrofitting our buildings to save energy, it's the lowest-cost option available to us. You're an energy economist. Let's leave the environmental part of it out of the equation. Does it make any financial sense to do that?

Mr. Jack Gibbons: Absolutely not. This is not economically rational. It doesn't make sense to rebuild nuclear reactors at double the cost of new wind or solar, and it doesn't make sense to build a brand new nuclear reactor in the GTA when you can get wind and solar at way less than half the cost. It's just economically nuts.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): That's all the time we have for this round.

We'll now turn to the government for 7.5 minutes. MPP Harris, you may begin.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you to both of you for being here today.

Mr. Gibbons, I don't have all the answers to this, and I'm hoping that you can fill me in a little bit with your expertise. I know one thing that we've talked about quite a bit when we look at how power production has happened here in the past and where things are going—when we talk about wind and solar, there are often times when the sun doesn't shine and the wind doesn't blow. How are we moving down the line of being able to store that energy for longer periods so that it can contribute to the grid? Is there still a need to, for example, be able to spin up a gas plant or some kind of alternative, like nuclear or what have you, if we're not able to get that power to the grid? I'm interested in hearing some of your thoughts on that.

Mr. Jack Gibbons: That's a very good question. You're right: Wind and solar are intermittent. The wind doesn't always blow and the sun doesn't always shine, so wind and solar need a backup or storage option. At the present, we're using gas as that backup option for wind and solar.

But we have a better option. We've got a carbon-free option that's better, and that's because Ontario is so lucky to be located right next door to the province of Quebec, because Quebec has these huge hydroelectric reservoirs which can act like a giant battery for our intermittent wind and solar energy. What we need to do is, by integrating our wind and solar energy with Quebec's hydroelectric reservoirs, we can convert wind and solar into a firm, 24/7 source of baseload electricity. This is great news, because

with the help of Quebec's reservoirs, we can use wind and solar to phase out the gas-fired power plants and we could also use them to reduce our need to rebuild our aging nuclear reactors, given that wind and solar are now much lower-cost options than rebuilding Darlington's or Bruce's aging nuclear reactors.

Mr. Mike Harris: I think we're lucky, too, to be blessed with quite a lot of hydroelectric generation here in the province of Ontario as well. I know the MPP from Mushkegowuk—James Bay probably has quite a few hydro dams in his riding. We're lucky to deal with a lot of them, as well, through the Ministry of Natural Resources, where I am the parliamentary assistant. Hydroelectricity is certainly something, I think, that we can promote, and try and utilize a little bit more, looking to some more sustainable things down the road.

It's certainly a lot of investment that goes into—you can't just put up a windmill, or you can't just build a solar farm. There is a lot of substantial investment that has to go into that, as well. I think when you look at the infrastructure that we have here in the province, being able to leverage what we already have in the intermittent time being, and as we have a lot more people moving here from other provinces or other countries, certainly being able to have a really long-standing, sustainable power infrastructure is very important.

I'm going to now move over to Stephen. I know there are just two of you here today so we don't want to pick on one person too, too much. Certainly, I've had a lot of dealings with the trucking sector over the last little while. My riding abuts right against the 401 corridor. We've got some great operators, with Charger, Challenger and some other folks that are right in the heart of Waterloo region and provide really good jobs. Certainly, I know a position of our government has been trying to get more people into the trucking sector, because it's something, along with many other trades that we have here in the province, that has kind of been forgotten about. Moving goods and getting food on people's tables is such an important thing. When we look at, certainly, what's happened through the pandemic, that's obviously been heightened.

I know that in the consultation that I have done with the industry, modernization has been one of the key things that you guys have really been pushing for. I was hoping that you could touch a little bit more on some of the things that you would like to see, maybe, in the next red tape bill, or different things that, from a government perspective, we can do to alleviate some of the unnecessary—and I want to make it very clear, unnecessary—regulation of your industry.

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Thank you very much for the question. I think the key for us going forward is exactly that balance that you just raised. The key issue facing our industry, quite frankly, is that there is a growing—they're still small, but a growing number of trucking companies of all sizes, small, medium and large, who actually are using non-compliance as a business plan.

So the issue really isn't—although it's fantastic and we strongly support the red tape process to continue to look at

government regulations that don't make sense, that make it more costly, unnecessarily costly, for industry. Really, if you asked us from a primary standpoint, what we would like to see is actually, in certain areas of regulatory, whether it's safety, labour, tax compliance or workers' compensation, that enforcement be targeted on the bottom of our industry to ensure that compliance costs are borne by everyone. Because it isn't through ignorance that these compliance costs aren't being borne by the trucking fleets; it's actually a business strategy. So we've been working very much with Minister Mulroney, Minister Sarkaria and others, the Workers' Compensation Board etc., to really bring more and more attention not to—

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The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: —all the trucking companies, but to the bottom of our fleets. If we do that, our great industry will become even greater and the good companies will grow, and those that shouldn't grow will either have to change to compliance or leave the sector.

Mr. Mike Harris: I've actually had quite a few folks in my office, even just drivers, who have raised that concern, and it's interesting to see that that is sort of throughout the entire industry—that non-compliance business model piece and people being able to make record profits and know that they're really not going to get caught.

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: That's it.

Mr. Mike Harris: It's a major challenge.

I know I've only got about 30 seconds left here, but I just wanted to say thank you to both of you for appearing before us today. I look forward to some more great conversation.

That's it for me, Madam Chair.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): We'll now turn to the official opposition for this round of questions.

Before we continue, though, MPP Daisy Wai, can you please confirm that you are present and in Ontario?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I'm MPP Daisy Wai. I am present, and I'm in Toronto.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much.

MPP Bourgouin, you may begin. You have 7.5 minutes.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Thank you to both presenters. My questions are going to be directed to the Ontario Trucking Association, but my colleagues will definitely get back to you, Mr. Gibbons, at the end of this round or in the next round.

Mr. Laskowski, I put a motion to address a government strategy to address the driver shortage, insurance costs, the drivers' records that are hard to get, and also the cost of getting trained on a truck.

The owner-operators in northern Ontario are a huge, huge issue. In fact, they're a dying breed. They used to be mom-and-pop operations that used to be handed down, and you see less and less of that. I had people that I talked to, when we did a press conference, explaining the situation.

I'd like to hear from you: How do you explain to the committee that a person—her insurance went up 123% in

one year just because they brought their kid in, because he wants to be part of the business. He did the training course, he did everything else, but the cost went up 123%. How can a business survive? Because it's their son, they did it, but a lot don't do it or they can't find drivers because of the shortage. I'd like to hear your perspective on this, because it's important because of the industry and how owner-operators are important in northern Ontario and throughout the province, to be honest with you.

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Thank you very much for the question.

First of all, thank you very much for the interest in our industry.

Insurance: It's hard to comment on—and I think you can appreciate this, too. My insurance went up X. Insurance costs are going up in all aspects of our sector, quite frankly, in all aspects of life. The issue within our sector is: Why? Even the best of the best operators are experiencing rising costs in insurance; some are actually not. Even the best of the best are experiencing rising costs of insurance—others, more.

Rising insurance costs are a reflection of multiple factors, but let's focus in on the overall safety performance of that carrier, whether they're small, medium or large. Your overall experience and how you are managing your fleet will be reflected in your insurance prices. As I mentioned before, even those who have excellent records are going up—it's also the factor of the insurance sector.

So the issue becomes, is it—we look at the rising costs of insurance in very generalities as a reflection of the performance of the carrier, which becomes a market-based decision. In essence, although I'm oversimplifying it—and this isn't a reflection of the carrier you brought up, so I'm not drawing that comparison, but in many cases, the rising costs of insurance can be a reflection of your overall fleet's performance—how you manage the safety; how you manage the drivers—and it becomes a competitive issue.

I'd also like to say that unfortunately—not “like to say”; I have to say—there are some—and this government dealt with it, through a facility and otherwise, where some fraudulent insurance was going on to artificially lower insurance costs. It's a complex issue, and the insurance sector—we are working with the Insurance Bureau of Canada with regard to some overall issues.

Particularly, you raised an issue about experience and experience letters. It's an issue we're working on, but I've also been told by others—and again, this isn't a reflection of the people you're working with, but out there, there's some fraud going on with those letters. It becomes very much a balancing act, and I think that working together with the Insurance Bureau of Canada, but also understanding how insurance acts in most circumstances, or in a number of circumstances, as a reflection of the management practices of the carriers—it is a balancing act.

Mr. Guy Bourgoïn: So maybe my next question would be, how do we address the driver shortage? The industries right now can't find drivers. I've heard the situation with drivers because they can't get their abstract

or their information, because they have to get their insurance, but the truck is insured, not the individual. How do we fix this problem so that we can address the shortage of drivers? There's a huge shortage of drivers. You can promote all you want, but if you don't make the industry interesting for young drivers or young adults who want to get into the industry—young women and men; family businesses that are getting away from that—how do we fix that problem?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: I think that it's probably threefold:

(1) As you just mentioned, it's getting people at a younger age through programs, potentially apprenticeship programs or funding-model programs, to come to our sector.

(2) Our sector needs to, like all sectors, market themselves and continue to market themselves to young people or people making a transition in their careers. We're about to embark this fall on a multi-year program in that area.

(3) Immigration: Over 90% of labour market growth in all of our economy is related to immigration, and the trucking industry is hamstrung there. We've been hamstrung there for years about bringing people over to this great country who want to come here, because of the various categories, how truck drivers are ranked federally in terms of skill versus skill and how it's all ranked. That's being worked on as well.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: So I think it's industry, it's training and it's immigration, if I had to overly simplify. But thank you very much for the question; it's an important one.

Mr. Guy Bourgoïn: I want to thank all the truckers, because you guys have stepped up to bring all these products to us: food, and the list goes on. We have to recognize your industry, and the work you've done to keep us safe also, but the drivers had to take huge risks, so thank you on this.

How many seconds left, Madam Chair?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Twenty.

Mr. Guy Bourgoïn: Okay. I would pass it down to my colleagues, but for 20 seconds, I think we'll wait until the next round so they can ask Mr. Gibbons. But I just want to thank you, and hopefully we can fix some of the problems we have, and hopefully the motion will address that and work with the government so that we can fix all these issues.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much. That's all the time we have. We'll now turn to the independent member for 4.5 minutes. MPP Schreiner?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you, Chair. Stephen, I just want to follow up on the last question about the essential role truck drivers have played, particularly during the pandemic, in keeping our supply chains going. I know my question is going to be unrelated to the bill, but while you're here, I'd just like us to have the information.

There has been some debate around the border issue, and I won't bring you into that debate, but when I

commented on it I had some truck drivers reach out to me and say, “Well, hey, prioritize us for vaccination.” I’m just wondering how widespread that concern is and if most truck drivers have been vaccinated.

1430

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: I’ll say this—I’ll start from square one. As I mentioned earlier in my presentation, this government has been fantastic in supporting our industry, and that included vaccinations. When the vaccination rollout was announced in the early days, our industry was made a priority. It was put in the second group of essential workers, which we completely supported—the first group being first responders and all those people who should have gone first. Our sector was second. And last week, the government announced that they moved that up and everybody in our sector right now can go out and get their vaccine. I don’t think we can ask for more.

The Premier also went to the state of Michigan to see if something could be done there, because we have a lot of long-haul drivers. All of us, in our jobs, we’re all working hard and we may put in 10, 12 hours a day or more sometimes, but we’re still here. If we can go to the Shoppers Drug Mart or whatever the case, we can make it work in our schedules. A long-haul truck driver is on the road a lot.

It was nice to see, over the weekend, the region of Peel and the province working together to have the 24-hour vaccine clinic at the International Centre, a fantastic opportunity for shift workers and long-haul truck drivers to go there.

I appreciate the member in the opposition just now. Everyone, governments from all party lines, have stepped up to support our industry, and our hard-working drivers deserve it, and we thank you. It’s making its way through. The long-haul drivers have that challenge, but we’re working our way through it.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Yes, I appreciate that. That’s good news and good to hear. And thanks for all your good work.

In the little bit of time I have left, I wanted to ask Jack a couple more questions. You had compared the cost of renewables to nuclear power, but I am curious. Gas is going to increase—the current estimate, you said, is a 300% to 500% increase in pollution. What’s the cost comparison between gas and wind and solar? Is there a lower-cost option to gas that wouldn’t increase our pollution so much?

Mr. Jack Gibbons: Well, the total cost of the gas plants, according to the Ontario Energy Board, the average total cost, including capital and labour and fuel, is about 13.5 a kilowatt-hour.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It’s 13.5?

Mr. Jack Gibbons: Yes. That’s at the moment, when the carbon tax that’s levied on the gas plants is very, very low. Prime Minister Trudeau is proposing to raise the carbon tax to \$170 a tonne by 2030. If that carbon tax is levied on 100% of the pollution from our gas plants, in 2030, if we run the gas plants like the government is planning to do, well, that will impose a \$2-billion-a-year carbon tax price on the electricity industry.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: But just to be clear, the price is higher even without carbon pricing, and with carbon pricing, it will be dramatically higher; is that right?

Mr. Jack Gibbons: Well, yes. If you include the full cost of the existing contracts, capital costs, labour and fuel, yes. The gas plants that we have in place—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. That’s all the time that we have for this round.

I now turn to the government for the next round of questions. MPP Sandhu, you may begin.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: I would like to thank both the presenters for their presentations.

My question is for the Ontario Trucking Association. The government has focused on digitizing products for businesses and people. Do you have a sense of the magnitude of time and money such digitization can save the industry?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: Thank you for that question. It’s always difficult to quantify time, so what this trucking permit issue does, especially with regard to the plates, is that an individual who would have to go down to an MTO office or a private office now can simply go online, do their job and move on. It’s a matter of adding all these efficiencies, and it’s very welcome. In an industry that’s highly competitive, you are always trying to improve your efficiencies. And so I think that’s exactly what this does. It was a long time coming, and we appreciate it.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you for that answer.

To what extent do you think the roads and safety of drivers could be enhanced by the proposed modernization and integration of [*inaudible*] in terms of your percentage or reduction in accident safety [*inaudible*]?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: I think it’s important for all the members of the committee to understand that as it relates to truck safety in general, we’re the leader in Canada and, quite frankly, the province is one of the leaders in North America. So what we’re really doing with these programs is making sure that we stay number one. We’ve made some changes to the programs that will—we’re always looking to improve. Yes, we’re the best sector and the best-performing province, so how can we continue to make sure we stay there? We’re always making sure that there are no gaps in the system so we can maintain our presence. So the changes made are just going to improve upon an already stellar record.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: What languages are you proposing to introduce for training needs? This sounds like a great idea—a plan to accommodate those who cannot contribute well due to language barriers.

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: With regard to LCV programs and reaching out in communication, we’re working with the Ministry of Transportation in terms of how to continue to improve outreach to our members and to non-members etc., understanding, for example, that one of the leading groups from an ethnicity standpoint, a growing group, is the South Asian community. Are there ways to better communicate to the South Asian community through Punjabi etc.? We’re looking to do that. We’ll be working with the province and working with trade magazines in the community to continue that outreach.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: That's a good idea.

Over the past 2.5 years, the government has made a priority [*inaudible*] million in net general savings to businesses, not-for-profits, municipalities, universities and colleges, school boards and hospitals, in regulatory compliance costs. As well, the government has reduced regulatory burden by a modest 2% a year.

Can you please tell us how important it is for the government to maintain its burden reduction efforts for your industry?

Mr. Stephen Laskowski: I really mean this: Whether it's Minister Mulroney, Minister Sarkaria etc., they've been sitting down with our industry—the Premier's office—from day one about how we can make sure that this industry stays competitive and maintains its level of safety. No stone has been left unturned.

In the previous red tape bill, we made a change to the motor vehicle inspection safety program that would streamline environmental—we're talking a lot about environmental issues here—performance in our sector that we want to make sure is looked after, and this province is doing it.

So it's a series of what I'll call continuous discussions and continuous improvements. What our board is extremely happy with the government of Ontario—is that we talk, we examine as a group, and we implement, and things are happening. This industry is improving its safety performance, environmental performance. Quite frankly, the Ontario economy relies on us, so we're improving the efficiency of the Ontario economy. We're all doing this by improving the environment and improving safety and improving compliance. We're ticking all the boxes.

Again, we applaud Minister Mulroney and her team, and Minister Sarkaria, for working with us. We're going to continue to improve as we go down this path.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Further questions?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: How much time do I have?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Sandhu, you have one minute and 45 seconds.

However, you're—

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: How much time left, Madam Chair?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute and 45 seconds.

I've paused the time because there seems to be a lag from your end, so I'm not sure if you can either strengthen your WiFi or if you can do some—

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Sure. Can you hear me now?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Yes. You have one minute, 45 seconds left. You can continue.

1440

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Quickly, I will ask a question to the Ontario Clean Air Alliance. Ontario plans for a competitive energy future that will ensure value for ratepayers by allowing all resources to compete to meet system needs. The previous Liberal government created an electricity system based on ideology that drove up costs for Ontarians. Do you think that Ontarians should have access to competitive energy prices and cheaper bills?

Mr. Jack Gibbons: Pardon me? I absolutely agree with you, sir, that the McGuinty government paid high prices for wind and solar, but our point is that wind and solar are our lowest-cost sources of new electricity supply. So if we want to actually reduce our electricity costs by 12%, we've got to start promoting and prioritizing wind and solar instead of polluting fossil gas, and instead of very high-cost nuclear energy.

The world has changed. It's true, wind and solar used to be very high-cost; they used to be the highest-cost options to keep our lights on. But things have just completely changed because of technological progress.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thirty seconds left.

Mr. Jack Gibbons: And you've got to remember—

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you. Those are all the questions I have, Madam Chair.

Mr. Jack Gibbons: —Ontario has a \$36-billion deficit—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. That concludes the time that we have.

We'll now turn to the official opposition for 7.5 minutes. MPP Tabuns, you may begin.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My thanks to both presenters today. My colleague MPP Bourgouin has asked our trucking questions; I'm going to be focused on energy questions.

Jack, thank you very much for your presentation today; it's much appreciated. You noted the increase in greenhouse gas emissions from the electricity system going up 300% by 2030, and 500% by 2040. What's the actual number in megatonnes of emissions that those increases represent?

Mr. Jack Gibbons: Okay; just a minute. In 2017, the greenhouse gas pollution from our electricity sector was at an all-time low during the past 60 years; in 2017, the greenhouse gas pollution from our power plants was 2.5 megatonnes.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Right.

Mr. Jack Gibbons: And now, the IESO, or Independent Electricity System Operator, is forecasting that by 2030, it will be 10.9 to 12.2 megatonnes, and by 2040, 15 to 16.3 megatonnes.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Okay. Thank you. So the reality is that we are going to start seeing emissions from the electricity system that we haven't seen since we were burning coal. We are going back to being a high-greenhouse-gas-emitting electricity system, correct?

Mr. Jack Gibbons: Well, yes, absolutely. Under the government's plans, in 2040, we'll be getting about a quarter of our electricity from fossil gas. That's going in absolutely the wrong direction, and it means that we'll lose about 40% of the pollution reduction benefits that we gained by phasing out the dirty coal plants.

As your colleagues know, it was Premier Ernie Eves who committed Ontario to a complete coal phase-out, and he did that in 2002.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: So, in fact, what we're doing is going backwards on our climate activities in Ontario. I

know the Auditor General in 2020 said that the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines was ignoring the climate plan. In fact, it sounds like the ministry is going against the climate plans and undermining the government's climate actions. Is that a fair comment, based on what we're seeing?

Mr. Jack Gibbons: Well, absolutely, but here's the good news: The government has a climate target to reduce our greenhouse gas pollution by 30% by 2030, and if they were to phase out the gas-fired power plants, that will provide them with all, or virtually all, of the extra pollution reductions they need to achieve their 2030 climate target. It's just common sense. It's the lowest-cost and easiest way for Premier Ford to keep his promise to lower our greenhouse gas pollution by 30% by 2030. As a result, it's being supported: 26 municipalities have passed resolutions calling on the government to phase out our gas-fired power plants.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: And as you outlined in an earlier response to a question, we sit next to North America's big hydro battery, Quebec, and they can provide a lot of the power backup to deal with the questions of intermittency. Do you just want to confirm that?

Mr. Jack Gibbons: Absolutely. We are so lucky to be located next door to Quebec's hydro reservoirs, which can act like a giant battery. There was a study done by MIT that shows that Quebec's hydro reservoirs are the most cost-effective carbon-free battery for wind and solar electricity. We should be expanding our trade with Quebec to help us phase out the gas-fired power plants and to lower our bills, and Quebec very much wants to do more trade with us.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'm going to stop you there. I know my colleague MPP Glover wanted to ask some questions as well. If he runs out of questions, Madam Chair, I would be very happy to take the microphone back.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Sounds good. MPP Glover?

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank both Stephen and Jack for being here. Let's see. I'll start with Jack. How much time do I have, Madam Chair?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Two minutes and 30 seconds.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay. Let's start with—what I just heard you saying, Jack, is that basically if this bill goes through and the government is basically penalizing and not giving the priority access or removing the priority access for renewable energies, that it's basically an announcement that the government doesn't really intend to meet its greenhouse reductions by 2030, its goals of 30% by 2030. Is that fair as a comment?

Mr. Jack Gibbons: Well, it's certainly going in the wrong direction. It would certainly make it much harder for the government to achieve its climate targets. Phasing out the gas plants is the easiest, lowest-cost way to meet our climate goals, so why you would tie your hands behind your back is beyond me, but—

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay. And the other thing this government has promised is to reduce electricity costs by

12%, and you're saying that just by promoting renewable, solar and wind, and then backing that up with hydro power from Quebec, we can actually meet that 12% reduction. Is that accurate?

Mr. Jack Gibbons: If we want to actually lower our costs, we're going to have to start promoting the low-cost options, which are energy efficiency, solar and wind, and Quebec water power. Those are our lowest-cost options, and there's just no doubt about that. If we're serious about a 12% reduction in cost, that's where we've got to focus.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Mr. Chris Glover: Let me just ask one more question. It seems like the government has an option here to reduce our costs, to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, but it's also the competitive advantage. The original reason that Adam Beck created Ontario Hydro as a public utility was to provide not only residents but manufacturers in Ontario with low-cost electricity. Would you argue that moving to renewables is a way to increase our competitiveness for manufacturing and other businesses?

Mr. Jack Gibbons: Absolutely. Sir Adam Beck created for this great province a virtually 100% renewable electricity grid that lasted for almost half a century, and in every single year, the price of electricity per kilowatt hour fell—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. That's all the time that we have. I'd like to thank our presenters at this point for joining us today. You can now stand down. You can be released. Thank you very much.

GREATER KITCHENER WATERLOO
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
ENTITÉ 4
MAYTREE

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): We'll now turn to our next set of presenters, beginning with the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce. Please state your name for the record, and then you may begin. You will have seven minutes. Thank you.

Mr. Art Sinclair: Thank you very much, Chair Ghamari and members of the general government committee, for the opportunity to appear before you this afternoon to outline our organization's priorities and our interest in the COVID-19 pandemic and the government response.

Again, my name is Art Sinclair, and I am vice-president of the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce. I was to be joined today by my colleague Ian MacLean, but unfortunately, he was not able to attend, so I am here on behalf of the organization.

1450

Just to start, as Perrin Beatty, former MP for Wellington county and a member of Parliament and a minister in the Ottawa government, once said—he's now president and CEO of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce—as he has said many times over the past year, the economic recovery from COVID-19 will be led by the private sector, so it is

incredibly important, extremely important, and imperative that in fact there is a strong working relationship between the private sector—and business organizations and other stakeholders in the private sector—and the public sector to ensure that we come out of this pandemic very strongly and in a good position to again compete at global and domestic levels. That is what I think we're attempting to do, is building a strong relationship with all levels of government here as we work out of the current pandemic and on to a strong economic recovery.

The Ontario business sector strongly supports efforts by all levels of government to reduce red tape and increase our collective competitiveness. We recognize that over the last year considerable effort has been directed to ensuring our businesses' resources are geared towards expansion and job creation. Like much of Ontario, housing supply and affordability are critical to our local ability to attract and retain talent [*inaudible*]. According to the Kitchener-Waterloo Association of Realtors, the average price locally for detached units is approximately \$900,000, a considerable increase from where we were a year ago.

Provincially, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce has been a strong advocate for expediting the approvals process to increase the supply of housing, which will then address affordability challenges. Also, the population of Waterloo region is expected to reach 950,000 in three years, a considerable increase from the current level, placing intense pressure on municipal governments and the development sector. We support efforts by the Ontario government, such as through Bill 276, [*inaudible*] streamline policies in this important portfolio.

I would just like to make a few remarks about the importance of infrastructure here, in terms of the competitiveness of the Ontario business sector. We have been quite fortunate over the last year to have two major announcements regarding major infrastructure projects in Waterloo region. I am sure MPP Harris will be quite familiar with these announcements. Of course, he provided an intense level of assistance to us that we are very grateful for at this point in time.

The two projects that we have received considerable support for [*inaudible*] past year have been expanding GO train service, passenger service, into Toronto on a daily basis, and the announcement last July on Highway 7. Both of these are going to increase our local competitiveness and greatly assist us in competing with global markets and domestically as well. We are very grateful to Minister Bethlenfalvy for the announcement that he made in the recent 2021 provincial budget regarding two-way, all-day passenger GO service from Kitchener into Toronto and back.

The key consideration here is that we have been lobbying for a number of years to have morning GO train passenger service into Waterloo region because we have a high percentage of our local workforce that live in Toronto and commute every day, usually by the 401, buses and other vehicles, and of course their commute times will be greatly reduced with the recent announcement on expanding GO train service. Again, this is a significant

investment into the environment, not only in Waterloo region and Toronto in the innovation corridor but across Ontario. People are going to save time, and this is going to be an environmentally friendly way of commuting. So, again, this is a strong and major announcement for our community.

I guess the recommendation going forward is that the government of Ontario consider a number of other major infrastructure projects and keep that money flowing, because coming out of the recovery, this is going to be a key imperative for, I think, all communities across Ontario, to be able to move goods and people moving forward.

Along those lines, as I mentioned before, we had another major announcement last July, about 10 months ago, regarding the initiation of the project to build a new Highway 7 between Kitchener-Waterloo, Waterloo region, and Guelph and Wellington county. That announcement was made in early July. This is something that as a community we have been lobbying for for a number of years, because not only is it important for us as a business community to move people and human resources, it's also important for us to move goods and services. Highway 7 was seen as an important link between the greater Toronto and Hamilton area and Waterloo region. It's important not only for our local community but for many communities north of us—Grey and Bruce counties, Wellington counties—for moving products into the important GTHA market. We have a lot of manufacturers that have to move their products to Pearson airport for movement into the international markets. We have a lot of traffic that moves down to the port of Hamilton. Again, that extra connection apart from Highway 401 is very crucial for us. We again thank MPP Harris and his local colleagues—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Mr. Art Sinclair: —and government for assisting us on that. That was a very important announcement.

In terms of competitiveness, another issue that has been very important to us over the last number of weeks has been the Ontario Small Business Support Grant. There have been some issues that have been faced by our members in securing funding and undergrad programs. There are five key recommendations that we have moving forward with respect to the Ontario Small Business Support Grant—and again, this is an important program for us. But the key recommendations moving forward are an expansion of eligibility for applicants; ensure eligible recipients receive their funding in a timely manner; freeze all audit requests while people are awaiting funding; announce a third round of funding, because, of course, the lockdown is still in place and there are a lot of challenged businesses out there that require that money urgently; and fifthly—this is a recommendation coming from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce a number of weeks ago at our annual general meeting—we would like the government to set up some type of a rapid arbitration process for businesses that are having difficulty—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. That's all the time we have for this round.

We'll now turn to our next presenter, Entité 4. Please state your name for the record, and then you may begin. You have seven minutes. Thank you.

M^{me} Lisa Gotell: Bonjour. Hello. My name is Lisa Gotell. Je m'appelle Lisa Gotell, et je suis la directrice générale de l'Entité 4. Il nous fait plaisir d'avoir l'occasion de nous exprimer devant le Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales sur le projet de loi 276 sur le soutien à la relance et à la compétitivité, la loi de 2021 édictant et modifiant diverses lois.

L'Entité 4 est l'une des six entités de planification des services de santé en français mandatées par le ministère de la Santé de l'Ontario pour améliorer l'accès à des services de santé en français. Le territoire que dessert l'Entité 4 correspond aux aires de service des agences de soins à domicile et en milieu communautaire du Centre, du Centre-Est et de Simcoe-Nord Muskoka.

Depuis 2010, les entités de planification des services de santé en français de l'Ontario travaillent en collaboration avec des partenaires aux niveaux local, régional et provincial pour développer des services de santé adaptés aux réalités auxquelles font face les communautés que nous desservons. Nos liens étroits avec nos communautés nous aident à comprendre les besoins des francophones et de leurs proches aidants en matière de santé.

Le projet de loi que vous étudiez aujourd'hui a une portée d'envergure avec ses recommandations pour moderniser divers règlements et soutenir la relance économique de l'Ontario suite à la pandémie de la COVID-19. Plusieurs de ces changements réglementaires ne touchent pas notre travail directement. Par contre, l'Entité 4 aimerait se prononcer sur l'annexe 9 du projet de loi 276.

L'annexe 9 permet d'étendre aux foyers municipaux et aux foyers communs l'éligibilité à la désignation en vertu de la Loi sur les services en français. La désignation est un processus volontaire couronné par la reconnaissance officielle du gouvernement de l'Ontario de la capacité et de l'engagement continu d'un organisme à offrir des services en français de haute qualité. Le processus de désignation est la pierre angulaire de la pérennisation des services en français.

La maison de soins de longue durée Bendale Acres, l'un de nos partenaires, est un établissement géré par la ville de Toronto qui mérite que l'on reconnaisse l'excellent travail du personnel du Pavillon Omer Deslauriers, principalement occupé par des résidents francophones. D'ailleurs, le modèle Bendale Acres est reconnu comme une meilleure pratique pour l'offre des soins de longue durée à des résidents de langue officielle en situation minoritaire. L'Entité 4 accueille cet élargissement du règlement avec plaisir et reconnaît les bénéfices potentiels pour les communautés francophones de l'Ontario.

1500

Actuellement, il y a plus de 622 000 francophones qui habitent en Ontario, donc le plus grand nombre de francophones hors du Québec au Canada. Selon les données du recensement de 2016, en moyenne, les francophones de l'Ontario sont plus âgés que la population en général. Les

francophones de 65 ans et plus représentent une proportion de 19,5 % de leur groupe, contre une population de 16,2 % d'individus de 65 ans et plus de la population totale.

La pandémie de la COVID-19 a levé le voile sur l'indéniable vulnérabilité des résidents de maisons de soins de longue durée. La vulnérabilité des aînés francophones est exacerbée par le fait que, souvent, les aînés ont une perte d'une langue seconde avec l'âge. De plus, les aînés francophones et leurs familles font souvent face à un choix difficile lorsqu'il s'agit de recevoir des soins de longue durée, soit de choisir une résidence qui répond à leurs besoins linguistiques et culturels ou bien de choisir une résidence plus proche de chez eux.

Nous allons donc passer la parole à M. Jean Roy, qui travaille comme bénévole à Bendale Acres et qui se porte depuis plusieurs années comme champion des soins de longue durée en français.

M. Jean Roy: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Merci beaucoup de l'opportunité.

En tant que bénévole et membre du comité adviseur du foyer municipal Bendale Acres, je suis très fier de la qualité des services de soins de longue durée en français qui sont dispensés depuis plus de 25 ans. Bendale Acres est le seul foyer de la région du grand Toronto, effectivement, qui possède une unité de services en français, et l'obtention d'une désignation selon la Loi sur les services en français lui permettrait de mieux faire connaître ses services à travers la communauté francophone.

Le présent rapport du 30 avril 2021 de la commission ontarienne d'enquête sur la COVID-19 dans les foyers de soins de longue durée nous indique, dans une de ses recommandations, que le ministère devrait—

La Présidente (M^{me} Goldie Ghamari): Une minute.

M. Jean Roy: —concevoir et mettre en oeuvre une stratégie visant à accroître les services de soins de longue durée en français. Alors la flexibilité pour les foyers municipaux de pouvoir obtenir une désignation est donc une opportunité qu'il ne faut pas manquer afin de bien supporter cette recommandation de la commission. Merci.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Merci beaucoup.

We'll now turn to our third and final presenter, from Maytree. Please state your name for the record and then you may begin. You will have seven minutes.

Ms. Garima Talwar Kapoor: Thank you, Madam Chair. My name is Garima Talwar Kapoor, and I am the director of policy and research with Maytree. Thank you so much for having me today and for the opportunity to appear before the Standing Committee on General Government. My comments today will be regarding schedule 21 of Bill 276, the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act. Specifically, I will then comment on proposed changes to the Ontario Works Act, 1997.

At its surface, the proposed amendments to the Ontario Works Act seem technocratic in nature, more about the machinery of government and the delivery of Ontario Works. Ontario Works, along with the Ontario Disability Support Program, or ODSP, make up Ontario's social assistance system. Both programs support people living in

deep poverty. While it may seem like these proposed amendments are simply technocratic changes, they are not.

These amendments shift the underlying ethos of Ontario Works and change who is responsible for different elements of program delivery. As a result, it is incumbent upon us to understand the potential implications that such changes will have on some of the most vulnerable people in our province. As we examine the potential implications, we need to ask whether the proposed amendments are clear, reflective of the government's vision for a social assistance reform, and in the best interests of people living in poverty.

Ontario Works was established almost 25 years ago. Since then, the values that underpin social assistance have changed. Twenty-five years ago, the dominant narrative that shaped the rules and regulations of Ontario Works were predicated on the idea that people would face unemployment only for a short period of time and that people in fact needed to be incentivized to work. These ideas dictated the litanies of rules that govern social assistance today. As a result, over the past several decades, we've normalized the devastatingly low rates available on social assistance. We've normalized a system that is overly punitive and invasive. We've convinced ourselves that deprivation is the only way to help people achieve a sense of security and stability.

Our policies and systems aimed at supporting people living in poverty have not kept up with the changing nature of the economy, labour market and society. We are now faced by undeniable facts that force us to rethink how we develop and deliver social assistance. For example, the length of time on Ontario Works has steadily been increasing over the past decade, from 1.5 years to three years on average. This is not by accident and points to a larger problem in our labour market. For example, non-standard employment, some of which can be precarious and marked by low wages and few to no benefits, grew at double the rate of standard employment arrangements from 1997 to 2015. It's hard to find and keep a job if the jobs created do not pay a living wage and are insecure and unstable. Furthermore, single, unattached adults make up a large proportion of the Ontario Works caseload. While a single adult can receive a maximum of \$733 a month on Ontario Works, the average rental cost for a bachelor unit was almost \$1,100 in 2019. This represents a shortfall of more than \$400 a month. This is before the cost of food, water, hydro, Internet and other medical expenses that people might have.

With this as the context for social assistance reform, it's no wonder that MCCSS, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, released its vision paper *Recovery and Renewal: Ontario's Vision for Social Assistance Transformation*. The vision paper outlined how service delivery changes across the social services sector could help people receive social assistance, address barriers to employment and access the benefits they need for their well-being.

The question is whether schedule 21 of Bill 276 starts to move toward this vision. Amendments to the Ontario

Works Act change who is responsible for the delivery of certain parts of the Ontario Works program. The aim is to move to a system where the province centralizes intake and the delivery of financial supports while requiring municipalities and district social services administration boards to deliver life-stabilization programming. While not articulated in this bill, these changes would help free up case worker time to focus on the needs of social assistance recipients, ensuring people have access to the programs and supports they may need. About one third of Ontario Works recipients are in need of life-stabilization supports, and as such, MCCSS's focus on this is understandable.

Proposed amendments to the Ontario Works Act aim to change the definition of employment assistance to employment and life-stabilization assistance, a marked change in the ethos of social assistance clarifying that there are a number of barriers to employment. Importantly, it signals that access to select public services are critical for the success of life-stabilization programming. However, while these changes be understandable, it does not mean that MCCSS is currently on the path to achieve its vision. For example, the provincial government will have to invest more significantly in areas that enable stability and well-being; for example, housing. Unfortunately, the province currently does not have a plan to invest in public services. Based on our own calculations, using a recent report from the FAO, there will be a \$1.9-billion shortfall—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Ms. Garima Talwar Kapoor: —between expected and demand-driven requirements for investments in social services in 2021 and 2022-23 alone. Without further investments that increase access to quality public services, the government will just be adding people to housing and child care wait-lists. I'm not sure that this is the kind of transformation that the government has in mind.

While there are important issues that remain to be resolved for municipalities on a go-forward basis, lastly, what I'd like to talk about is that it's important to note the effects that this will have on people alone. It's important to note that stakeholders and communities living in poverty are worried that these changes could make Ontario Works more invasive than it already is, that people will have to demonstrate that they are accessing their mental health—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. That's all the time that we have.

1510

We'll now turn to our first round of questions, beginning with the official opposition. Who would like to begin? MPP Tabuns, you have 7.5 minutes.

M. Peter Tabuns: Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you to the presenters.

Je commence avec M^{me} Gotell. Madame Gotell, je suis désolé. Je parle seulement un peu de français, et si je fais des erreurs, c'est dommage. Votre position : il y a un manque de lits pour les aînés francophones in the GTA en ce moment-ci?

M^{me} Lisa Gotell: Oui.

M. Peter Tabuns: Et avec les changements de ce projet de loi, nous pouvons avoir beaucoup de lits. Il y a une crise ici maintenant, je pense, et ça change cette crise. Ça donne de l'aide aux aînés francophones?

M^{me} Lisa Gotell: Oui, alors ça va offrir la possibilité de désigner des foyers de longue durée pour des services en français, ce qui veut dire que les résidents seront garantis des services en français.

M. Peter Tabuns: Et en moment-ci, est-ce qu'il y a beaucoup d'aînés francophones sur les listes de gens qui ont besoin d'un lit?

M^{me} Lisa Gotell: Ça dépend de quelle région de la province. En ce moment, Bendale Acres occupe 37 lits pour les francophones, et puis, en moyenne, il y a environ 26 francophones qui sont là.

M. Peter Tabuns: Et si j'ai compris vos mots, il y a un programme ici en ce moment-ci. Il y a des lits à Toronto, mais un manque de lits au Grand Nord ou dans les régions où on trouve beaucoup de francophones. Est-ce que c'est vrai?

M^{me} Lisa Gotell: Oui. Les francophones sont vraiment éparpillés dans la province. Alors, d'avoir plusieurs petits foyers ou bien plusieurs aires dans les foyers serait idéal. Comme ça, la famille n'aurait pas à voyager—alors, de la voir dispersée.

M. Peter Tabuns: Merci beaucoup.

Madam Chair, I'm going to turn it over to my colleague MPP Glover, and then we may switch around again.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Okay. MPP Glover?

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you very much. Let's see. I would like to address a couple of questions to Mr. Sinclair. And I want to thank all the presenters for being here. It's great to have you. We've got a second round, so I'm hoping to get some questions to you, Garima, as well.

You're talking about changes to the small business support grant. I've been in contact with a lot of small businesses in my riding and a lot of them are facing the same problems that you talk about with your recommendations. The eligibility: New businesses are now eligible if the April 2019 and April 2020 incomes don't show a dramatic increase. They're not eligible, so that's a problem.

I had also just been speaking yesterday with a business owner who was promised on February 9 that he was eligible. He was expecting \$20,000 in a grant and didn't get it, and all the other things.

So, you've got five recommendations. Are you seeing a similar instance where the small business support grant is not working for businesses in Kitchener-Waterloo?

Mr. Art Sinclair: Absolutely, MPP Glover, and thank you very much for the question.

One thing we frequently hear is the issue with respect to businesses that just started in the last year, or somebody who has bought a business in the last 18 months. Again, this has been a problem, not just with the Ontario Small Business Support Grant, but it's been a problem with wage subsidy and rent subsidy at the federal level. There has

always been that difficulty working around people who have started a business or who have purchased a business from another vendor. That has been really a very difficult portfolio that I think all levels of government are having difficulty dealing with. That's one.

I would agree with you that there are a lot of people apparently who have—and we're hearing this from our members. They said they were told in February that, in fact, you will get the money, and they're still waiting.

Mr. Chris Glover: Yes. The gentleman I was speaking with yesterday is under incredible stress because he leveraged himself that much further under that promise, and now he actually got a notice last week saying he's not going to be eligible.

The other question I wanted to ask you about—the two-way, all-day passenger service to Kitchener-Waterloo is obviously a great thing for the community and particularly for its economic development. But there's one other issue around GO Transit. I'm a big believer in public services, both for residents but also as providing competitive advantages. There was an RFP that the government put out a couple of years ago for a private agency to run, operate and expand GO Transit, and part of that RFP was to phase out the government subsidy. If you get two-way, all-day passenger service to Kitchener-Waterloo, but the fares go up, will that diminish some of the competitive advantage of having GO Transit into Kitchener-Waterloo?

Mr. Art Sinclair: Thank you for that question, MPP Glover.

We're just hoping that in fact there's going to be some considerable revenue coming into Metrolinx and eventually [*inaudible*] to government. We feel there is some significant potential here. A heavy volume of riders over the next decade, once we get back to working away from home and remotely, and into offices—our primary objective has been to get the service operational. We've been pursuing this, really, for about 50 years, back when GO service started in the 1960s.

We received a couple of trains every morning in 2011, when our local MPP John Milloy, who was Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities at the time, did a lot of heavy lobbying. We got morning service and night service.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Mr. Art Sinclair: It has just really been an expansion of previous efforts. We've always advocated for two-way, all-day service, because I think as I mentioned, we have more people coming into Waterloo region every day from Toronto and along the corridor, from places like Brampton and Guelph, than we have people going in the direction of Toronto. Again, we've just been lobbying for that service, and I think that we'll be looking at the revenue options over time.

Mr. Chris Glover: I represent the area of downtown, and I'm the tech and innovation critic for the NDP, so I recognize the importance of this Toronto and Waterloo corridor for our tech services sector.

Mr. Art Sinclair: Thank you for your support.

Mr. Chris Glover: Certainly, the railway is going to be a big help to extending that sector. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): We'll now turn to the independent member for 4.5 minutes. MPP Schreiner, you may begin.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Merci, tout le monde. Thanks, everyone, for being here today.

I think I'll start my questions with Maytree, since, Garima, you haven't had a chance to answer one yet.

You were starting to talk about how some of the changes in this bill could lead to more invasive interactions with people on Ontario Works and service delivery providers. I find that a bit ironic—because one of the things I've always talked about is, when we think about reducing red tape, we need to think about reducing red tape for people on social assistance in being able to access services. I can't believe how many forms people have to fill out and how many different places people have to go to be able to access services and supports, and how undignified and demeaning that process can be for people.

I'm just wondering if you could finish your thoughts and address my question in relation to removing red tape for people on social assistance.

Ms. Garima Talwar Kapoor: I'd be happy to.

The changes proposed in the amendments to the Ontario Works Act replace wherever the act says "employment assistance" with "employment and life stabilization assistance." We agree that life stabilization is important for people who are so distant from the labour market—when your housing insecurity is just so important, before you can actually apply for a job; where people have to resolve many health issues, before they can actually apply for a job. That is important.

But the concern coming out from the sector and from people with lived experience of poverty is that right now, people have to show that they are looking for a job as part of their process or as part of their agreement in social assistance. So there is a fear that people will now have to be able to show that they are going to their prescribed mental health appointments, for example, as a prerequisite for receiving the financial supports in social assistance. I'm not saying that this is the government's intention. I don't believe that this is the government's intention, because it would be extremely invasive to do so. What I do think, though, is that the government has to outline what its intentions are within this regard.

1520

I'll note, MPP Schreiner, that this is the first time—and my concluding thought was going to be—that the Ontario Works legislation has been amended in 25 years. These changes are consequential, and people living in poverty have not been consulted when it comes to these legislative changes. So when you speak to how do we reduce some of the litany of rules and regulations in Ontario Works and ODSP, I think it starts with, first of all, asking the people who receive support, consulting with them—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Ms. Garima Talwar Kapoor: Not to take up too much of your time, but that's where I think it requires clarity on the government's intention, and convening and engaging lived experts of poverty.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: We're almost out of time, so I'm just going to stay here. In the limited amount of time we have, do you have some thoughts about how the bill could be amended to address some of those concerns, and outline it in a way that clarifies?

Ms. Garima Talwar Kapoor: Yes. The bill is open and a lot of these things come through regulation. I think the purpose of me being here today is not to suggest that you take out prescribed—in the legislation, it says prescribed "life stabilization" supports—but rather for the committee and for the government to say, "We are on notice now and we need to ensure that the regulations that come forward are absolutely clear on what this means and doesn't mean."

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. That's all the time we have for this round.

We'll now turn to the government. MPP Harris, you may begin.

Mr. Mike Harris: Again, thank you to all the presenters. I'm sorry, Art, but I'm focusing all my time on you. Good to see you.

MPP Glover, if you ever want to talk about technology or GO Transit or any of the great things that are happening in Waterloo region, I am more than happy to have that discussion with you.

I know that MPP Schreiner and I have had multiple discussions, as our constituencies almost abut each other. There's lots going on, obviously, with the new Highway 7, as was brought up here, and of course two-way, all-day GO is a big thing for both of our ridings and moving those almost 30,000 people who commute from Toronto and the GTA. Art, I know you'll back this up: 30,000 people a day into Waterloo region and some of the other stops along the Kitchener line. It's fantastic to see that commitment to GO Transit, and I know that's something that's been worked on for a long time, Art. I've certainly pushed very hard for it over the last little while. I know you know that. We've had a lot of different conversations. But I do also want to give a shout-out to the people over the years who have helped push that across the finish line.

But maybe let's bring it back to the bill a little bit, because I think there have been a lot of conversations that have been had that have been outside the scope of what we are trying to achieve here with red tape reduction. We know that the pandemic, obviously, has been tough on a lot of businesses. Certainly, it's changed the business landscape, not only in Waterloo region but across Ontario and, quite frankly, across the world.

With what we're trying to accomplish from a red tape reduction standpoint here, as a government, how do you think that this can help businesses get back on their feet? How do you think that—just the little things, sometimes. It's funny, because everyone often talks a lot about the big things that need to be done. But what do you think, in your estimation, are some more of the little things that can be done to help businesses get back on their feet, that we can achieve through a reduction in burdensome regulation?

Mr. Art Sinclair: Oh, gosh. Well, obviously, with respect to the small business support grant, I think the

intention was to—I think the Premier was quite clear when he made the initial announcement back in January that this would be an exercise in less bureaucracy and money going out the door. Again, as I mentioned before, there have been some problems, but I think they can be addressed. I guess that's the primary objective of my presentation here today: to make everyone on the committee and everyone on the government side of the House and across all sides of the House aware of the problems some businesses are having with securing support under the small business support grant. They had problems with the wage subsidy and the rent subsidy as well, so again, as I mentioned before, it has been universal.

I think the key thing that we have to consider is that businesses want to spend their time on hiring people, making profits, developing products, so any way that governments can assist the businesses in cutting that burden, streamlining that burden and allowing businesses to do what they do best, which is essentially creating jobs and opportunities—and revenue, in turn, for the government, through paying taxes—I think is the key consideration moving forward.

Again, I think, generally over the last three years—and I think I had this information in my notes, but I didn't get through much of them; I spent so much time talking about infrastructure. But I think that's a key consideration. I think that over the last three years, the government has put considerable effort into ensuring that businesses have that latitude and that ability to do what they do best.

One particular industry is the housing industry. It's difficult for us. We're in a two-tiered government situation, where we have the lower and upper tiers. There are always challenges and planning approvals. We're expanding the population here, which is, I think, a pretty important factor. We're now predicting we'll have close to a million people in 30 years, so that's a lot of housing that has to be built. I think this particular bill is starting and continuing with previous efforts in terms of cutting the process for development and approvals to ensure that we meet our local housing requirements. They are going to be very significant, because we had said before, 300,000 people literally over the next 30 years is the projection.

If you look at the housing market right now, there's a lot of people who want to move here, not into only Waterloo region but across southwestern Ontario. I think we have to consider that. Yes, it's difficult sometimes for employers to recruit in their communities because of the cost of housing, but then you also have to consider there are a lot of people across Canada and around the world who want to move here. We have challenges in terms of population growth requirements, so we're going to have to have the legislative and regulatory regime to ensure that we can meet those.

Mr. Mike Harris: I think that's a good point. When you look at the way that Waterloo region is structured, most of that development now is going to be occurring in what is my riding. On the east side of the Grand River, in Woolwich township and Breslau, that area is expanding out. I know that in the next 20 or so years, Woolwich is

looking at over doubling their population, which is fairly substantial for a township of just over 20,000 people.

Part of that is because of that increased GO service and looking at building a new GO train stop in that area and making it easier for people to commute. They don't need to necessarily live in, say, downtown Toronto anymore to be able to get to their job or see family or do things in a timely manner. And of course, the southwestern side of Kitchener, as well, is developing at a pretty fevered pitch.

But when you look at the home prices, they're really still kind of stagnant, because we haven't been able to increase the supply to that level that we all want to see, and I think then when we look at—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Mr. Mike Harris:—different regulations and pieces of red tape that stifle some of that, it's really important to move that out of the way and, like you said, let business do what they do best: That's create jobs, employ people, bring revenue into the region. Ultimately, I think from a red tape perspective—and I know for Minister Sarkaria, that's really what he wants to see from a lot of these things.

I think we'll end it there, Madam Chair. Again, thank you to all the presenters, and sorry, Art, for putting you on the spot.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. We'll now turn to the official opposition for 7.5 minutes. Who would like to begin? MPP Glover.

Mr. Chris Glover: I'll address my questions to Garima. You mentioned at the beginning of your talk basically what seems to amount to the downloading of responsibility for the social assistance programs to municipalities. Is that a fair assessment of what you think the intent of this bill is, and is it similar to the downloading of housing responsibility 25 years ago by a former Conservative government?

1530

Ms. Garima Talwar Kapoor: Thank you, MPP Glover, for your question. I'd say that there are concerns in the sector that this represents a downloading of responsibility to municipalities. From my own perspective, I don't think it's necessarily a downloading as of yet. I think what remains to be seen to if this is downloading or not is whether the province actually invests in the services that municipalities are going to be responsible for helping social assistance recipients and other people living in poverty access. This includes housing. This includes mental health supports. This includes child care services, amongst other areas. What we've learned from the past with the downloading of housing and social and affordable housing to municipalities is that when that happens, municipalities do not have the resources to be able to meet the demands that are placed upon them, and so—

Interjection.

Ms. Garima Talwar Kapoor: Sorry, go ahead.

Mr. Chris Glover: What I see every day in my riding in downtown Toronto is the result of that downloading of housing 25 years ago and then the complete abandonment by both the federal and provincial governments in providing both social and affordable housing. Now, virtually

every park in my riding in downtown Toronto and many of the streets are full of people living in tents. There is no affordable housing. Twenty-five years ago, the Conservative government reduced Ontario Works by 23%. It has never even kept up. That was at a point where you couldn't afford to rent a room and to eat on that, and the government basically admitted it at the time. Inflation has eaten away at that over the last 25 years, so it's even worse. People are living in absolute destitution.

Between Ontario Works and ODSB being below the living wage and the lack of affordable housing and social housing being built, the result is what's right outside in my riding right here: people who are homeless. And it's not just in downtown Toronto; across this province, so many people are living in destitution and suffering from homelessness. Would you be asking, then, for this government to take a greater role and responsibility in lifting people out of that kind of destitution and providing housing and social supports?

Ms. Garima Talwar Kapoor: Absolutely. Our own internal analysis shows that about 90% of Ontario Works recipients actually live in market rental housing—so not aligned with what conventional thinking might be on this, most social assistance recipients receiving Ontario Works are exposed to the wild increases in market rental housing we've seen over the past decade or so. Our own analysis also shows that between 2014 and 2018, the provincial government only spent 0.3% of its total budget expenditures on affordable housing programs, and that's absolutely ridiculous. And analysis—

Mr. Chris Glover: I'm really interested in this, and I want to you send me the documents with those numbers, so if you could send that to my office. But I want to give my colleagues a chance to ask some questions too. I want to thank all of the presenters for being here today.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Who would like to speak next?

Mr. Chris Glover: Peter?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I think Guy—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Bourgouin?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Merci, madame la Présidente. Écoute, ma question est pour l'Entité 4. Merci pour votre présentation. Je sais que quand ça vient aux soins de longue durée pour les francophones, on est très limité, on a beaucoup d'attentes, beaucoup de places—bien, beaucoup de communautés n'en ont pas. On a besoin d'un gouvernement qui va prendre une approche beaucoup plus agressive à nous donner plus de lits francophones à la grandeur de la province pour qu'on puisse desservir la population qui est une population, en plus, vieillissante. Moi, je viens d'une région, de Mushkegowuk—Baie James et de Kapuskasing, où on a 60 % de francophones, mais écoute, il y a beaucoup d'autres régions en province qui ont besoin d'être desservies pour les soins de longue durée, et plus de lits.

Lisa, si tu pouvais me parler plus encore—sept minutes, quand on fait des présentations, c'est très court. Je sais que vous l'aviez couvert, mais si je vous donne la parole pour être capable de dire encore plus sur les besoins de vos

régions quand ça vient—pour essayer de dire au comité, pour essayer de montrer au comité le besoin des francophones. Je pense que je vais vous donner l'opportunité de donner plus d'information, le plus possible.

M^{me} Lisa Gotell: Merci, monsieur Bourgouin. Alors, c'est partout dans la province qu'il y a une demande et qu'il y a une pénurie de lits en français. Avoir la désignation voudrait dire que les lits seraient garantis pour les francophones, mais ce n'est pas ça que le projet de loi annonce aujourd'hui avec les foyers municipaux.

La Présidente (M^{me} Goldie Ghamari): Une minute.

M^{me} Lisa Gotell: Alors, c'est pour cette raison-là que c'est très important d'avoir la possibilité de désigner les foyers de soins de longue durée pour les foyers qui font partie des municipalités.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Parce que, écoute, c'est sûr et certain que la désignation est la clé : tu as la désignation, tu as les services qui viennent avec. C'est une raison pourquoi vous demandez qu'il y ait plus de désignations francophones.

M^{me} Lisa Gotell: C'est ça. Puis, Bendale Acres, ça fait quelques années qu'ils sont identifiés, mais encore, aller à la désignation, ça va garantir les lits. Je trouve c'est très important d'avoir ça pour avoir la continuité des soins.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Bien, c'est sûr, parce qu'on a le droit aux mêmes services. On a le droit à l'équité, puis on a bien du monde qui ne sont pas capables de s'exprimer en anglais. Ça fait que, la désignation assure ces services-là. C'est pour ça que la communauté a tellement besoin de lits—

M^{me} Lisa Gotell: Oui.

M. Guy Bourgouin: —à la grandeur de la province.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Merci beaucoup. That's all the time that we have.

We'll now turn to the independent member. MPP Schreiner, you have 4.5 minutes.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you, Chair. I need to ask my neighbour a couple of questions, if you don't mind, Art. I'm 100% happy to work across party lines, whether it's MPP Harris or Fife or Lindo. All the MPPs in the region are really pushing hard for all-day, two-way GO.

I certainly agree with the four points you made about how we need to fix the Ontario Small Business Support Grant and have a third round of funding for the third wave, but I didn't catch your fifth point, because I think you were cut off just as you were making it, and I wanted to add that to my notes. Could you give us your fifth point that you were halfway through presenting?

Mr. Art Sinclair: Yes, my apologies. As I said earlier, I spent far more time discussing GO trains than the rest of my analysis on the bill.

At the Ontario Chamber of Commerce annual general meeting a couple of weeks ago, our chamber and the Cambridge Chamber of Commerce submitted a resolution that was essentially a recommendation that was drafted by the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters about a year ago, when we first started seeing COVID support programs at the provincial and federal levels. They proposed that the federal and provincial levels of government set up some type of a rapid arbitration process.

So, in terms of the businesses that are out there that have been waiting for some type of an answer from government in terms of whether they are eligible or not, or trying to get some type of an answer with respect to when their funding will be sent to them, we thought it might be appropriate for the government to consider some type of a rapid arbitration process, where it goes to some kind of a third party for resolution.

Now, again, I guess the consideration has to be made gauging the fact that it doesn't involve a heavy expense for the individual businesses, because a lot of them would not have the resources to pay legal fees, to fight some type of an elongated resolution process. But some type of, as we said, a rapid arbitration process that would allow a lot of businesses to get some type of a resolution with their funding applications. We and, I think, MPP's offices, as you get frequently—you hear from your constituents wanting some answers. Again, the process here would be to provide some type of an alternative to leaving phone calls with a lot of people to determine what the status of your application is or why you've been denied. I think for a lot of businesses, that's the key thing: They've been denied, and they want to know why, because it's not clear to them.

1540

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Great, Art. Thank you for clarifying that. Absolutely, that would save my office, and I'm sure a lot of other MPPs' offices, a heck of a lot of time, because over the last few months we've been trying to resolve that for a number of small businesses who have either been declined or are somewhere caught in the process. I appreciate you adding that.

Garima, I'm going to switch over to you, because you were in the middle of, I think, a really important comment about the need to expand housing support. I know there's so much research out there showing that—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: —access to stable housing is vital to life stability. Could you just maybe, in the last minute here, talk about what your organization has found, and how important housing is to life stability?

Ms. Garima Talwar Kapoor: Yes, absolutely. I think it goes without saying that you cannot find a job or have any type of health security without housing security. I was very interested in the conversation with Art about housing need in Waterloo, moving forward. I think that it's important to note that, according to the FAO's analysis, the number of households in core housing need is expected to grow from 617,000 households in 2011 to about 815,000 households in 2027. So that's a 200,000-household increase in the number of people who cannot afford rent and cannot afford the cost of housing, whether it's rent or—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. That's all the time we have.

We'll now turn to the government for 7.5 minutes. MPP Crawford, you may begin.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the three presenters. I'll start off questions for Art from the chamber

of commerce. As you know—and I think we're all familiar with the fact that Ontario has had the most regulations of any jurisdiction in North America in terms of over-regulation: 380,000 regulations. BC, which is a much smaller province, has 190,000. It has been one of our top priorities as a government to reduce some of these burdensome regulations—obviously, not ones that impede health and safety, but ones that are impeding business and just, quite frankly, causing headaches.

I know we've brought along some cost savings of about \$340 million to businesses, universities, colleges, not-for-profits, municipalities. I'm wondering, your members, because you're a membership of businesses: How have they been affected by these changes, and are there any other low-hanging-fruit recommendations that you would make so we can get this province to really get back to being the economic engine after COVID?

Mr. Art Sinclair: That's a good question. I think, generally, on the environmental side, there are a lot of components and projects and standards. There's a different focus on risk—more so on the risk side this time. I know the Ontario Chamber of Commerce will probably be bringing this up in their presentation later this afternoon, but I think there have been some noticeable improvements in the environmental assessment process over the last couple of years.

I did want to add this in my opening remarks, but right now, the biggest threat to competitiveness in the province of Ontario is the situation with Enbridge line 5. We have a lot of members who are getting very, very concerned about this. My only point on this is that, again, at the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, we passed a resolution two weeks ago just telling the Ontario government to stay the course on this with the federal government, because we have a Union Gas office here—and I know MPP Bailey is here. This is a big issue down in Sarnia. It's a big issue in Chatham-Kent where the Enbridge office is. It's a big issue in Waterloo region, because we have a lot of people employed by Enbridge here. But that's a huge issue right down. There are a lot of nervous people here in south-western Ontario over the future of Enbridge line 5.

So again, whatever the Ontario government can do with the federal government to stay the course on this and make sure that the pipeline stays open, we support you. The Ontario business community very strongly supports all levels of government on this.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: We've obviously been talking to the federal government to coordinate with Michigan and the States on that, and I agree with you on that.

In terms of harmonizing regulations with other provinces, I just wondered if you have ideas or what your thoughts are just in terms of harmonizing regulations with other provinces, because right now it's often burdensome for companies that operate in different jurisdictions in Canada because of a different patchwork of regulations. I just wonder if you could bring a perspective to that from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Art Sinclair: Yes, there are a lot of areas. Particularly, I know, a lot of it gets into the area of

interprovincial trade and the barriers that are set up across the country with regulations in other provinces. I think probably the federal government has a strong coordinating role to play in there.

I know we frequently hear from a lot of people—of course, we're the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce, but we have a lot of members outside the cities, in the four rural townships, in the agriculture and food industry, and they often complain about the situation with duplication at the federal and provincial levels of government with respect to food safety, product quality and a lot of those areas.

So again, there are variances across the provinces, but there's also variance between the federal and provincial government, I think, that has to be addressed. And I think it's a very strong role that the federal government has to play there, ensuring that we can move goods across provincial boundaries and ensuring that, in fact, businesses are profitable and they can move those goods without those barriers and add them to the bottom line. Ultimately, it will come back in revenues, tax revenues and other revenues to the provincial government here in the province of Ontario, if we can move those goods cross-country.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: And through the COVID pandemic, I'm just curious: Has your membership in your chamber grown, decreased? I'm not sure if there's a fee associated with it. I'm just wondering what has been the effect on your business members.

Mr. Art Sinclair: We've been pretty steady. We've gained members and we've lost a few, but that's normal across the chamber world. In the chamber world, you have businesses that cease operations or they merge or they get bought out, but yes, we've had a membership rate that's very steady over the last year. We have a lot of people who are still getting up. We have a lot of manufacturers that are in supply chains. We have a lot of food processors. They're doing the same thing today that they were two years ago, and they haven't skipped anything. So yes, we've had a pretty solid economy that has been able to get through the pandemic pretty well, and we expect to be in a pretty good position coming out.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay. Well, that's good to know, that you've had a fairly stable membership. We know some businesses have been terribly affected by the pandemic; others haven't been. But overall, that's good to hear, so that we can have that strong recovery when we get out of this.

How much time do I have left, Chair?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute and 30.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay. I don't have a lot of time, but I guess my next question will go to Lisa. I just want to touch on long-term-care homes. We all know the issue, the importance of long-term-care homes. There has been a major shortage for not just years, but even decades. It's been a problem. We've committed as a government to certainly expand long-term-care homes, including seven which will be benefiting Ontario's francophone and bilingual communities, some new beds, as well as some upgrading of some facilities.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I'm just wondering if you could shed light—I know you did mention that the francophone community does tend to be older, but what's your projection on the demands for francophone-specific long-term needs not just over the next five or the immediate years, but over the mid-term—say, 10, 15, 20 years—as well?

Ms. Lisa Gotell: I see it growing quite a bit larger, to be honest. There's a high number of newcomers who are coming to Ontario, and they'll be the ones who will be needing those beds, on top of those who have lived here all their lives. So I see that demand increasing quite a bit.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay. So you're, I guess, suggesting that perhaps a lot of the immigrants who are coming here maybe are French-speaking, but the native French population might not be growing as much?

Ms. Lisa Gotell: There is still a strong Franco-Ontarian population, but there are several newcomers coming from African and Caribbean countries whose mother tongue is not—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much. That's all the time that we have. I'd like to thank all of our presenters for joining us this afternoon.

ASSOCIATION DES PROFESSEURES
ET DES PROFESSEURS
DE L'UNIVERSITÉ DE HEARST
ONTARIO FEDERATION
OF AGRICULTURE
AVALON ADVANCED MATERIALS

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): We'll now turn to our next group of presenters, starting with l'Association des professeures et des professeurs de l'Université de Hearst. S'il vous plaît, give your names for the record, and then you may begin. Vous avez sept minutes. Merci beaucoup.

M^{me} Diane Macameau-Plourde: Bonjour à vous tous. Je suis ici—Diane Macameau-Plourde—avec ma collègue Mélanie Girard. Bonjour, chers membres du Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales. Merci de donner l'occasion à l'Association des professeures et des professeurs de l'Université de Hearst de vous parler aujourd'hui.

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Ma collègue et moi sommes ici aujourd'hui pour exprimer la position de notre association relative au contenu de l'annexe 28 du projet de loi 276, la Loi de 2021 sur l'Université de Hearst, dont le but est d'octroyer une charte à notre institution. Avant même de nous prononcer sur le projet de loi dont il est question aujourd'hui, nous tenons à exprimer notre enthousiasme à l'idée que le gouvernement ontarien songe à attribuer une charte à notre institution. L'indépendance dans la prise de décisions permettrait à notre université de mieux desservir sa clientèle, tout en poursuivant sa mission.

Ceci étant dit, notre association a des préoccupations importantes à partager avec vous concernant le projet de

loi 276. En effet, tel qu'il est écrit, il remet en question l'indépendance de l'institution, puisque plusieurs clauses renvoient à la réglementation. Conséquemment, il y a trois aspects fondamentaux qui méritent d'être mieux précisés dans le projet de loi de charte : premièrement, la reconnaissance du français comme langue officielle de l'université; deuxièmement, la composition et les pouvoirs du conseil des gouverneurs et du sénat; et troisièmement, les droits des successeurs pour notre association.

Il est important de noter que l'Université de Hearst existe depuis 1953 et que l'institution est francophone [inaudible] admission dans l'institution. À ce jour, on met encore en évidence la francophonie. Le projet de loi de charte, pour sa part, ne précise rien quant à la langue officielle de l'institution. La Loi de 2017 sur l'UOF, pour sa part, reconnaît le caractère francophone de l'institution. En effet, il est mis en évidence, notamment au paragraphe 3, qui est la « mission particulière » de l'UOF, et au paragraphe 5, « langue officielle ». Nous souhaitons donc que la Loi de 2021 sur l'Université de Hearst soit amendée pour tenir compte de la francophonie de l'institution.

Merci, Mélanie, à ton tour.

Ms. Mélanie Girard: Merci, Diane.

As my colleague has underlined, the francophone mission is central to the Université de Hearst and vital to ensuring its autonomy and self-governance. This autonomy and self-governance are ensured through the governing powers of the institution, namely, the senate and the board of governors. However, schedule 28 of Bill 276, as it stands, does not ensure protection of the composition of the senate of the Université de Hearst, but rather submits it to regulations.

As the supreme academic body of any university, the senate's main function is to regulate and superintend the development of programs and teaching within the university, all the while promoting research. In order to do this, the senate must be composed of persons who possess significant knowledge of the communities they are serving, because programs need to be aligned with demographics in order to respond to the changing needs of the workforce. This knowledge is a result of deep, infra-structural analysis which is conducted precisely by institutions such as the Université de Hearst, and self-governance is a prerequisite of the very ability to conduct such research.

In the same way, the composition of the board of governors under the Université de Hearst Act, 2021, is subject to regulations. The board of governors' primary responsibilities are to contribute to and approve the university's mission and strategic vision, and to ensure its senior management structure and financial solvency. In order to achieve this and to ensure overall accountability for the performance of the university, the board must be made up of individuals who have deep-rooted knowledge of, and ties to, the communities which they serve through their roles as members of the board of governors. As it stands, Bill 276 provides no such assurance.

It must be stated that a founding principle of Western universities is that of collegiality. As they have been

formed and are presently constituted within the Université de Hearst, both the senate and the board of governors abide by that principle, which is now potentially threatened by the proposed structure of Bill 276.

I'm now on slide number 6, if we're looking at that, section 2(d) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms: "Freedom of association is intended ... to protect the individual from state-enforced isolation in the pursuit of their ends," as recognized by *Mounted Police Association of Ontario v. Canada*, at paragraph 54, and to protect "the collective action of individuals in pursuit of their common goals," as stated in *Lavigne v. Ontario Public Service Employees Union*, at 253.

Settlement through regulations threatens this very freedom. As it stands, the proposed charter contained within Bill 276 does not specify that the new entity, the Université de Hearst, will be bound by the same contracts and commitments as the collège de Hearst, hence possibly jeopardizing the Association des professeurs et professeures de l'Université de Hearst in their ability to negotiate effectively and within reasonable certainties.

I'm now on slide 8. Given these circumstances, we ask that Bill 276 be amended in order to preserve the French-language mission of Université de Hearst, the collegiality of the governing bodies within the institution and the acquired rights of the APUH to recognition of successor rights, thus ensuring that the new entity, Université de Hearst—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Ms. Mélanie Girard: Thank you—be bound by the same contracts and commitments as the collège de Hearst.

We respectfully thank you for your time today, and we'll be happy to answer any questions that you may have. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much. We now turn to the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. Please state your names for the record, and then you may begin. You will have seven minutes. Thank you.

Ms. Peggy Brekveld: Hello. I'm Peggy Brekveld, president of Ontario Federation of Agriculture. I'm here with Heather Derks, one of our main researchers. On behalf of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, thank you for inviting us to speak today.

Today, OFA is only going to comment on schedule 24 of Bill 276 with respect to the automatic merging of titles and subdivisions. We are in favour of the proposed changes which would end the practice of automatic merging of titles where there has been a death of a joint tenant. The discovery that under the land registry system an automatic merger of titles has taken place on their lands has been a challenge for OFA members to navigate for a while. OFA recommends that the Ontario government change the land registry system so that the practice of automatic merging is discontinued.

We appreciate and applaud the government's commitment to red tape reduction. The changes proposed in Bill 276 that would end the automatic mergers of properties which result from the death of a joint tenant are a perfect example. We are in agreement with the end of this type of

merger, and we look forward to the time where there will be an end to other types of mergers as well.

This situation is real to OFA. One example would be a farm family making plans for more than one child to continue farming, and a second property is purchased next door to enable the second child to start on their own. We are aware of mergers that have occurred when the death of a parent causes the farm to transition into the name of the inheritor, and because that person owns adjoining property in his or her own name, the two farms became one. This type of automatic merger causes problems for our membership. Our member farms are businesses at the end of the day, and businesses need the surety of knowing that if they believe that they have two distinct real estate assets that they actually do. Business plans and succession plans are based on the expectation that properties will not unexpectedly merge into one.

Often, the automatic merger isn't known until the time when a sale is initiated, usually to their children, and the process to unmerge the properties can be time-consuming and costly. Worse, sometimes the merger isn't known until there's a death of a farm owner, and when automatic mergers are discovered at such a time, it negatively and adversely affects the succession plan, particularly if the plan had been for each child to inherit one property to start up a farming operation of their own. If at such a time an automatic merger is discovered, the succession plan falls by the wayside, greatly amplifying the barriers to starting up farming operations for the next generation. This type of merger can be heartbreaking for these families to navigate, particularly if it occurs at the time when the family is already suffering the loss of a loved one.

Should the practice of some types of automatic merging continue under the land registry system, OFA wonders if automatic advance notification would be given to the landowner to provide opportunity for them to act to prevent this transaction. Failing that, could a clear process to cancel the merger be provided to the local planning authority for cases where a farm property owner has not requested and does not support the automatic merger?

With respect to the changes proposed around subdivision control, OFA is not in favour of Planning Act amendments that would enable the further subdivision of lots beyond what is already permitted. Maintaining large, continuous tracts of agricultural land for agricultural purposes must continue to be a core provincial priority. OFA does not support scattered or strip development within prime agricultural areas because this form of development limits the ability of new and existing agricultural operations and fails to contribute financially to municipalities.

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The provincial policy statement provides for limited lot creation in prime agricultural areas. OFA supports lot creation only under those limited circumstances. In supporting the severance of a residence surplus to a farming operation, we acknowledge that the outcome is a non-farm residential use within prime agricultural areas and its impact on surrounding operations. Nevertheless, we also

understand that it is advantageous for farmers to be able to sever and sell a surplus farm dwelling sometimes.

We believe that care needs to be taken to ensure that these proposed changes do not have unintended lot-creation consequences that are inconsistent with provincial land use policy direction and the protection of agricultural lands. We continue to support compliance with official plans and zonings.

OFA would like to express our appreciation for the proposed changes which would end the practice of automatic mergers under the land registry system as a result of the death of a joint tenant. We thank you for introducing this bill, which will resolve these types of mergers, which have impacted some of our members.

OFA is willing to work with the government to help develop strategies by which economic—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Ms. Peggy Brekveld: —and farmland can be protected.

As an organization that represents 38,000 farm families, \$47 billion in GDP and over 200 different food products, we see the value of land use policies that can make sense for long-term food production in Ontario. We believe in farms and food forever, and our comments reflect that.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment today. As always, if there is interest in discussing these matters further, please do not hesitate to reach out. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much.

We'll now turn to our third presenter, from Avalon Advanced Materials. Please state your name for the record, and then you may begin. You will have seven minutes.

Mr. Don Bubar: I'm Don Bubar. I'm here today to talk about critical mineral supply chains, a subject that's getting a lot of attention in government these days, as to what needs to be done to help create these supply chains now needed in clean technology here in Ontario.

I would see the changes in section 14 in this new omnibus bill as maybe being a good start, but there's much more that needs to be done if we're going to enable establishing these supply chains here in Ontario. That's because it's not just about mining; it also should really be thought of as more of an advanced manufacturing business, and these are the critical materials that are needed in clean technology. We're talking about electric vehicles and battery materials, of course. While producing the critical minerals like lithium does involve taking some rock out of the ground, after that it's really about—it's a manufacturing business, in terms of how you turn that into the derivative materials that can then be used in these new clean technologies, such as lithium-ion battery cathodes. So you really need to think of it as different in terms of meeting the needs of the industry to produce manufactured products from the resources that we have in the ground. So I see this as a good start.

I think Mike Schreiner is one of the people in the audience here today. You may recall, Mr. Schreiner, that we

spoke about a year ago on this subject, and I actually recommended that we look at creating new legislation—maybe a new act entitled “critical minerals for clean technology”—because they really should be regulated, because they’re so different in terms of the steps you need to take to get these supply chains started here in the province. I still think that’s something that we should think about, because we’re seeing precedents for this in other jurisdictions, notably in both Australia and in the US. They have created new regulatory systems to help, specifically, in the establishment of these new critical mineral supply chains. So there are positive precedents out there on what can be done.

One other initiative I heard about recently here in Ontario is this new Invest Ontario agency. That also sounds like a good initiative to attract international investors. I think this, coupled with updating the regulatory system for critical minerals and materials, would send a powerful, positive signal to the capital markets internationally that Ontario is indeed open for business and wants to get these supply chains started quickly.

Finally, I would like to also talk a little bit about some specific opportunities here related to critical minerals, and that is to remind people that they can be produced in very low-impact ways, in terms of the environmental impacts that are typically associated with mining of traditional commodities. For one thing, many of them can be produced at a much smaller scale, because they’re not as big of a market as you have for iron ore or copper.

Another opportunity that Avalon has been looking at lately that I think is huge in terms of potential environmental benefits, in addition to the use of these critical minerals, is the opportunity to recover many of them from historic mine waste, where these mines were developed decades ago for one traditional commodity, but the ore may have contained a whole lot of other elements that they had no markets for then, but they do today. So now there are opportunities to go back to closed mine sites and extract these materials from the waste and clean up the site while you do it, in terms of the long-term environmental liabilities. There are huge opportunities here in many parts of the province to do exactly that. We’re trying to do one right now in northern Ontario where there are incredible concentrations of rare earths in the waste from a closed phosphate mine site and other elements like scandium and zirconium that are needed in other new technologies now. This is something that’s being looked at more and more by companies around the world. There are actually examples in other jurisdictions; people are doing exactly this. One major company that has an operation here in Canada, Rio Tinto, have now established what they call full-value mining and are recovering some of these obscure elements from the waste streams from existing operations.

So there’s a huge opportunity for northern Ontario here to create these supply chains and enable this whole new clean technology industry established here in southern Ontario to make electric vehicles and lithium ion batteries. Maybe I’ll leave it there.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much. At this point, we’ll turn to our first presenter from

the government. Who would like to begin from the government? First round of questions? MPP Piccini, you may begin.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you to all of the presenters for presenting today.

My first question is just going to go to OFA, to Peggy. Thank you. I’ve got proud rural roots and a proud agriculture community, and I actually have the benefit of three distinct areas: Durham, with our Clarington ag advisory board; Peterborough, of course—a great group in Peterborough; and also Northumberland, which is the bulk of the riding that I have the opportunity to represent.

I know you spoke about severances, but I’m just going to first start with broadband, and an important piece for broadband, obviously, is a historic announcement in terms of funding from the provincial government; the largest in Canadian history. My question is twofold: (1) Speak a bit about the significance of that piece; and (2) I’m just wondering if you can elaborate a bit more on what the ag community might want to see to that. Then I’m going to pivot a bit more on what you said today.

Ms. Peggy Brekvelde: Thank you for the comments and questions. We certainly, as OFA, are big supporters of investment in rural Ontario and rural Ontario infrastructure. That includes things such as broadband, natural gas, and roads and bridges. The broadband investment that was announced is exciting to us. We continue seeing projects being done with organizations such as SWIFT, and we’re proud of that investment.

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Today’s conversation on basically land use planning and merged titles is also part of looking at the future of agricultural businesses in Ontario and talking about how we look forward and ensure that farms are viable. Part of that answer is the broadband that you’ve just talked about and mentioned, and part of it is about ensuring that we can help our young farmers’ succession plans etc. with their parents.

Mr. David Piccini: Now, just on the succession planning piece, I know the OFA has been very clear—I mean, we want to preserve our prime ag land, but probably one of the number one issues I hear from residents in my community is with respect to—they hear a lot about affordable living, and the discourse predominantly in Ontario takes a really urban focus. At least they—and I’m just channelling what I’ve heard from them to you today—view it as an equity piece, saying, “Dave, we often hear about urban Ontario, but we never hear people talking about equality, equity for folks in rural Ontario, specifically the ability for me in terms of succession planning for my son or daughter, or the ability to sever off a portion that I haven’t farmed.”

I know, when we’re looking at mapping, I always lean on bringing planning folks out on site. The best planners are the people who really till the land every day and who know that land like the back of their hand. So speak to me a bit more about what this legislation does, and what more you might like to see with respect to that specific piece and the ability of farmers to potentially sever that portion. Obviously I know, in terms of succession planning, its

importance, but do you see it expanding beyond that, or is it just sticking to the family and family only?

Ms. Peggy Brekveld: I didn't inherit the farm that I'm on, so I can say that there's importance that people who are not succession planning also have opportunities to purchase farms etc. There are programs and different ways we could do that, and we could have that discussion another day.

But I will say that the importance of preserving farmland is critical to the industry. There is only 5% of land across the province that is actually arable land that you can farm, and so if you want to see farming done in this province, if you want to see the economic benefits, the employment benefits and certainly the environmental benefits of agriculture and what it does in this province, then we have to preserve farmland, and part of that story is ensuring that farm units and farms are mostly in tracts.

It's also about urban planning and ensuring that cities look at building in and up, truly capitalizing on the infrastructure they have invested in: sewers, water systems etc. That bigger picture is what I expect from a provincial government, and I like to think that today's talk is about that.

Mr. David Piccini: Definitely. I know sometimes a debate we have in rural Ontario is about getting our municipal friends and levels of government to think that way. I think of all the secondary units in heritage towns, in the communities I represent, sitting empty and idle. Instead, we look to people moving out from the city and into farmland, and then complaining about why it smells like manure etc. So definitely, I take your point on that.

Part of the legislation, I know, as well, harmonizes regulations with other provinces. Can you talk about how standardizing, harmonizing regulation is important for the OFA?

Ms. Peggy Brekveld: Specifically to other provinces, as far as the land use file goes, no, I'm not an expert in that. But I will say that the importance of ensuring that we have a provincial vision, ensuring that the provincial policy statement is strong, ensuring that we look with a bigger picture than just individual municipalities I think is critical, and I think it's your role as a government to ensure that.

Mr. David Piccini: Anything else you want to add, Peggy?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Mr. David Piccini: You've just got a minute.

Ms. Peggy Brekveld: I see ways that there has been investment in rural Ontario. I see ways we can continue to do that. I hope this conversation continues after this, and we're looking forward to putting our submission in on this file. Thank you for the opportunity.

Mr. David Piccini: And thank you for the work you do, in closing. I've got other questions for other presenters, but thank you for the work that you do. You've been a really strong voice in our community. Members that feed in to you, I know, and the work you do are friends, they're neighbours, and they quite literally feed our cities and get up every day working hard in our community. I know, be

it natural gas, be it broadband, be it the importance of that land for proper environmental stewardship, you do it all. So thank you again for being such a strong voice for the agriculture community.

Ms. Peggy Brekveld: Thanks.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much. We'll now turn to the official opposition for 7.5 minutes. MPP Bourgouin.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Thank you to all presenters. I just want to say congratulations to Peggy, the newly elected president. We used to talk face to face—I guess we will be eventually back talking face to face. I can't wait until that happens.

Mais mes questions vont être plus dirigées vers l'APUH. J'ai entendu votre présentation. Je vous remercie. C'est tout le temps plaisant aussi de voir du monde de ma circonscription venir présenter. Bienvenue, mesdames.

Ma question surtout c'est : dans votre proposition, vous dites que, tel que le projet de loi est proposé—puis on est les premiers à reconnaître qu'on est content que le gouvernement va donner l'indépendance à l'Université de Hearst. Il faut le reconnaître, définitivement. Mais dans vos propos, vous dites qu'il y a des changements fondamentaux sans droit de regard, alors que l'objectif d'obtenir la charte est d'être indépendant dans la prise de décisions.

Puis vous dites qu'il y a trois choses fondamentales qui méritent d'être mieux précisées dans la Loi de 2021 sur l'Université de Hearst. Vous les avez mentionnées, mais je sais que cinq minutes, c'est court pour être capable de donner beaucoup plus d'information. Vous l'avez fait, en partie en anglais. Je vous donne l'opportunité de nous expliquer encore plus pour que le comité comprenne l'importance de ces trois amendements que vous demandez—puis peut-être que durant votre présentation, je vais vous arrêter ou vous poser d'autres questions, mais j'aimerais vous entendre, Mélanie ou Diane, élaborer sur ces trois points-là. Je pense que c'est important qu'on vous entende.

D^{re} Mélanie Girard: Je vais y aller. Merci beaucoup pour la question. Merci encore de nous recevoir ici aujourd'hui. Alors, le premier des trois points, la mission francophone de l'Université de Hearst : il faut savoir que l'Université de Hearst existe depuis 1953, que c'est une institution unilingue francophone installée dans sa région qui a vécu de longues séries de lutte. En fait, l'histoire de l'Université de Hearst est littéralement une histoire de survie. L'Université de Hearst dessert une population du nord-est de l'Ontario faite de 20 % de francophones, donc qui est quand même proportionnellement très importante. Elle a subi de nombreuses réformes, dont la dernière en 2014 visant à rester toujours en lien avec sa communauté de façon à la desservir du mieux possible. L'Université de Hearst est donc une unité centrale pour la francophonie dans le nord-est de l'Ontario.

L'université a maintenant trois programmes : psychologie, administration des affaires et interdisciplinarité, ce qui veut dire que l'Université de Hearst forme des personnes qui répondent à un besoin vital

de services de santé mentale dans le nord-est de l'Ontario, qu'elle forme des jeunes entrepreneurs à travers son programme d'administration des affaires, et qu'elle forme aussi des enseignants dans nos écoles élémentaires et secondaires, notamment à travers son programme interdisciplinaire.

Le fait que la mission francophone ne soit pas précisée est inquiétant pour une population minoritaire. Je pense qu'on peut assez facilement le comprendre. C'est vital à la survie de la francophonie dans le Nord-Est dans notre sens.

Le deuxième point, c'est la préservation des instances de gouvernance, telles qu'elles ont été construites et conçues à travers le temps. Le principe de la collégialité est fondamental aux universités et c'est ce qui assure que, par exemple, au sénat académique, où toutes les décisions sont prises relativement aux programmes de l'institution, il y a une représentation des professeurs qui sont des gens qui oeuvrent dans la communauté, qui connaissent l'institution et qui connaissent ses besoins. C'est la même chose pour le conseil des gouverneurs, qui est appelé à prendre des décisions financières fondamentales, ce qui nécessite que les personnes qui siègent à ces instances soient impliquées dans la région connaissent la région et ne viennent pas strictement de l'extérieur.

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De la même façon, l'APUH à l'Université de Hearst a une histoire et a des droits qui ont été acquis à travers le temps, des droits qui nous semblent importants de préserver. Tel que présenté, il n'y a rien qui assure, justement, que les droits de succession soient préservés. Alors, c'est la raison pour laquelle, en même temps qu'on se réjouit fondamentalement de l'indépendance que va nous procurer une charte, on s'inquiète du fait que cette même indépendance, justement, ne soit pas assurée telle que la charte est présentée aujourd'hui.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Diane, voudrais-tu rajouter quelque chose?

M^{me} Diane Macameau-Plourde: Juste quelque chose à mentionner pour préciser : le projet de loi tel qu'il est écrit présentement renvoie à la réglementation la composition du sénat et du conseil des gouverneurs aussi, donc il n'y a rien qui assure que, par exemple, au sénat, les profs vont avoir la majorité des voix, comme c'est le cas présentement. Et même chose pour la composition du conseil des gouverneurs : tout ce qui a été écrit dans le projet de loi c'est que ça renvoie à la réglementation, donc on ne sait pas de quelle façon le conseil des gouverneurs pourrait être formé, puis l'APUH, elle, a un siège au conseil des gouverneurs aussi. Donc, la façon dont c'est écrit, il n'y a aucune certitude que l'APUH pourrait avoir un droit de regard dans la prise des décisions au conseil des gouverneurs, par exemple.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Si je comprends bien, ces trois inquiétudes-là sont parce qu'il est assez vague quand ça vient à l'université, le projet de loi. Il fait juste dire : « OK, ils vont avoir leur indépendance, » puis ça s'arrête là. Merci beaucoup. On en est content. On est le premier à reconnaître que ça fait 20 ans que l'université se bat pour avoir son indépendance, mais il y a beaucoup plus attaché

à ça. Donc, vos craintes sont que ces trois points-là n'en font pas partie puis que ça peut chambarder—quand je parle de « chambarder », c'est l'APUH. Ça veut dire que votre association ne peut pas être reconnue. La nouvelle université va dire : « Excusez-nous. On ne vous reconnaît plus comme étant l'association qui représente ces »—ça veut dire que techniquement les professeurs seraient dus à se reformer une nouvelle association.

La Présidente (M^{me} Goldie Ghamari): Une minute.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Si je comprends bien, c'est un des points qui viendraient en litige. C'est une de vos « concerns », ça?

M^{me} Diane Macameau-Plourde: Oui, c'est tout à fait une préoccupation. Puis si je pense au premier point, la mission francophone, nous, on donne des cours en français; notre personnel peut avoir les services administratifs en français; les étudiants viennent chez nous et parlent en français. On ne veut pas que ça devienne une université où, par exemple, les services administratifs pourraient être en anglais. Donc, c'est une des préoccupations du projet de loi actuel.

Mélanie, tu veux ajouter quelque chose?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Vas-y, Mélanie.

D^{re} Mélanie Girard: Oui. Si je pouvais ajouter, il faut aussi savoir que ce qui est assez particulier à l'Université de Hearst c'est que les contrats des membres, les contrats des profs, sont renouvelés chaque année. Présentement, si c'est soumis à la réglementation, il n'y a rien qui assure, par exemple, la reconduction de nos professeurs, ce qui est quand même assez inquiétant.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Merci beaucoup. That's all the time that we have for this round.

We'll now turn to the independent member for 4.5 minutes. MPP Schreiner, you may begin.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thanks to all three presenters.

Pardon mon français. Mon français n'est pas bon. My first question is going to be for Université de Hearst. I wanted to ask about the concern you have about having the senate and board of governance structure in regulation. Is that due to that it could potentially compromise the independence of the university? And I'm not saying this government, but future governments may make changes in the regulatory process that could potentially compromise the independence of the university. Am I understanding that correctly?

Ms. Mélanie Girard: Yes, absolutely, because as it is constituted now, there is representation of the professors and of our association. It is also mandatory that these people know the communities that are being served by the university, to the extent to which programs need to be changed, need to be amended, need to be reformatted in accordance with needs within the communities. It's mandatory for us that the people who sit on the board of governors know the institution, know the communities, be implicated, as well as the members of the senate, and that our association be represented within the senate, as is the case, and that our professors be represented as well, in the spirit of collegiality.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Great. Thank you for that. I'm assuming that you've submitted your proposed amendments to us in writing as well, that we can follow up?

Ms. Mélanie Girard: Yes.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Great. Okay. Perfect, thank you.

Ms. Mélanie Girard: Thank you.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'm going to switch over now to the OFA quickly. Peggy, congratulations on your election. I just want to say I've been incredibly impressed by the OFA's recent campaign around protecting farmland. We're losing farmland and have been for a long time now at an unsustainable rate. I'm curious what measures you would like to see those of us on government or parties of all stripes be advocating for to help protect farmland moving forward.

Ms. Peggy Brekveld: As OFA has advocated before, this is a conversation about long-term land use planning and thinking about how all the pieces have to fit: where we get aggregates, where we get our food and where people will live. Ensuring that we think long-term about those things, it will be a better situation for us. It will be a thought about: How do we protect that remaining 5% of our land base that's arable?

Part of the solution is certainly saying that agriculture lands have priority and need to be protected. As we look at where to put houses, we consider the importance of building in and up, ensuring that, as I said before, the infrastructure that we put into our cities and towns is well utilized, that our transportation systems actually work for the benefit of all citizens, or at least as many as we can access with public transit. And part of it is about [inaudible]—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Ms. Peggy Brekveld: And part of it is certainly about MZOs and ensuring that MZOs are not used on farmland, because farmland is a non-renewable resource. Once you turn it into concrete or houses, it doesn't go back.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: That's interesting—Don, I'm going to get to you in the next round. But it's interesting you talk about priority for agriculture, because we know aggregates have significant priority in most of our planning processes. Bumping agricultural up on the priority list would certainly make a lot of sense. I appreciate you bringing that to the table.

There's probably 20 seconds if you want to share any final thoughts.

Ms. Peggy Brekveld: Some 175 acres a day is lost. That's a lot of carrots and that's a lot of food that goes to both rural and urban people. You live in Ontario; I think you want to buy Ontario food.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. That's all the time we have for this round.

We'll now turn to the government for seven and a half minutes. MPP Piccini, you may begin.

Mr. David Piccini: My question is for Diane and Mélanie. I'm going to excuse that it's in English. My French is not quite good enough to go "en français" for everything here. But thank you both for your depositions today.

My question is—I'll just start by prefacing that I totally understand and echo the importance of governance by and for francophones, understanding the importance of local presence. I think the government has shown that the local appointees in my region, who understand the region, who are bringing forward good expertise, be it in the agriculture space, be it in policing—if that's an expertise at that specific school. I just want to make that clear, because I don't want us to run away too far in this session on assuming motive here. Rather, this is the government that will now go for two universities governed by and for francophones, whereas there were none before.

So just going forward on that, your recommendations: Can you speak a little more in terms of "competency based"? I really zeroed in on that piece: competency-based board, composition. What would you like to see? You mentioned, of course, local professors who understand—can you elaborate a little further on what you'd like to see there? I look forward to discussing that further.

Ms. Mélanie Girard: Yes, sure. Thank you. We are looking to ensure that members of the board—they will be part of government, for sure; we understand that, and we are totally in agreement with that. But we also want to make sure that we don't go over a certain percentage of local representatives, because boards of governors are usually made up of people who reside within the communities that we serve—"the communities" meaning Hearst, Kapuskasing and Timmins, very specifically, but much broader than that in northeastern Ontario. So it's important to us to have people on the board of governors who are local business owners, for example, who are maybe local representatives—people who know the community and who have lived within it and know of its needs.

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As far as the senate goes, that's the more academic part of it. Again, because such important decisions are being made in terms of programming, of closing some programs and maybe putting together new ones, it's important that we have people who are very in tune with the community, who know about the needs, who have access to research regarding the community, who have agency within the community as well and who can vouch for certain populations, perhaps, and for the need for certain programs. For example, we're putting together right now a joint program with the Cité collégiale d'Ottawa, where we have training for nurses—so a joint program to actually have very practical work experiences within our hospitals, because that's a need for the north. We need people who can advocate for specific needs of the workforce, and to us, that means that they need to be in tune with these communities, have knowledge of these communities.

Mr. David Piccini: I completely agree, and so assuming local governance, do you think that the move for the independent degree granting—do you think that's good, to give you that autonomy to be responsive for that local need? To members, just to show—in a non-partisan vein, Peggy Sattler, what she brought forward with Huron—responsive to local needs, certainly something we've seen from the opposition. I would agree, being responsive to

local needs—do you think that this autonomy the government has now given Hearst is a good move, with more autonomy—again, assuming, obviously, that that local flavour and that expertise is at the decision table? Is this a good move?

Ms. Mélanie Girard: As far as we're concerned, absolutely, because to us, autonomy is also the ability to develop. As francophones have been asking for for many, many years now, what we need in northeastern Ontario is a complete range of education, starting from elementary school all through university. But in order for the university to be able to develop, it needs a certain level of autonomy. It needs to be able to self-govern to make its own decisions based on what it deems to be the best for the institution at any given time. So yes, we do.

Maybe Diane wanted to add something to that; sorry.

Mr. David Piccini: Diane, go ahead.

Ms. Diane Macameau-Plourde: Yes, just to add something to what Mélanie said here—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Two minutes left.

Ms. Diane Macameau-Plourde:—having the independence to allow us to move a bit quicker as well—I remember when I joined university, we saw a need, and then going through the hoops of Laurentian University—well, that need was two years ago. We're working on something right now, a new program, and our program has been waiting for a year at Laurentian University. While we're ready to put that program into motion, we just have to wait until someone else approves it. Obviously, having our independence allows us to move a lot quicker and be more efficient, for sure.

Mr. David Piccini: I'm glad you mentioned that, because I think to when I first joined the ministry, and we saw program approvals taking years. We know that the economy moves quickly; the pandemic has highlighted that even more, to be responsive. So you think that this autonomy—and my point, I guess, pretty bluntly, then: This autonomy will give you the ability to be more responsive faster to local needs?

Ms. Diane Macameau-Plourde: Definitely.

Mr. David Piccini: Okay. Perfect. Well, that's good to hear. I appreciate the written submissions. I appreciate what you—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute.

Mr. David Piccini:—on that local autonomy piece.

Just maybe with the last minute we have, can you touch a little more on where you see that competency and that local advice coming from? Is it small business? Where do you see the needs of tomorrow? You mentioned nursing; obviously health care is key. Is there anything else you can elaborate on?

Ms. Diane Macameau-Plourde: It's hard to say, because we're not part of management and a lot of that research is made by management at the university. So we don't want to say something we shouldn't say right now. But for sure, in social services, there is a need in the community and we're developing a new program right now to address those needs. I think Mélanie wanted to add—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much. That concludes this round.

We'll now turn to the official opposition for 7.5 minutes. MPP Glover, you may begin.

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you very much, everybody, for being here. I have got a lot of questions and I'm not going to get through them all because I have to share my time with MPP Tabuns. So I would ask you to try to be brief in your responses, because I've got questions for each person.

The first one is to Diane and Mélanie about the Université de Hearst. I heard you talking about the importance of local autonomy, about having it at the Université de Hearst, and it makes a lot of sense to have it as an independent university, but I also heard you raising concerns about the independence of the institution, because the minister will be able to control the board of governors and the senate through regulation. Is that fair? Are you concerned about the independence of the institution in its governance?

Ms. Mélanie Girard: That's our main concern, actually, because it almost feels as though we're being given independence on the one hand, but on the other, not quite. So yes, definitely, that is our main concern. The charter would establish autonomy, but autonomy also comes with having representation within the governing bodies and local representation within the governing bodies.

Mr. Chris Glover: And so, would you say that having—and I don't know if I've ever seen another public university in Ontario with a similar control, where the minister actually controls the board of governors and the senate. If there is one and you can point it out to me, then I would appreciate that. But does this raise the prospect of political interference impeding academic freedom?

Ms. Mélanie Girard: Absolutely, it does. I would also like to underline that what we're asking for here is nothing—there's no surplus that we're asking for; we're asking strictly for preservation of what actually already exists: the fact that we are a francophone university, and that is actually our mission. We would like for the composition of the senate and the board of governors, in essence, to remain as it is, because representation is ensured in the way they are presently constituted. And in much the same regard, we ask that successor rights be recognized in order for our association to preserve the rights that we've acquired.

Mr. Chris Glover: Right. Thank you very much, and thank you both for being here.

I would like to ask a question of Peggy. Peggy, I absolutely—it makes sense that farm families should have control over the succession of their properties. I'm dating myself, but in the 1980s, I got to live on a farm outside of Binbrook and it was a very similar situation. The family had bought the farm across the street as part of their succession plan, so that makes a lot of sense.

Let's see. The other concern that you raised is about breaking up farms into individual lots. Would this undermine the protection of our farmland in areas like the greenbelt?

Ms. Peggy Brekveld: I'm actually going to ask Heather if she would like to talk to this a little bit.

Mr. Chris Glover: Sure.

Ms. Heather Derks: There we go. Hi. Thank you. I think we're concerned about further subdivision of ag lands across the province. When you have scattered or shifted development within any kind of ag system, you have unintended consequences such as traffic interfering with agricultural traffic, and there are a host of other issues that that causes, which—I know you're pressed for time—I don't need to go into.

Mr. Chris Glover: Actually, I would appreciate it if you have more information to share, please email it to my office, because we'll be working on amendments through the week for this bill. So thank you both very much for being here.

Now, Don, let's see. My question for you, Don, is: How do we promote the manufacturing of these minerals in Canada so that Canadians aren't just hewers of wood and drawers of water? I know I may be dating myself by saying that, but that was a common complaint years ago. What should we be doing to promote not just the extraction of these minerals but the actual processing of them in Canada and in Ontario?

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Mr. Don Bubar: Good question. Basically, it's an education process that needs to happen now, to help people understand where all those things that go into their smart phone that they're looking at all day long come from. Most people do not know what goes into manufacturing products like that now. Increasingly, it's a very diverse range of elements that most people have never heard of since their high school chemistry class and have no idea how they're used in new technology. I've been trying to encourage more education on this at the high school level, for sure, and more R&D at the university level. The opportunities are all about creating the demand, and demand is created when innovators innovate new products that use these obscure, non-traditional commodities in very creative ways. We can do that, and we're trying to inspire that, actually, at Lakehead University.

Mr. Chris Glover: I'm going to pass it over to MPP Tabuns because I know he has some questions and we've got limited time.

Thank you all for being here.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Tabuns, you have one minute and 50 seconds.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, I'll be quick.

Peggy, I don't have a question for you—everyone has asked the questions that I was going to ask—but I'm so happy to see you here. I'm very pleased that you're president of the OFA. This is wonderful. Congratulations.

Ms. Peggy Brekveld: Thank you.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question for you, Don, is about the size of the market we're talking about. We're looking at a new industrial revolution. What's the potential in Ontario for economic development from investing in these clean-tech technologies that can transform our energy systems and our transportation systems?

Mr. Don Bubar: Basically, it's a new growth industry, and it has unlimited potential. It will start at a modest scale—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute.

Mr. Don Bubar: —with a few manufacturers, and then I think it can grow over time into a much bigger segment of the overall economy of the province of Ontario. What excites me is, it can involve both economic development in the Far North, involving Indigenous business, and traditional communities in southern Ontario having the manufacturing capacity here.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Has anyone actually looked at the different economic sectors and what potential there is in the next decade for Ontario?

Mr. Don Bubar: That's starting to happen now. There hasn't been a whole lot of work done on that.

Obviously, the one that's being talked about now is electric vehicles and renewable energy and energy storage.

Aerospace is another one. We have an aerospace industry here and there's lots of scope for innovation there that could take advantage of the resources that we have here.

I like to point out that all those obscure elements—we have them in the ground.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): That's all the time that we have.

We'll now turn to the Green Party member for 4.5 minutes. MPP Schreiner, you may begin.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Don, it's good to see you again—I actually think it has been since pre-COVID-19, because I think we actually met in person, so it has been too long, but it has been quite a 14 months or so.

I just want to pick up on the previous line of questioning—the economic opportunities that exist in clean technologies and, particularly, electric vehicles and battery storage for renewables, and how that relates to the north.

What do you see as the biggest barriers to developing what I think could be a made-in-Ontario mining-to-manufacturing supply chain for these new products?

Mr. Don Bubar: These non-traditional commodities, as I said earlier, are very different than traditional commodities, yet they're regulated under the Mining Act, which is structured for traditional bulk exchange-traded commodities that effectively have unlimited demand, whereas most of these non-traditional commodities are just emerging with new demand. So you have to basically help create the demand, and to do that, you've got to start producing small quantities so that you can define the product for the end user, and then that tells you that you've got a customer that will buy the product at the end of the day. You don't know that until you actually start producing something at a small scale.

In the traditional mining industry, taking a bulk sample to do test work on it is the last step you do before you start a giant open pit. So they view that as having endless regulatory requirements and permitting requirements before you're allowed to take that sample, to do that test work. That's the big difference that I've been trying to

point out, and that's why they need to be regulated differently than traditional commodities.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: And would that different regulatory framework make it easier? You had mentioned the business opportunities for partnerships with First Nations, Indigenous communities. Would that different regulatory framework help facilitate that, as well?

Mr. Don Bubar: Yes, I sure hope so. That's why we're keen to establish a lithium battery materials refining facility in Thunder Bay, because there's no shortage of lithium mineral resources in northern Ontario. That could be developed at a small scale with very minimal environmental impacts, in the traditional territories of many northern First Nations, to create a supply for that refinery and help them establish new economic development opportunities in the north while establishing that supply chain.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: When you say "create demand," can you elaborate a bit on what you mean by that?

Mr. Don Bubar: Well, the issue is that we have not had end users here in Canada that use many of these things, so a lot of the demand is being created offshore. But it's time for us to start to recognize that because we've got the advantage of mineral resources of many of these obscure elements that are not easily found—to take advantage of that, and innovate—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Mr. Don Bubar: —and encourage more—

Mr. Mike Schreiner: So, Don, would you say demand for more electric vehicles, demand for batteries, demand for renewables and storage—you're thinking of people who would actually purchase the minerals being based in Ontario, creating demand in Ontario?

Mr. Don Bubar: Yes, and that's the model that China did, and why they're global leaders in producing most of these materials now. We should be doing that here.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: And would you say that this is likely going to be the dominant or one of the dominant sectors of our economy over the next two decades?

Mr. Don Bubar: It sure could. As I said before, I think it's a real growth opportunity in the economy here. There are lots of areas where it could create new economic development in the province. I just think we need to take advantage of the vast mineral resource wealth that we have in the north and the diversity of mineral commodities in the north. We have an element called cesium in one of our—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much. That concludes this round of questions. I'd like to thank all of our presenters at this point for joining us.

We don't have our next three presenters, as we are running a little early, so at this point we are going to take a quick recess. We're going to come back at 5 o'clock for the final round with our three witnesses. Thank you.

The committee recessed from 1648 to 1700.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Good afternoon, everyone. The Standing Committee on General Government will now come to order. We are here for public

hearings on Bill 276, An Act to enact and amend various Acts.

ONTARIO FOR ALL

ONTARIO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): At this point, we are going to call upon our final group of presenters. One of our presenters—there has been a cancellation, so he will be rescheduled for Wednesday morning, I believe.

At this point, I'd like to call upon Ontario for All. Please state your name for the record, and then you may begin. You will have seven minutes. Thank you.

Mr. Sean Meagher: Good afternoon, and thank you for including us in the discussion today. My name is Sean Meagher, and I'm the coordinator of Ontario for All, which is a project of the United Way that brings together non-profit organizations to add their expertise and their front-line experience to the development of public policy.

I've spoken with dozens of front-line organizations about Bill 276, and I have to say that there is widespread concern. The bill is very, very broad and appears to have been written fairly quickly and, as a result, generates a large number of unfortunate and no doubt unintended consequences. The bill, as it's currently written, can produce outcomes that reduce government accountability, increase intrusiveness of the government into the private lives of individuals and increase the dependency of vulnerable people. In particular, schedules 18, 21 and 27 have that effect. Those schedules should be removed from this omnibus bill and reassigned to stand-alone bills, where they can get adequate scrutiny and provide an opportunity for the government to clarify its intent and its approaches in ways that remove the unintended consequences that I'm going to describe.

Schedule 18 calls for the repeal of the provisions of the Ontario Drug Benefit Act that require the establishment of a pharmacy council and a citizens' council. Those sections in the current act are specifically identified as tools to ensure that people with technical expertise and the people directly affected have a role in helping to define what drugs are available under the act. This has the equivalent effect of cancelling the science advisory table of the ODB, something hopefully no one on the committee or in the government would ever support.

Schedule 27 calls for severe penalties for people who are seeking access to justice under our tribunal system: fines of up to \$25,000 for people trying to gather and disseminate data relating to those tribunals. The effect of the act includes circumstances where someone who accompanies a person with limited English or French to the Landlord and Tenant Board records the hearing and goes over it with them after the fact has committed an offence under the act. As I know ACTO has outlined in their submission, there are ample remedies to the concerns the government has about how people have acted in tribunals that do not need to add risks and penalties to the lives of already vulnerable people trying to seek out access to justice for challenges that they're facing in their lives.

Finally, and most significantly, schedule 21 brings a host of risks. Schedule 21 is designed to facilitate changes to the social assistance system and, unfortunately, produces a variety of unintended problems in the way that it does so. Section 3 of the schedule replaces the existing rules that say that OW recipients have to pursue employment programs with a clause that says that they must “participate in any prescribed employment and life stabilization assistance activities.” There is no limit placed on how far this prescription can go or how intrusive into the lives and health choices of the recipients it can be. This is not only unduly intrusive, but it’s clinically unsound. The most effective measures are always achieved by the consent of the people participating in them, and this act does not ensure that OW recipients have the power to make decisions about their own life-stabilization activities. Surely, this is not what it intended, but without amendment and without clarification, this is what the act says, and section 18(2) reinforces the right of the Lieutenant Governor to unlimited scope in this area.

Further, there are challenges with sections 8 and 18(1) of the act that make municipalities responsible for providing life-stabilization activities like housing and supports, as assigned, again, by the Lieutenant Governor. But those programs are already in short supply, with long waiting lists. Without clarity on how those needs are going to be met, municipalities will be forced to sign up for unachievable goals that carry considerable penalties for failing to meet them.

Bill 276 also allows the province to assign or reassign service delivery to a manager anywhere in the province, risking a service delivery model that is less locally appropriate and locally informed. Under the current wording, all of the clients in Peel or in Simcoe county, for example, could be reassigned to the city of Toronto for supports—surely, again, not an idea the government supports but something the act clearly allows.

Most distressing, actually, is what’s not in the act. There is no section in the act that addresses the main problem with OW and with life stabilization under it: the rates. People’s lives simply cannot be stabilized without increasing social assistance rates, which are currently frozen at \$733 a month for a single OW recipient. Clients cannot afford even the most basic needs such as food and shelter on that amount, much less life stabilization, because they are living more than 50% below the poverty line.

There is no place for addressing the coordination under the new social assistance reform plan, though under the new model, clients will access income supports from the province, life stabilization supports from the municipalities, and employment supports through a new provider that could be anyone, including a private corporation, as is now being piloted in Peel. The province has not set out a clear plan for integrating these three essential pillars, nor support for coordinating the partners who deliver them.

Last but not least, there is no plan for addressing the problem of online access. The government proposes a centralized intake with automated systems accessible online, with access to live intake only “where available,”

according to the ministry website. This may lead to significant barriers for clients and applicants.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Mr. Sean Meagher: Despite recent investments, many rural communities lack adequate broadband coverage, and in rural areas, 50% of low-income households lack adequate Internet access. Social assistance rates have never been adjusted to account for the need for digital access, and there is no digital access that is affordable on \$733 a month.

This is a distressingly long list of shortfalls which combine to make a bill that produces far too many unintended adverse consequences. We encourage the government to address them before it’s passed. Many aspects of the bill need clear indications from the government that the regulations will not allow for the most dire outcomes, and the sections of the bill that I have described here badly need to be removed and reassigned to stand-alone bills so that they can get adequate scrutiny and provide an opportunity for the government to clarify its intent and its approach in ways that remove these consequences. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much.

We’ll now turn to our next presenter, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. Please state your name for the record, and then you may begin. You have seven minutes.

Mr. Rocco Rossi: Rocco Rossi. I am CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, and I’m joined today by two of my amazing colleagues: Michelle Eaton, our VP of public affairs, and Claudia Dessanti, our senior manager of policy, both of whom are far more qualified than I to speak on this.

But I have the job today, and I would like to start by thanking members of all parties for all the work that they’ve been doing through the pandemic. This is, really, the most difficult policy development time I’ve certainly ever seen in my lifetime. The willingness of all parties to take their best shot at policy, but then be open to iterate as circumstances dictate and require, to be able to respond quickly and agilely, is one of the silver linings, if you will, in an otherwise very difficult time.

I salute the other presenter in pointing out areas for significant improvement. I’d like to actually point to areas where we see a lot of good in this bill that is important for business, and through the success of business, the success of the province.

Specifically, and not exhaustively but on a highlighted basis: The digital one-stop shop to help navigate Ontario’s development approvals and permitting process is really crucial. Housing affordability is a key concern for all residents of the province but also certainly a concern for businesses as it’s a key barrier to accessing and maintaining talent in a number of locations throughout the province. Streamlining the development and permitting process will help speed up supply and reduce the cost in building, and this is a necessary step in affordability.

Second, supporting Ontario’s auto tech industry through innovative pilot programs: The automated vehicle

pilot program is not only a benefit to the auto tech sector, but also to a wide range of end users, from the agricultural sector that adopts automated, autonomous farm vehicles, to consumers who will see reduced congestion and more choice in transportation.

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The combination of streamlining environmental permissions and allowing self-registration of businesses that conduct activities with little or no environmental impact, combined with strengthening enforcement penalties for polluters, is a really important part of this bill, from our perspective. The vast majority of businesses are in full compliance with environmental laws, and the duplication of many things is simply adding to costs, slowing things down unnecessarily. But at the same time, as with all citizens, as with all residents of Ontario, we really want to ensure that bad actors are penalized. So that's important, to combine those two.

Finally, reducing red tape on the mining sector—really crucial. This isn't about looking backwards to a country whose economy was based on natural resources, but really looking forwards, because as you look at the electrification, lower-GHG economy, the modern economy, mining is going to be a critical part of that, and Canada and Ontario can play a crucial role there. So I'm delighted we're lessening that burden to make us more competitive.

I'm sure more will come up during question period, but I want to take advantage of this opportunity to also underscore a more general point, and that is around transparency and clear communication being critical to ongoing public confidence during this time. We very much, on top of everything else, want to see evidence-based metrics for reopening. We want to see—not necessarily the same as what Premier Moe has done, but to give us greater clarity so that we can plan going forward.

As one of the 850,000 Ontarians and over two million Canadians who received their first dose of AstraZeneca, we'd very much like to see a decision on clearing that up sooner rather than later, or ensuring, before they expire, that they get into the arms of the billions of people around the world so desperate for vaccination. We fully appreciate the need to be nimble and agile, but clarity, transparency is going to be crucial to getting together and to getting through this successfully together.

Thank you very much.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you.

At this point, we'll now turn to our first round of questions, starting with MPP Schreiner. You may begin. You have 4.5 minutes.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thanks to both presenters for excellent presentations. Hopefully, I'll have time to ask both questions. I do want to start with you, Sean, from Ontario for All, and some of the comments you made, particularly regarding schedule 21.

One thing I have said, and I said it earlier today, is that we talk about reducing red tape, but people who are on social assistance probably experience more red tape than maybe anybody in our society, quite frankly. I think one of the concerns you raised about participation and life

stability is that it actually may increase the amount of red tape that people on social assistance face and require people to do things—or maybe a better way of putting it is, require intervention in people's lives that may not be appropriate. Can you elaborate a bit more on that and just maybe go into a little bit more detail about it and your concerns?

Mr. Sean Meagher: Certainly, yes. It is one of the contradictions of this bill that it is widely touted as the “red tape bill.” Mr. Rossi spoke about how much it's streamlining situations for his members, and I certainly appreciate that, but it is complicating the lives of the most vulnerable people in our province considerably.

Just to begin with, the fact that most people who previously interacted with one provider for the full range of their supports are now interacting with three separate providers managed by two different levels of government, and a third that's still in evolution, will make their lives more complicated. The fact that many of them, who don't have proper online access, don't have access to broadband, are trying to interact with their providers through a medium that they simply can't reach will make their lives less streamlined and more complicated.

As you pointed out, the provisions of the bill that provide for an absolute requirement for eligibility for income supports being the compliance with any prescribed life stabilization activities mean that they are facing some potentially very large challenges. We see already, under ODSP, some of the complexity involved in making sure that service providers fully understand the challenges and the scope of the challenges that people are facing, and the appropriateness of services they need. We have expanded that challenge, rather than contracting it, and exposed people to, at this point, under the legislation, an unlimited range of potential interventions that can be as unwelcome as the Lieutenant Governor decides they're going to be.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I would think one of the ironies is that those levels of intervention and the way it affects people's mental health, their feelings of self-worth and dignity, may actually destabilize their lives even more. Would you concur with that statement?

Mr. Sean Meagher: I would, certainly. But I think, more importantly—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Mr. Sean Meagher: —the clinical research is absolutely clear that part of what helps to stabilize people's lives is their gaining control of it. Imposing things that are unwelcome interventions into their lives in ways that they can't control—the clinical evidence is absolutely clear that it consistently causes disruption.

The best road forward is to enable people and support people in tackling the challenges that are most immediately present for them, and to move forward in that sequence, rather than saying, “Somebody far away at Queen's Park is going to decide what's good for you, and we'll let you know when that happens.”

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Would you say that supportive housing may be one of the most stabilizing ways that we can prepare people to access employment and stabilize their lives?

Mr. Sean Meagher: Across the board, again, the evidence is pretty clear that people who are housed, not surprisingly, do a better job of stabilizing their lives, do a better job of obtaining and maintaining employment. Certainly, the provision of—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. That's all the time we have for this round.

We'll now turn to the government for this round of questions. MPP Sandhu, you may begin.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: I would like to thank both of the presenters for their presentations.

My question is to the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

Our government has made burden reduction our top priority, and as a result, in the past two and a half years our government has saved \$340 million in net annual savings to businesses, not-for-profits, municipalities, universities and colleges, school boards and hospitals in regulatory compliance costs.

As the Chair of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, I have had the opportunity to hear from hundreds of stakeholders from across the sector.

Can you please tell us how important it is for the government to work on its burden reduction efforts in general, and especially during these challenging times for the business community?

Mr. Rocco Rossi: It's absolutely crucial. All of us know—it's no secret—that all levels of government are going to come out of this crisis with massive levels of debt that are going to be harder and harder to sustain. So what you can do to reduce costs, to enhance efficiency through regulation reduction has the double advantage of (a) not costing you money and (b) generating more activity in the economy that will generate more taxes to help bring down that burden. When we and our members look at the fact that Ontario has roughly 400,000 regulations and you compare that to a jurisdiction like British Columbia, which is not exactly Dickensian England, which has fewer than 200,000—yes, there are some scale issues, but clearly we're doing things that don't make sense. So we certainly support that.

We do think that it's crucial—it's not simply the number of regulations, but I think we can be more and more strategic. Sometimes reducing fewer actually will have a bigger impact, because they are going to move the dial. One area where I would certainly share common cause with Sean is in how can we rapidly extend broadband throughout province. Because if you're going to have a digital-first government, you have to first provide digital capacity to the citizens of this province, and that is something that we have common cause on.

1720

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you. The Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act is expected to save businesses time and cost. Can you tell me why addressing red tape and regulatory burdens is of particular importance to creating jobs and attracting more desired investments during these turbulent times?

Mr. Rocco Rossi: Well, look at the examples I gave. Whether on the environment, so long as we're ensuring

that we're going to call out and punish bad actors, or the mining regulations or in development, we are one of the slowest jurisdictions in North America. Time, literally, is money. By reducing red tape, you allow businesses to get to their goals faster. That's going to make it cheaper. That's going to make for more economic activity and more jobs rather than tying up cash and tying up capital that's both financial and HR in going through duplicative regulatory environments. So we think it's a crucial step, and there are lots of additional steps that can be taken.

I didn't even touch the whole issue of interprovincial trade barriers, where Ontario could play a much bigger leadership role nationally. As former governor of the Bank of Canada Stephen Poloz put it, if we were to eliminate interprovincial trade barriers, we would be giving every man, woman and child in Canada an additional \$2,000 a year equivalent in perpetuity. That's \$60 billion that would also help to generate an additional \$20 billion in tax revenue, without increasing tax rates.

Reduction of regulation is a key stimulus to economic activity, wealth generation and tax generation that is going to be particularly at a premium at a time when governments' fiscal manoeuvrability is going to be diminished because of the massive debts that we have coming out of this crisis.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you so much for that answer. My last question is: The objective of this bill is to streamline and harmonize regulations with other provinces while still maintaining health and safety standards. Why do you think standardizing and harmonizing regulations with other provinces and jurisdictions is so important, and how might this help in making lives better for people and efficiencies for businesses?

Mr. Rocco Rossi: Let me give you an example that hasn't been covered yet and that I hope the government does take action on. If you're an apprentice carpenter in Fort Frances or Atikokan and you spend some summers working construction in Winnipeg, the hours that you spend working construction in Winnipeg do not count towards your certificate of qualification, your move to journeyman, in Ontario—as if a two-by-four in Winnipeg is different from a two-by-four in Thunder Bay. It is nuts, and it is costing business and it is costing jobs. We have to go at it root and branch.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you so much. How much time do we have, Madam Chair?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: These are all the questions I have. I'm not sure if MPP Piccini wants to add anything. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): MPP Piccini?

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you very much; I'll be very quick.

You talked about broadband capacity, Rocco. Thank you to all the presenters. Sean, you spoke about broadband too, but my question is to Rocco. We often glaze over the historic investment the government has made. I think of at least eight ICON submissions that I have overseen in my own riding. Speak a bit more about that piece.

Mr. Rocco Rossi: Look, we're thrilled at those announcements, the announcements made by the federal government and the announcements made by the private sector. We've just got to see it happen, right? It's great to announce, but we've got to accelerate implementation because this isn't just about jobs. It's education: our kids, being asked to be educated online during the crisis, during the pandemic, and having kids even in the city of Toronto, in less fortunate neighbourhoods, going into parking lots at McDonald's to use WiFi—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. That concludes the time we have for this round.

We'll now turn to the official opposition for 7.5 minutes. MPP Glover, you may begin.

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank all of the presenters for being here today.

Rocco, I'll start with you and some questions about—we heard from the Kitchener-Waterloo chamber of commerce earlier today, from Art. He was saying, with the small business support grant, there are some changes that need to be made because there are too many businesses—and I hear this all the time from small businesses in my area: New businesses are not getting the grants. And then there is a number of other criteria.

They listed five different recommendations to the small business grants: expansion and eligibility; the timeliness of the response; freeze all audit requests; create a third round of funding; and a rapid arbitration process. Does the Ontario Chamber of Commerce echo those same recommendations?

Mr. Rocco Rossi: We absolutely do. Look, it's as my sainted grandmother used to say, "God answers all prayers; sometimes the answer is no."

We would love to see the program expanded. We were delighted that the second round came in and was made automatic. I think the government needs to be applauded for this, because it didn't require another round of filling out forms which, quite frankly, small and medium-sized businesses don't have the capacity to do. So that was very welcome.

But that was before this last lockdown announcement. This is extending longer than anyone anticipated, and a third round would be very helpful.

The fact that some of the eligibility requirements—and I agree with Art, as I always do; he's one of the smart policy people within our network. But one of the ways that the criteria and qualifications was expanded was by essentially adding the tourism sector. They call it a different name, but it's effectively that small business grant to, now, many more businesses, but even there—because clearly tourism, one of the hardest-hit right up front and probably the last to come out, is going to need extended support if we're going to see these businesses on the other side.

Mr. Chris Glover: Would a third round be adequate to fund the reopening of businesses? I know many of them are leveraged to the hilt now and a lot of them just don't have the money to buy stock in order to reopen. Would that third round be adequate, or is there something else that's needed for small businesses to reopen?

Mr. Rocco Rossi: Look, this isn't simply what is done at the provincial level; it's also at the federal level. We heard in the budget and we heard discussions around the tapering of rent subsidy and the wage subsidy programs. This simply can't happen before the economy truly starts to turn around. All levels of government are responsible and need to understand that the economy will not open like an on/off switch. It's going to be a dimmer switch, and so this is going to need to go longer.

You can taper in terms of the amount but, quite frankly, that support is going to be crucial. Some people say, "Look, businesses fail all the time," and that's true, but this is through no fault of their own. You do not want the scarring. You do not want main streets across this province boarded up because, through no fault of their own, businesses have gone bankrupt. That's why it's so important to keep as many afloat—because we'll come out of this faster if businesses are in business.

But to your point, they've added considerable debt, and there are a lot of deferred taxes and fees, which were fine for cash flow early on, but once those get called, that's effectively debt on the balance sheet. I think one of the things that will be required the longer this is taking is actually for the provincial government and the federal government to consider some of those deferred issues to be written down or written off, because otherwise you're going to force more companies into bankruptcy.

1730

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you for that point.

You talked about tapering off the rent and wage subsidy. My big concern in this—and it talks to the things that Sean Meagher was talking about earlier: We've got people being pushed out of our society and out of our economy. We've got tent encampments across the downtown core of Toronto. It's a humanitarian crisis, first and foremost, but it's also a competitive disadvantage for the businesses. It's really having an impact on businesses in downtown Toronto. The storefronts are worried about reopening and what impacts that's going to have.

You talked about housing affordability, and the government has been talking about increasing supply—but at \$14 an hour, there are a lot of people who will never be able to afford any of the housing that's being built.

Would you agree that if we're going to address the housing crisis and the homelessness crisis in this province, we actually need the government to reinvest in social housing and in Ontario Works and ODSP, and bring them up to income amounts where people actually have housing?

Mr. Rocco Rossi: We are enormous believers that the single best, most sustainable way to ensure that we can afford the programs that we want, as compassionate citizens, is to grow the economy, and so everything that can be done to stimulate, to get to opening as safely as possible, is going to be the key.

As someone who has an enormous amount of time for United Way—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Mr. Rocco Rossi: —because my mother learned her English from a United Way program, I definitely see a critical role for all of us in the recovery.

Mr. Chris Glover: But is there a role for government in providing housing directly, if we're going to end the homelessness crisis and its competitive disadvantage?

Mr. Rocco Rossi: I think that the government using the private sector to build the housing—because what we've seen in the past is that governments haven't been particularly good and effective at doing that, so we would look to partnerships to help to provide that going forward.

Certainly, we want a society where all of us can look ourselves in the mirror and say that we are caring for our brothers and sisters.

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you very much, and thank you, everybody, for being here.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): We'll now turn to the independent member for 4.5 minutes. MPP Schreiner, you may begin.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Sean, I want to ask you one more question. Hopefully you'll give a quick answer, so I'll have a bit of time to ask Rocco and his team a few questions.

You brought up a concern around schedule 18—it's the first time anyone has brought this to my attention—about provisions repealing the pharmacy council and the citizens' council. Can you elaborate a bit more on what your concerns are around that?

Mr. Sean Meagher: The Ontario Drug Benefit Program obviously is just not a credit card for drugs; there's a specific formulary that's established by the government that says, "This is what you can have access to," and "If you need X, this is an equivalent; you're going to have to take Y." That makes sense, provided it's based on good research, good science and the real, lived experience of the people who are using it. Up until now, there has been a recognition that we need to talk to scientists to figure out what's the right medicine, and to talk to pharmacists and to talk to doctors. This bill repeals that. It says that we don't need scientific guidance to make decisions about health. I think we probably learned the lesson that that's not true and we do need scientific guidance to make good decisions about health, and this government shouldn't turn away from that.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I couldn't agree with you more on needing more science, for sure.

Rocco, I'm going to switch over to you. We had a representative of a mining company come in and talk about the huge potential of creating a made-in-Ontario supply chain for minerals for manufacturing for electric vehicles and battery storage for renewable energy. You hinted at a bit of that in your presentation, but could you elaborate a bit more on the opportunities in the clean-tech economy for Ontario?

Mr. Rocco Rossi: The clean-tech economy is not going to be wished into existence. It needs lots of key minerals that, quite frankly, I'd rather have mined here, with the level of human rights, employer and employee rights and environmental standards than having children mining cobalt in the Congo, which is producing currently 80% of the world's cobalt that goes into batteries for electric cars and other purposes.

I think there is an enormous opportunity to create wealth and opportunities in regions of the province that have not benefited as much to date from the new economy. Certainly, if you look pre-crisis—we have Claudia here who did a lot of the analysis and work in our Ontario economic report that essentially pointed out that before the crisis, when people looked at the job creation and economic activity in Ontario, which was leading the country, the vast majority of that was actually happening in the GTHA and in southern Ontario. In fact, in northern Ontario—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Mr. Rocco Rossi: —not only were you losing jobs, but you were losing population in that same period.

So this is an enormous opportunity. It's an enormous opportunity towards reconciliation with First Nations, who could have real stakes and real businesses that are going to be key to the clean economy of the future.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Yes, I appreciate that. He was actually suggesting we might even need to rethink the whole regulations around mining to facilitate that, and so—

Mr. Rocco Rossi: It's going to be speed to market. Someone's going to do it, and so if we create the right environment, it should be Ontario.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: We certainly have the skilled labour force and the capacity to do it, literally, mining to manufacturing, so I agree with you on that.

I think we're almost out of time, but he did say incentives to create demand were important in that as well, so I'm just curious what your thoughts are on incentivizing demand for clean-tech products in Ontario—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you. That's all the time that we have.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Oh, sorry. We're out of time. Next time.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): We'll now turn to the government for 7.5 minutes. Who would like to begin? MPP Bailey, you may begin. You're muted, MPP Bailey.

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): We can't hear you, MPP Bailey. No. Is there some audio setting—

Mr. Robert Bailey: There we go. How's that?

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Yes, there we go. We can hear you now.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Great. Thank you very much.

Thank you to all the presenters. I've been listening intently here. Sean, thank you for coming on. A long time ago, longer than I want to think or remember back, I was the chair of the Sarnia-Lambton United Way, many, many years ago, and I really enjoyed it. It was one of the best experiences I had. I came from industry at the time, I worked with the loan rep, and I was chair of the United Way. I understood the links between the community, the small business and the larger corporations.

I come from Sarnia-Lambton, the so-called Chemical Valley—"Chemistry Valley," we say nowadays—and we've always relied on the business community and the corporate community, as well as the other sectors there, to support the local United Way in Sarnia. When they're

successful, the businesses there—I know their employees and the operators and others have been very supportive of the United Way.

I certainly took to heart a number of your concerns, so I'm going to follow up on the one, section 18.

And Mr. Rossi, I think—there he is. I've known Rocco for a long time. I wanted to commend him and the Ontario chamber on the work that they did for the advocacy for a very important issue in both Ontario and Canada with line 5. I had the opportunity to work with Mr. Rossi on that with the Michigan senate, and I know he advocated at the federal level as well.

I'm interested in the interprovincial trade. I've heard this for longer now than I can remember, about how if we could just—I'd never heard that number before that you mentioned, the \$2,000 per person in perpetuity, so I'd like you to expand on that. I could talk all day here, but if you could expand upon that, and I've got a couple of more questions. But maybe a little more on that, if you have some more.

Mr. Rocco Rossi: Well, thank you, and right back at you on line 5. I want to salute MPP Bailey's effort. He has been a real all-star ambassador for Ontario on this issue that, quite frankly, all Ontarians should be concerned about. Earlier, one of the MPPs mentioned saving \$354 million a year. We could lose all of that and then some if line 5 is shut down, and so we have a common interest, and it's not just an Ontario interest. It's a Quebec interest. It's a western Canada interest. This is not a Michigan-Ontario issue; it's a North American issue, and so I applaud your efforts, and we're going to keep going until it's done.

1740

In terms of interprovincial trade: Again, Canada prides itself on having signed more free-trade agreements than any other OECD country, and it is in fact easier for some of my members in Ontario to do business in Pennsylvania and New York than it is in Saskatchewan and British Columbia. I think just of the great Ontario winemakers. This sort of internal protectionism that has built up over the years was something that, in a sense, we could "afford" because we had been blessed with this incredible country with so many resources, with a relatively small population. And so we've had this incredible standard of living without having to make real choices sometimes, and one of them is on this issue.

What we've seen in the world, during this crisis of growing protectionism, whether it was PPE nationalism or now vaccine nationalism; whether it's looking at the world going into blocs—a pro-China bloc, a pro-US bloc, and what's happening in the EU—Canada cannot take what is effectively a relatively small economy on the global scale and make it even smaller by breaking it up into 10 provincial markets and three territorial markets. Governor Poloz's argument is that when you do the analysis of all of the additional costs that that layers on in making us smaller, and therefore more expensive, we are adding a cost to each and every Canadian every year, and it's also costing revenues.

There are a number of steps, and there is technically a free-trade agreement internal to Canada, but it's this massive document that is filled with exceptions. Each province has exceptions, and even the federal government has some exceptions. One of the things I will salute Premier Kenney in Alberta about is that he said very early on, "I'm actually going to unilaterally cut the majority of the Alberta exceptions," and that has had some impact. But Ontario, as the single largest economy in the country, could really play a leadership role, we argue, even unilaterally, on a number of these points. Some people will say, "Well, that's crazy. Don't give up anything until you get something in return." That game has cost us decades of debate and no progress, so I think it's time for bold action. It's not a massive number of regulations, but it would really move the dial.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Okay. I agree. I'd just like to have your comment on one thing: I just heard driving in on Sunday a great radio program. It refers to some of the things you talked about earlier, taking old mine tailings and old sites where they mined minerals years ago but didn't realize they were valuable, but they are today. I wondered if you've got some comment on if we could do this—I know we could do it in Ontario, but do you think it would be beneficial? It would involve many different communities that you referred to earlier.

Mr. Rocco Rossi: Absolutely. I spent some time earlier in my career in the rare earth industry, and China has 80% of the world's known reserves of rare earths, and the vast majority of those are mined from an old iron ore tailing plant in Baotou, in Inner Mongolia. Little did they know, that bastnaesite—they were mining it for iron ore, but they created the single largest pile of rare earths anywhere in the world. We can do that here.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much. That concludes all the time we have for this round.

We'll now turn to the official opposition for 7.5 minutes. Who would like to begin? MPP Tabuns, you may begin.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My thanks to the presenters today. Rocco, it's very good to see you. I actually don't have a question for you. The others have been very thorough. Relax, relax.

Sean, in your presentation, one of the statements you made early on was that an unintended consequence of the legislation before us was that it could increase dependency on the part of people. I'd appreciate it if you could expand on that idea. What did you mean?

Mr. Sean Meagher: There are a few things in the bill that would change the way that social assistance operates that have that consequence. One is certainly the one that we've spent the most time talking about, which is the requirement that people undertake any prescribed life stabilization activities. The ability of people to make choices about how they increase their independence and become more capable of obtaining and sustaining employment ceases to be something in their control and can go into the control of the province of Ontario. It also moves

the role of ensuring life stabilization supports to the municipalities, who really don't have the resources to fully address the life stabilization requirements that people have.

One of the earlier members spoke about the need for affordable housing, and we are in desperate, desperate need—not just in Toronto, not just in the GTA; all across Ontario—of affordable housing. The affordability of housing in Belleville has gone through the floor in the last year or so, and in all municipalities. While I appreciate the role of the private sector in building that housing, the evidence, actually, is that the not-for-profit sector is the most successful at creating and sustaining housing affordability.

But there's no strategy for ensuring that those systems are supported and adequately funded, and the accountability for them moves to the municipalities, who don't have the capacity to deliver those programs. The same is true for a variety of health supports that, again, aren't historically in the purview of the municipalities to have to provide, but they, under this bill, become accountable to the province of Ontario and to the ministry for delivering those programs, even though they don't have the resources to deliver them themselves. The province hasn't put on the table any strategy for resourcing them, and the current level of resources isn't adequate.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you. I appreciate that assessment.

One of the things that concerned me in this bill was what looked to me like the potential for contracting out or privatizing the delivery of social services, particularly Ontario Works. Did you have a similar analysis or a similar perspective on what's before us?

Mr. Sean Meagher: It's a bit unclear how that moves forward. It's pretty clear in terms of employment supports that, under modernization, not only can it be privatized, but one of the three existing pilots is a private corporation from outside the province delivering services to all the people of the region of Peel. The current bill, as it's written, makes the providers municipalities, but again, it's a little unclear what the regulatory authority will be after the bill is passed, and it does increase, again, reliance on some private provision.

One really important example that we've just barely touched on is access to online capacity. I completely agree with Mr. Rossi that it is fantastic that we've expanded broadband to all the communities that haven't had it before, but we're running the pipe up into Stayner and then putting a plug in the end of it. There's no actual access at the household level for people to get online and use that broadband capacity, unless they fund a private provider out of their \$733 a month. That's certainly not a circumstance that's going to be viable for most recipients of OW.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Is there any suggested amendment to the particular section in question, or are you simply recommending that we vote against it?

Mr. Sean Meagher: We're recommending, actually, that the government do its due diligence in this area. Schedule 21 does not belong in an omnibus bill. Schedule 21 is the legislative infrastructure for a complete overhaul

of the social assistance system. It's a system that needs to be overhauled—there's no question about it—and we welcome that conversation. We think it's really valuable. Historically, that process has involved enormous consultation, the active involvement of the people who deliver those services on the front line and a stand-alone bill that gets proper scrutiny. We don't have that here.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Okay. I think you've explained very well, then.

I don't have further questions. I'm not sure my colleagues do. If they do, Chair, you could allocate the time.

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): You have two minutes, if anyone would like to ask a question. MPP Glover?

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you very much. Since I didn't get to ask you any questions in the first round, Sean, I'll ask you now. You mentioned that all clients in Peel could be reassigned to Toronto for care. I didn't quite understand that point. Could you explain that?

Mr. Sean Meagher: Sure. One of the sections of the bill quite specifically says that it's in the ministry's purview to withdraw the assignment of a delivery partner and reassign it to somebody else. In fact, over two clauses, it reinforces that: a second clause to make it very clear that they are under no obligation to retain the services of any particular provider, and they're in an absolute position to say, "We're just going to completely amalgamate all of southwestern Ontario under one service provider, and it's going to be"—because the MPP is here, I'll say, "Guelph is going to run social assistance for all of southwestern Ontario"—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): One minute left.

Mr. Sean Meagher: —which means that people in Windsor and people in Sarnia won't necessarily have the sensitivity that they need to local circumstances, especially for the assignment of life stabilization, that they expect today.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay. You also said that they're increasing red tape for the most vulnerable people in the province with this. Can you expand on that? I know you've only got a few seconds left.

Mr. Sean Meagher: Sure. We now have three providers where we used to have one, no strategy for integrating them, no systems for people to access the online, digital-first approach and no capacity for them to guide their own strategies for life stabilization. That's going to make everybody's life a lot more complicated.

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you. You know, I live this every day. In my riding, I see the failure of our social services with the tent encampments in the downtown core, and I just shudder to think that they're actually going further down the road of privatization and the down-loading of our social services, and what that's going to mean in terms of—

The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari): Thank you very much. That concludes this round of questions. At this point, I'd like to thank our presenters for their time. You are now released and may step down.

I want to thank the committee for their co-operation today. As a reminder, the deadline for written submissions is 7 p.m. on Wednesday, May 19, 2021.

The committee is now adjourned until 9 a.m. on Tuesday, May 18, 2021. Thank you, everyone, and be safe.
The committee adjourned at 1753.

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