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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 2 November 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 2 novembre 2021

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Good morning. We're going to begin this morning with a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member from Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill on a point of order.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Good morning. I'm seeking unanimous consent to move a motion without notice respecting the expedited passage of Bill 38, An Act to amend the Remembrance Week Act, 2016.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Parsa is seeking unanimous consent of the House to move a motion without notice respecting the expedited passage of Bill 38, An Act to amend the Remembrance Week Act, 2016. Agreed? Agreed.

Once again, I'll recognize the member for Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill.

Mr. Michael Parsa: I move that, notwithstanding any standing order or special order of the House, that when the order for second reading of Bill 38, An Act to amend the Remembrance Week Act, 2016, is called, that one hour shall be allotted to debate on the motion for second reading of the bill with 20 minutes allotted to the government, 20 minutes allotted to the official opposition and 20 minutes allotted to the independent members as a group; and

At the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

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

That the Speaker shall immediately put the question on the motion for third reading without debate or amendment; and

That, notwithstanding standing order 30(a), any division on the motions for second or third reading of the bill arising during afternoon orders of the day shall not be deferred.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Parsa has moved that, notwithstanding any standing order or special order of the House, that when the order for second reading of—

Interjection: Dispense.

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

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

REMEMBRANCE WEEK AMENDMENT ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SEMAINE DU SOUVENIR

Mr. Parsa, on behalf of Mr. Gill, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 38, An Act to amend the Remembrance Week Act, 2016 / Projet de loi 38, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2016 sur la semaine du Souvenir.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Good morning. It's always a distinct honour to stand in the Legislature and speak on behalf of the residents of St. Catharines, and especially today to speak to recognition of the poppy.

As we approach November 11 this year and we celebrate again within this House, across the province and, indeed, the entire country, we'll be participating in a day of reflection, taking a step back from sometimes taking our way of life for granted and remembering what so many men and women sacrificed for our freedom. This legislation brings forward the spirit of that recognition and to remember why we are here, why we have such a wonderful place to live. It does represent the importance of the symbol of the poppy to Canadians across Ontario and this great country of Canada.

Now, it is important to remember that this legislation is a response to an incident from a year ago. This legislation is a response to a large American-based conglomerate, Whole Foods, that forbade their employees wearing anything other than their basic uniforms, restrictions that included the poppy.

Now, some will point out that this legislation could have passed with all-member support last year when this incident occurred. It could have passed right away instead of being trotted out just before Veterans' Week begins in 2021. But I can appreciate that the government is using this legislation as a moment to further reflect on the importance of the poppy to Canada and to those who served. Any time we can do that it is worthwhile. This year more than any other, on the 100th year of the poppy as Canada's symbol of remembrance, helps us honour and remember all of those who wore a uniform for Canada.

I recall two years ago I stood in this chamber around this time to point out that the Ontario Soldiers' Aid Commission excluded too many of our younger veterans. The following Veterans' Week, the House passed legislation to close those gaps. It brings me to an important

commitment we all need to make as politicians: It is important to protect, fight to protect and preserve the symbolism of the sacrifices of our servicemen and -women. But if that symbolism doesn't come with equally weighted commitments to those who sacrificed so much, then that is a problem.

I am happy to see legislation like this one after the Premier vowed to do it last year. I am happy to see it come forward at all, but I hope we are listening to those voices and advocates for veterans and closing gaps that are not just symbolic. That means ensuring veterans do not go homeless, doing whatever we can to support the Royal Canadian Legions across Ontario, doing whatever we can to support the Royal Canadian Legion's Leave the Streets Behind initiative. It would be a great gesture for the province of Ontario to make it their stated responsibility to eradicate homelessness for anyone who served—anyone at all, actually. And there is more we can do for veterans who need affordable housing, long-term care and disability support to have obstacles removed. It means finding ways of honouring their service by raising their quality of life. We can do that.

In this province, there are gaps. We can always do better. We know we can do better. It is my hope we find ways of fundamentally helping our veterans so to not only find celebration in the symbolism. But symbolism is very important. Despite this pledge coming a year after it was made, this legislation allows us to have the important conversation about the poppy and what it means at a moment that matters the most.

I have the honour to represent a community with a rich military history, and it has produced tangible and concrete reminders of who and what we should remember every November 11. Like cities across this province, St. Catharines has established Royal Canadian Legions and veterans' clubs dedicated to the veterans and their families. These Legions conduct annual ceremonies of remembrance at cenotaphs, and, just as importantly, raise funds both for the betterment of local veterans and local initiatives. They promote remembrance and awareness for those whose names are engraved on our war memorials, on our cenotaphs and memorial walls.

0910

The symbolism of the poppy and the charitable work, the revenue generated, the good it creates and gives back to our community is evident at this time of year. I know what that looks like with the poppy, so enshrining the right to wear one is important.

This year, I will be participating in several shifts for our local Legions, giving out poppies. I try to do this every year, and I encourage all citizens across Ontario to go to your local Legion and give out poppies so people will remember.

I do need to mention as well that I am a proud Legion member of Branch 138 in Merriton in St. Catharines. For most of my life, I've been a member there, and I do my best to truly show my gratitude to local veterans I know personally and to relay the message to veterans across Ontario. I've attended my fair share of Friday fish fries

across St. Catharines in support of veterans' communities, because it's the least I can do to honour and give back for their sacrifices. The poppy feels just about the best piece of Canadian you can get right now.

The work of our veterans, our Legions and other supportive organizations across the province is what sparked this change in the first place. As the opposition MPP on this file, I will continue to ensure that the symbolism is respected.

But just like we have the tools now to enable legislation that modernized the Soldiers' Aid Commission into a modern access tool, we have the opportunity to work closely with the veterans and other stakeholders across Ontario to ensure that honouring the sacrifice of our veterans is not just symbolism. There are great ideas flowing from our advocates and residents and veterans that will encourage the government to take positive steps forward and always find ways to improve the lives of veterans in tangible ways. I very much look forward to working with the government in the near future, making sure symbolism is met with action and ensuring that support flows to veterans as efficiently and effectively as possible.

I want to thank veterans themselves across the province of Ontario, veterans' advocates, Legions, support organizations and Ontario Command, because truly, this is your win. There is much work to be done, and the advocacy never stops, but it's your hard work over the decades that has led our work here to continue to enshrine and support our veterans. Without your voices, I would not even be standing here.

It's about education and awareness. It's about getting our veterans off the streets, giving them a chance to be strong human beings with dignity and respect. And it's about offering support, whether it's ever needed or not.

Thank you for the opportunity to be able to speak on this piece of legislation. This is a promising start, and I can say with enthusiasm that I will ensure we keep this process honest and that I will work alongside my colleagues.

As everyone within this chamber knows, I am a mother to an active service member. He's a petty officer first class in the Royal Canadian Navy. I am familiar with hardships faced by his wife and his two young children, my granddaughters, Josephine and Hazel Mae. Three six-month tours of duty away from home and his family in support of his country's commitment to NATO and peace in our world is what I think of on November 11. When I wear my poppy on November 1, the beginning of November, working up to the 11 days, I think of my grandchildren and my daughter-in-law Sarah, who sacrificed so that her husband could go and fight for our country.

The poppy is a symbol of honour, the sacrifice our veterans made for our freedoms. It turns 100 this year—100 memories should be shared with everyone through this chamber, 100 things that might come to mind. But let's remember 100 years of wearing a poppy, donning it on our lapel, putting it at our cenotaphs. We must remember all of the veterans, the men and women, who have fought for our country.

But most of all, as I said, I am and I will be working alongside my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to make sure we always strive for real, tangible support. I hope everyone supports this motion, but I also hope we reflect in the coming days on what men and women for this country have done for our freedom.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Ms. Donna Skelly: As we approach November 11, I rise to speak to the Remembrance Week Amendment Act. It's an act that declares November 5 to November 11 as Remembrance Week. The amendment that our government has brought before the House today supports the right of every worker in Ontario to wear a poppy in the workplace during Remembrance Week.

Our government wants to enshrine the right in law to remind employers that, collectively, we owe a debt of gratitude to those brave men and women who have served and currently serve our country. The exception to the law would be if wearing a poppy at work poses a danger or hazard to a person's health, safety or welfare.

The proposal to amend the preamble would state that wearing poppies at work during Remembrance Week is a symbol of remembrance, a symbol of respect—remembrance and respect for the extraordinary courage and sacrifices made by our veterans and members currently serving in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Our government wants to show our gratitude to members of the armed forces, not only during soldiers' involvement in conflict but also in their everyday service to our country. They deserve our unwavering respect and support. We are proud of the members of our armed forces and we want to demonstrate how proud we really are.

One of the most visible ways we, as Canadians, honour our veterans and show them our respect and gratitude is by wearing a poppy on Remembrance Day and the days leading up to Remembrance Day. It's a Canadian tradition. It has been a Canadian tradition for more than a century. The poppy is a clear and visible symbol of the extraordinary courage and profound sacrifice that members of the armed forces have made to protect our freedoms and the way of life in Canada. The tradition of wearing poppies to honour our veterans and current serving members of the armed forces binds us together as Ontarians. By wearing poppies, our families, schools, workplaces and communities will never forget the sacrifices that have been made by these brave men and women.

It was Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae of Guelph, a Canadian medical officer during the First World War, who first introduced the poppy to Canada and the Commonwealth. As we all know, John McCrae penned the poem *In Flanders Fields* in May 1915 on the day following the death of a soldier. Little did he know that those lines would become enshrined in the hearts and minds of Canadians. The words in that poem are recited by schoolchildren across our country. *In Flanders Fields* was the inspiration for the Remembrance Day poppy.

The idea of the poppy was considered at a meeting in Thunder Bay, and the poppy was adopted on July 6, 1921.

Today, more than 100 years later, the poppy is worn on and leading up to Remembrance Day to honour Canada's fallen soldiers.

0920

The poppy is worn close to the hearts of Canadians to acknowledge the sacrifices our soldiers have made on the battlefield since World War I. It is heartwarming to see people from all walks of life wearing a poppy on their lapel to symbolize their gratitude to veterans for the sacrifices they have made to protect our freedoms. In Canada, the poppy is a universal symbol of our respect for veterans and the members of the military who are currently serving.

It is such a significant symbol of respect that a US grocery chain reversed its decision to enforce its company dress code that prevented employees from wearing Remembrance Day poppies with their uniforms. The backlash from the public was immediate. That grocery chain received a barrage of criticism for its decision to ban the poppy on workers' uniforms. The grocery chain quickly learned a lesson in patriotism. It is now encouraging employees to wear poppies to honour the heroes who bravely served the country.

When this incident occurred, our Premier vowed to create legislation that would ban employers from prohibiting staff from wearing poppies during Remembrance Week. With this legislation, the Premier is making good on his promise.

The poppy represents those who have served, fought and died for our country, and it is an issue that, for many, is deeply personal. Initially, the grocery chain said the poppy was prohibited because it symbolized a cause. The poppy is not a cause; it is a symbol of respect. The poppy has also long been a symbol of peace to honour the memory of fallen soldiers during the First and Second World Wars.

Today, the poppy honours the memory of fallen soldiers in every war in which Canadian soldiers have fought, including World War I, the war that my grandfather, Henry Skelly, fought in. Today I am blessed to have his diary where he describes his life behind enemy lines. It is a piece of history, and I treasure it.

There are more than 629,000 veterans in Canada and 228,000 veterans in the province of Ontario. Those numbers are significant—36% of veterans call Ontario home. There are hundreds of thousands of people in Ontario who have a direct connection to a veteran, including, as we have heard this morning, the member from St. Catharines. They are spouses, parents, children and friends who want to honour the important work that members of the armed forces perform on a daily basis. They want to honour the sacrifices of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice by dying in battle.

For an employer to prevent workers from honouring those who have courageously served our country is simply unthinkable.

The right to wear a poppy at work is what this legislative amendment will protect. Our government is demonstrating our support for members of the armed forces by ensuring that every employee has the right to wear a poppy

at work during Remembrance Week, unless wearing a poppy may pose a danger or safety hazard.

I want to speak for a moment about the many local businesses, schools and community organizations that support the poppy campaign each and every year: those employers and organizations that keep poppy boxes on their front counters to encourage more people to wear a poppy and donate to the Royal Canadian Legion. They show their gratitude by welcoming Legion volunteers and poppy boxes into their locations, and, because of their support for the campaign, millions of people across the province wear poppies as a visual pledge to honour veterans for their service and their sacrifice.

The provision in this Remembrance Week legislation protects and promotes the voluntary observance of Remembrance Day.

Like all of us in the chamber, I have been to many Remembrance Day ceremonies. They are emotionally moving events: to see elderly veterans marching down the street, their faces beaming with pride, tears in their eyes as people lining the street applaud and cheer them on. For many, their bodies may be frail, but their spirit is strong. These are the people who we honour and remember every year on Remembrance Day. They are courageous and selfless individuals who are willing to risk their own lives to protect the freedoms that we enjoy.

We believe employers share the values that honour veterans and they support employees wearing the poppy to show their respect and gratitude for veterans. For that reason, our government will not include an enforcement provision as part of this amendment. We believe an enforcement approach would be too stringent and really, in the end, unnecessary.

As we have seen with the grocery store chain that initially prevented their employees from wearing the poppy, they quickly reversed their policy when they had to deal with the scorn from the public and our Premier. For businesses that want to maintain their reputation of good will, alienating the public by banning the wearing of the poppy is simply not good policy.

This legislation does not open the door for employees to wear symbols and slogans in support of other issues. The legislation strictly applies to the wearing of a poppy in the workplace during Remembrance Week. And although there may be some circumstances where wearing a poppy in the workplace could pose a problem, for example, an employer could prohibit the wearing of a poppy if it's deemed a safety hazard. If an employee is involved in preparing food, they could be prohibited from wearing a poppy. Nobody wants the pin from a poppy falling into the food. A sharp object could seriously injure someone. Anyone who works in a lab must comply with a strict dress code for safety reasons. In a case like this, they could be prohibited from wearing a poppy if it could get caught in equipment or, again, if it could fall out and end up hurting someone.

Some people might ask, if the grocery chain quickly reversed its prohibition on the poppy, then why is this legislation even necessary? Our government wants to

make it clear that we support our fallen soldiers. We support our veterans and those individuals who are currently serving in the armed forces, and we support workers who want to pay tribute to these members of the armed forces. By enshrining this support in law, we would be providing every worker in Ontario the right to wear a poppy as a symbol of remembrance and respect during Remembrance Week, assuming that wearing a poppy at work does not create a health or safety hazard.

Speaker, wearing a poppy is one way Ontarians acknowledge and remember the bravery and valour of Canadian Armed Forces veterans and active members of our military. These are people who fought to preserve peace around the world. They are selfless individuals who have protected Canada and defended our country's freedom and way of life. We are grateful to those who wear and have worn the uniform. We are grateful to those who have served our country and protected our values. They deserve our respect. They deserve our support.

We all know how children love to ask questions. When we wear our poppy, our children ask about the poppy's significance and what it symbolizes. Wearing the poppy helps to ensure that our children, our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren understand the sacrifices that have been made for all of us.

The Royal Canadian Legion's annual poppy campaign brings Ontarians together. We wear the poppy proudly. The poppy is so much more than a symbol, though. The funds raised from the Royal Canadian Legion's annual poppy campaign go towards supporting the caring of veterans throughout the year. The funds support long-term care and needed home care for veterans. The money raised finances facilities and transition programs for veterans, and they provide supports for veterans and their spouses who may need to be hospitalized.

By enshrining in law the right to wear a poppy in the workplace, it reminds employers of the significance of this symbol that respects those who have served our country. It also reinforces that the right to wear a poppy should be reflected in employment policies and practices.

Our initiative to preserve the right to wear a poppy at work in the law has received praise from veterans' organizations and individuals right across the province. Our government is grateful to members of our armed forces, not only for the courage that they have displayed on the battlefield but also for the service they provide our citizens every single day. Veterans deserve our steadfast support and respect. Ontarians admire our military personnel for the work that they perform in keeping us safe.

0930

In our battle with COVID-19, it has been the members of the military who delivered the shipments of life-saving vaccines, which has put our province on a path to gaining control of this pandemic. It was members of the military who organized the delivery of vaccines right across the country. And the Canadian Armed Forces perform so many other critically important functions. They conduct search-and-rescue operations for people who may get into trouble on our lakes or get lost in remote areas of the

province. They patrol our air space and territorial waters. They support anti-drug operations and they are there to help in whatever way they can before a natural disaster hits or during the aftermath when cleanup is required. Members of our military are there when we need them most, and the poppy is one of the most visible ways that we can acknowledge what they have done for all of us.

This year, more than ever, it is critical that Ontarians support the annual poppy campaign. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the Royal Canadian Legion and other organizations that support veterans. Some organizations have indicated that, because of plummeting donations and decreasing funds, they may have no choice but to close. But I'm positive that Ontarians don't want to see veterans' support organizations shut down because funds have dried up during the pandemic. I know Ontarians will do everything they can to support the Canadian Legions and other veterans' organizations. We know how Ontarians feel about their veterans who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

Our Highway of Heroes is a perfect example of our patriotic demonstration and traditions for those who have been killed in war. We all remember, and many of us were there along that stretch of highway from Trenton to Toronto, when Canada's soldiers who died in Afghanistan were being repatriated. We remember ordinary citizens crowding the overpasses along that 160-kilometre route, waving Canadian flags and saluting as the entourage drove past. Thousands of people turned out alongside firefighters and police officers to pay their respects. This kind of demonstration of respect and gratitude is the Canadian way. Paying tribute to our fallen soldiers in this manner has garnered the attention of news networks in the United States and admiration from average American citizens.

We have always had a tradition of honouring our war dead in a public way, and wearing a poppy on our lapel is part of that very visible tradition. Being there along the Highway of Heroes as a soldier is brought home is a very moving experience—158 Canadian Armed Forces members lost their lives in Afghanistan; the Highway of Heroes is a living tribute to these veterans.

When Canada's mission in Afghanistan ended, the Highway of Heroes tree campaign was launched. Two million trees have been planted, one for every Canadian who has served in uniform since the War of 1812; 117,000 trees are being planted alongside the Highway of Heroes as a living memorial to each military member who died in service. Last year, our government provided \$1 million to plant the 117,000 additional trees as a way of honouring those members of the armed forces who made the ultimate sacrifice. Each tree planted along the Highway of Heroes will be a growing reminder that will inspire people for generations to come. Highway 401 between Canadian Forces Base Trenton and Keele Street in Toronto is recognized as the Highway of Heroes. It represents the final journey of Canadian Armed Forces members who died in service to our country.

Our patriotic tributes to our fallen soldiers did not end with our withdrawal from Afghanistan. The Royal Canadian Legion's annual poppy campaign continues. Wearing

a poppy is part of who we are. No one should ever be prohibited from showing their patriotic pride and respect through wearing a poppy at work. This legislative amendment protects that right. By enshrining this support in law, we are reminding employers that Ontario owes a debt of gratitude to the brave individuals who have served our country and continue to serve our country. That gratitude should be reflected in allowing and encouraging their employees to wear a poppy close to their heart.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to stand in this House on behalf of my colleagues in the official opposition and the people of Timiskaming–Cochrane, particularly to make remarks about the amendment for Remembrance Week, to be able to talk about the significance of the poppy and the significance of the sacrifices that people have made and continue to make.

When we pin the poppy on each year, we all have a thought that comes to us, something personal. I just listened to the member from across the way—her grandfather. I listened to my colleague—her son. For me, it's my father.

My father was not a military person. My father was a man of very, very few words. I asked him one day why he came to Canada. He had a sister who went to South Africa, a sister who went to America, a brother who stayed in Holland. "Why did you come to Canada?" He said that it was the Canadian soldiers.

He was a teenager in World War II when the Nazis occupied. He didn't talk about that much. He went through hell then. He didn't talk about that much. When the Canadians came, he assumed that they would be occupiers as well, and they weren't. They came. They suffered incredibly, and thousands of them died. They freed the country and they went home. He thought that Canada must be the greatest country in the world for them to do that, and that's why he came here. That's why I have the incredible honour to be standing here today, saying that. That's why I wear the poppy.

I'm sure that everyone, regardless, has a similar something—it might not be as profound, it might be incredibly more profound, but everyone has it. The goal of this act is to make sure that no one is denied the ability to wear the poppy; to remember not only the sacrifices of those who have passed, the sacrifices of those who continue to sacrifice today—because as we speak, there are still people in other parts of the world who are looking at Canadians who come, who help and who go home—to remember that.

We fully support this, but we need to remember, to the member across the way, that there are 228,000 veterans in Ontario right now, and many of them are still sacrificing, because they have suffered incredibly and continue to suffer. Many live now in conditions similar to what they freed people in other countries from. And I'm not exaggerating that, Speaker.

0940

We need to use this time to also make sure that we do whatever we can to improve the conditions for those who

continue to sacrifice. We need to do that. Part of wearing the poppy shouldn't be just remembering those who sacrificed, but should be committing to improve the conditions of those who serve and who continue to sacrifice.

The member across the way said many Legions are close to collapse. We know that. We need to act to actually do something about it. We know there are many veterans who actually aren't part of the Legion system. We need to make sure that they're being supported as well. We know there are veterans who are homeless. We know that. We also need to be debating and passing legislation and finding funding to actually support them as well. We know all those things.

The poppy signifies those who sacrificed, who served, who died and who continue to serve, and, for me, those who continue to suffer. We fully support this and we urge the government to do whatever we can to make all those veterans and their families—to serve them as well and to support them as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mr. Stephen Blais: It's an honour to rise this morning to debate this important initiative. I have the honour and the privilege of representing a community in the east end of Ottawa that is affectionately known as CFB Orléans because we have so many members of the forces that call Orléans home and work at headquarters or other locations across the capital region.

The importance of honouring our veterans and the importance of honouring those men and women in uniform who serve today is always with us in Orléans, because literally our neighbours are members of the forces and many of our relatives are members of the forces, and they've sacrificed much over the years—obviously those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, but also those who have spent many months, if not years, overseas, and, of course, the strain that that puts on their mental health, on their physical health in many circumstances and also the mental health of their families.

The Legion was just mentioned, and we're lucky in Orléans to have a dynamic and very active Legion, but the numbers are going down. As we know, veterans of the two Great Wars are slowly but surely passing on, and other members of the community are not taking up Legion memberships the way that we may have seen in the past. That creates challenges operationally and organizationally for the Legion, but also has challenges to the capital investment of the Legion building itself. They don't have the membership dues and the other revenue to keep those buildings in good shape and to provide the services that they used to, so the government does need to step up and provide more support for Legions for those capital improvements and those rehabilitations to ensure that the Legions have the capacity to offer the services that they've always been there to offer.

As we know, too many veterans come home and suffer from extreme mental health issues, from post-traumatic stress disorder. That often leads into other challenges with

substance abuse and, as has been mentioned, can often lead to homelessness. There are far too many veterans sleeping on the streets of our nation's capital every night. As I've said, they've sacrificed much to serve our country, to defend democracy and protect freedom both here at home and abroad, and they deserve a place to lay their head at night with a roof overtop of them.

I was very proud to help support Veterans' House in Ottawa, which is an affordable housing project with a multi-faith housing initiative, to provide housing supports for some veterans. We need more of that, not just in the nation's capital but right across Ontario and Canada, because those men and women who served our country with distinction and have put their lives on the line and put their family and themselves through great stress and emotional turmoil deserve a place to call home and don't need to sleep on the streets every night.

In terms of the poppy, the poppy is obviously a symbol of great importance for us here in Canada, but internationally as well. It is a very small gesture that we make for a week or two in the fall as we lead into Remembrance Week and Remembrance Day, to show our respect, faith and honour to those men and women who have served. Everyone should be able to wear the poppy without any threat of repercussion or, certainly, losing their job or having any kind of employment consequences. Not only should everyone be free to wear the poppy, everyone should be encouraged to wear the poppy to show their respect and honour for our veterans who have fallen and have come back with health disorders and for those who serve in the armed forces today.

Just to sum up, Mr. Speaker, we owe our veterans a great debt. We should do everything in our power to honour that debt, both big ways and small.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: I'm pleased to be able to speak in support of the Remembrance Week Amendment Act, Bill 38. I also feel very privileged that, in 2016, the member from Simcoe–Grey asked the member from Parkdale–High Park, Cheri DiNovo, and I to join him on the Remembrance Week Act, which this bill amends. It was very thoughtful of him and it's something, like today, I think we all agree on. It's important to take the acknowledgement of Remembrance Day over a week. It was something that was already happening, but we put it in a bill to make sure that it was there for people to see and look at and know that that's what existed.

The interesting thing about this is at the time when we debated this bill, I don't think we ever thought we'd be talking about what we're talking about today, that someone would not let somebody wear a poppy in the workplace, that an employer would do that. We just didn't think that that would happen. And it happened in Ottawa. It was, I think, a store in Ottawa Centre where it happened, where we all found out about that last year. Thankfully, it doesn't happen very often. It's the first time that I know of that this has happened. I've never, ever had a problem.

When I worked in the grocery business for 22 years, the same business where this happened, anybody wearing a

poppy—as a matter of fact, we encouraged everybody to wear a poppy. So for the people who say we don't need to be doing this today, well, they could say we don't need to do the Remembrance Week Act. Look, I think we're just putting it down and saying, “Look, here are the rules. Here is what we all agreed on. And if it wasn't clear before, it's very clear right now.”

I listened to some of the remarks from the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane, and he's right.

I'm really fortunate to live in a community where Rideau Veterans' was housed for many years and then became Perley and Rideau Veterans', and now it's Perley Health. We had a few hundred veterans in my riding in a long-term-care home, a good long-term-care home, but not every veteran has access to that kind of care. Not every veteran has access to long-term care or the things they need to sustain themselves.

When we think of veterans, we often think of the First and Second World War—those were great conflicts—the Korean War. But there have been conflicts subsequent to those where people have taken great risks, made great sacrifices, had their lives changed forever. And we need to recognize that.

My colleague from Orléans talked about housing. It's a big challenge in our society all around. For veterans, for some of them, it's a tremendous challenge. So while we honour people today and talk about this bill and how important it is to recognize the poppy as a symbol that everyone can participate in, we have to remember those things that we still have to do, along with other governments, along with other organizations. It's not just about a week every year, or a day every year. They're really important, but the rest of the year is something we have to work on as well.

0950

I want to thank the member from Simcoe—Grey again for bringing that bill forward and including myself and Cheri DiNovo on the bill. It was very, very thoughtful of him. I'm very proud to be on that bill, and I can't express my gratitude enough to him for being that thoughtful.

War touches everyone's family somewhere along the line—conflicts. Everyone's family has someone who has made a sacrifice somewhere along the line. In my family, my mother-in-law Yvonne's brother died at Dieppe, Robert Ansley Cavanagh. In August 1942, along with thousands of other young men, he lost his life. I don't think he was 20.

She was very, very close to him. You know, in families that are large, you kind of group together, and the people who are closest in age sometimes connect the best together. Well, Ansley and my mother-in-law, Yvonne, weren't just brother and sister; they were dear friends. So she took his loss hard.

The thing I remember about Yvonne is she always had a picture of Ansley on her dresser in her bedroom. It was always there. She passed away a few years ago. It was there when she passed away. She had that picture on her dresser for 75 years—75 years. She didn't just remember every year; she remembered every day. And that's how we

should remember. That's what I was trying to allude to earlier.

We have the picture now in our house, and we try to remember every day. That's why we have the picture there. That sacrifice was almost 80 years ago. It also reminds you that people are making sacrifices every day. People made sacrifices in peacekeeping. People made sacrifices in Afghanistan and all those places we went to, to try and make things better, to break up conflict. We take it for granted sometimes, and so it's all of our jobs to remember that every day if we can.

Je le dis en français pour mes amis: je suis très fier de dire quelques mots pour nos anciens combattants. Je suis vraiment fier de dire quelques mots en souvenir de nos anciens combattants, ceux qui ont servi à protéger ce qui compte le plus. Et cette année, nous ne pouvons pas nous réunir de la même manière que nous le faisons chaque année. Il est important que nous continuions à nous souvenir.

Ma belle-mère Yvonne était résidente au Perley Rideau. Elle a perdu son frère Ansley à Dieppe, quelque chose qu'elle n'a jamais oublié. Elle a toujours gardé sa photo sur sa commode pendant 75 ans. Et comme Yvonne s'en souvenait toujours, il faut toujours s'en souvenir.

Souvenez-vous toujours des sacrifices qui ont été faits pour chacun de nous. Il est de notre devoir de nous souvenir. Nous nous souviendrons.

And once again, Speaker, I'm very proud to be supporting this bill and that it's connected to something that I had the pleasure of being part of since 2016. Thank you for your time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate? Further debate? Further debate?

Pursuant to the order of the House passed earlier today, I am now required to put the question. Mr. Parsa has moved second reading of Bill 38, An Act to amend the Remembrance Week Act, 2016. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pursuant to the order of the House passed earlier today, the bill is now ordered for third reading.

REMEMBRANCE WEEK
AMENDMENT ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LA SEMAINE DU SOUVENIR

Mr. Parsa, on behalf of Mr. Gill, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 38, An Act to amend the Remembrance Week Act, 2016 / Projet de loi 38, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2016 sur la semaine du Souvenir.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pursuant to the order of the House passed earlier today, I am now required to put the question. Mr. Parsa has moved third reading of Bill 38, An Act to amend the Remembrance Week Act, 2016. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Orders of the day?

Mr. Michael Parsa: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): There being no further business at this time, this House stands in recess until 10:15 this morning.

The House recessed from 0957 to 1015.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Mr. Ian Arthur: I rise today to recognize something with sombre purpose: that November is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. On average, one woman is killed by an intimate partner every six days in Canada. Indigenous women and girls are disproportionately victims of all forms of sex- and gender-based violence and are six times more likely to be victims of femicide.

We are measured by our treatment of the most vulnerable members of our community, and here we continue to fail. It is imperative that we commit to protecting and supporting victims of family violence, and I would urge this government to hear the pleas of women's centres, asking them to commit to long-term, stable funding needed to do life-saving work.

COVID-19 has amplified the terror of domestic violence. Rates of violence have ballooned by 20% to 30% during the pandemic. And we know that during lockdowns, women were disproportionately affected. We failed to consider the impact of the lack of access to peace bonds for those in danger or that some women may not even have the freedom to get themselves vaccinated, Speaker.

I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to recognize this month. It's a privilege to be able to advocate for the women and children who suffer all forms of domestic violence. And I would urge this government to lift the building of funding precarity for women's centres and the courageous front-line social workers who do this daunting work.

CORNWALL POLICE SERVICE

Mr. Jim McDonell: I rise today to shine a light on a new chapter in the history of the Cornwall Police Service. On October 22, Chief Danny Aikman began a well-earned retirement after almost 40 years of excellent police work. Chief Aikman's skill and expertise allowed him to successfully navigate through the rapidly changing times of police work. I want to congratulate him on his long-time service to his community.

He passed the baton on to Deputy Chief Shawna Spowart, who became the first female chief of police in the city of Cornwall. Like her predecessor, she's a

graduate of Rotman School of Management and has already utilized these skills to develop and put in place several important policing and community initiatives.

I've had the chance to work with the new chief in her previous role and I know that her team-first approach will make her an important addition to the eastern Ontario security network, working together with our RCMP and neighbouring Mohawk and OPP police services.

The residents of Cornwall are in good hands, and I wish her the very best of luck in her new role in serving her community.

SENIORS' HOUSING

Ms. Doly Begum: The Royal Canadian Legion hall contacted our office to get help for a senior, a veteran, living in a TCHC building. For months, his unit was horribly infested by bedbugs. The Legion offered to help pay rent for a new unit, furniture and carpeting to fix this situation. However, Toronto Community Housing informed that it could take up to one year for Ralph to be moved into another unit, despite the infestation.

Because of the terrible conditions, care workers stopped coming to his unit to take care of Ralph. The infestation got worse, which led him to stop eating. His family also offered to pay for the services to clean his unit, but TCHC could not relocate him or coordinate cleaning services. As soon as my office received the case, we started coordinating, but it was too late. Ralph was already suffering from severe anemia. He passed away.

Ralph George Musgrove, a senior veteran who honourably served his country, passed away from bedbug anemia in his home. This is the reality of many senior veterans, especially those living in our collapsing social housing system—lack of proper services, units falling apart or infested, decade-long wait-lists. How did Ontario, one of the most prosperous provinces in this country, let things get so bad? Why are our honourable veterans spending their final years in such painful and undignified conditions? For Ralph, for the thousands of veteran seniors across Ontario and for their families, we must do better.

1020

I would like to thank the Royal Canadian Legion halls for their commitment to helping Ralph, and to Darlene Khalfan, Ralph's daughter, for letting us remember her father in the Legislature today.

On November 11, we will honour and remember Ralph and all the veterans who sacrificed, served and continue to serve our country. Lest we forget.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Speaker, there's good news out of Perth-Wellington. Louise Marshall Hospital in Mount Forest recently completed a major expansion project. The new emergency room and ambulatory care is a major investment in rural health care. It is an investment in future generations who will live and work in our community—people who will need these modern health care facilities.

I was honoured to attend the grand opening on September 8. There are so many people to recognize for the success of this project: Mayor Andy Lennox, the township and county councils; Dale Small and the North Wellington Health Care board; outgoing CEO Steve Street and the new CEO, Angela Stanley; Dr. Chris Rowley and all the health care professionals and hospital staff; Bob McFarlane and the campaign committee and all those who contributed; the Louise Marshall Hospital Foundation; and the broader community.

Projects like these do not happen without community support. This project had that, and then some.

I've been pushing for this project ever since I was first elected, from opposition and from government. I'm grateful for the support we received along the way from the ministry and so many others. I especially want to thank our Minister of Health for approving this project and for her interest in it ever since her visit to the hospital eight years ago.

Again, I want to thank all those who worked so hard over so many years to make this project possible. Be proud of this accomplishment, and be proud of our community.

REMEMBRANCE DAY

M^{me} France Gélinas: On Thursday, November 11, multiple branches of the Royal Canadian Legion in my riding will be holding events to recognize Remembrance Day.

Residents of Nickel Belt have always selflessly answered the call, so we have many veterans from the Second World War all the way to the Afghanistan war. I want to encourage everyone to get out and show these service people the respect they have earned, putting their lives in harm's way for our safety, for our prosperity.

The Royal Canadian Legion's branches in Lockerby, in Capreol, in Chelmsford and in Falconbridge will hold in-person events starting at 10:45 on Thursday, November 11. Branch 503 in Onaping is starting their ceremony at 1:45 in the afternoon at the Onaping Community Centre, and the Sudbury Wolves will also do a ceremony at 7 o'clock this Friday night.

If this past year has taught us anything, it is the importance of people who sacrifice their safety to protect others. Our veterans have done this without question for decades, and I am honoured to recognize their sacrifices this Remembrance Day and every day. I hope you will join me.

Lest we forget. We will remember them.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. John Fraser: I want to say a few things about mandatory vaccinations. I know we've been going back and forth on this for several months now.

It's hard for me to understand why the government says that the same rules that apply in long-term care don't apply in hospitals or home care or in our schools or in child care. And the latest thing is the government doesn't want to put

COVID-19 vaccinations on the list of universal vaccines that we have in schools. That's a real head-scratcher as well.

Our kids are vulnerable. I think it's reasonable for parents to expect that the government is going to move to protect their kids in school. Those universal vaccines in schools have worked for 40 years, and we have a way of dealing with that, and families. But here's the thing that's being missed: The tools that are in that act allow for contact tracing and very rapid movement to prevent an outbreak, and guess who they protect the most? Not the kids who have been vaccinated but the kids who are unvaccinated. So the government is leaving this tool on the table, and that's the wrong thing to do. It's not good for families, and it's not good for kids.

KEVIN KEOHANE

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: On December 31, Kevin Keohane will be retiring as president and CEO of the CHEO Foundation. Kevin joined the foundation 20 years ago and he has served as president for the past nine years. During that time, the foundation has grown in substantial ways. It has continued to fulfill its important mandate of ensuring that every child in eastern Ontario can live their best life.

In 2001, when Kevin joined the foundation, they raised \$12 million. Over the 20 years since, donations have increased as the foundation team under Kevin's leadership sought innovative ways to reach donors. Last year, the foundation pulled in \$44 million. That means more kids receiving the critical care they deserve, more medical equipment, more world-class research and a renewal of the CHEO campus.

Now, Kevin would be the first to say that none of this would have been possible without the incredible community of support in Ottawa. Co-workers I spoke to all mentioned that at the heart of Kevin's leadership was a firm belief in the strength of the team, but what is undoubtedly true is that Kevin's humble and tireless leadership has helped steer the foundation to greater success. His devotion to helping kids, as well as his passion to tell CHEO's story, is evident to all who meet him.

As Kevin prepares to step down, I'd like to sincerely thank him on behalf of the thousands of kids and families who have benefited from CHEO's exceptional care. Enjoy your well-deserved retirement, and thank you from everyone in Ottawa.

HÔTEL-DIEU GRACE HEALTHCARE

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Like my colleague across the aisle, I, too, have a special accommodation today to recognize Janice Kaffer, the CEO and president of Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare in Windsor, who is retiring after 37 years in the health care field, mostly as a nurse.

Our region in Windsor and Essex county has been well served by Janice's leadership, especially during the last

several years and months throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Janice has been a champion for social justice and anti-poverty measures, as well as mental health supports for our community. She has spearheaded so many different services through Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare to support people in our community who have suffered and continue to suffer from mental health issues.

She has exemplified leadership in our community throughout COVID and led her team to supporting all regions of our community. We wish her well and thank her so much for that leadership, and also welcome and thank the new president of Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare, Bill Marra, who is the acting vice-president of Hôtel-Dieu and who has enormous experience in leadership as a previous city councillor.

Bill is a great friend of ours and we are so thankful for him accepting this new role and confident that he will lead our health care system into the future, post-pandemic, and support the needs of our entire community.

Best wishes to Janice, her family, and I know she's going to spend a lot more time with her grandkids. Best wishes to Bill as well as he enters into his new journey.

DIABETES

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: November is Diabetes Awareness Month. I want to recognize the challenges and the courage of over 1.5 million Ontarians living with diabetes and the many millions of Ontarians with pre-diabetes.

This year also mark a global milestone in the diabetes world as this is the centennial anniversary of the discovery of insulin right here in Ontario. The discovery of insulin has saved millions of lives around the world.

Thankfully, we have come a long way in these 100 years and innovative health technologies have drastically improved the lives of Ontarians with diabetes. One of these game-changing technologies that the Ontario government invested in in 2019 has been the FreeStyle Libre flash glucose monitoring system, allowing accessing of glucose data in real time by scanning with a swipe of your phone, and has enabled Ontarians with diabetes to receive care through remote patient monitoring and virtual diabetes care. This is the care of the future.

1030

Ontario is only one of the first provinces providing flash glucose monitoring technology. The province also has the most widespread access in Canada. That's something all members of this Legislature should be proud of, Mr. Speaker. We are the leader in Canada, and I'm confident that we will continue to lead in helping Ontarians with diabetes.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Before I ask for oral questions, I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 101(c), changes have been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Sabawy assumes ballot item

number 16 and Mr. Pettapiece assumes ballot item number 18.

QUESTION PERIOD

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question is for the Premier. The Premier's three-year-long low-wage policy has hurt so many workers in this province. It has been three years that this low-wage policy has been in place, and what we know about this Premier is that at least in the past, he has called the \$15 minimum wage a "job killer."

Meanwhile, the cost of everything is going up: Auto insurance is up, hydro is up, gas is up, milk is going up by 8% and butter is going up by 12%. Everything is going up but people's wages. Under this Premier, literally the price of everything has gone through the roof. So why has this Premier stubbornly stuck by his low-wage policy for three long years, hurting so many workers?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply on behalf of the government, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Actually, it's just the opposite. What we set out to do in 2018 was to rebuild the Ontario economy so that it would work for all Ontarians.

Look, in 2018, I think everybody would acknowledge that Ontario was a province in decline. We were losing thousands of jobs. High electricity rates were forcing small, medium and large job creators to make investments in other parts of the country—and in other parts of North America, frankly. But because of the hard work of this government, we're seeing those jobs start to come back, despite the fact that we are battling a global health and economic crisis. We're seeing those jobs start to come back to the province of Ontario, and we are very excited about that.

But the Leader of the Opposition is correct: We do understand how tough it is. The prices of goods are starting to increase. Inflation is a problem. It is something that we continue to fight against every day. It's something that we started off in 2018, saying it was too expensive for the people of the province of Ontario to live here because of those high prices. That's why we started immediately to—

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

Supplementary question?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Workers have been robbed of over \$5,000 since this Premier's low-wage policy was enacted three years ago. A \$15 minimum wage is not going to make up for those losses and that hardship. Meanwhile, the Premier's buddy, this very government House leader, just got a raise of \$27,000—by the way, that's a raise of \$13 an hour.

The Premier's low-wage policy has hurt workers; it's very, very clear. It has robbed them of more than \$5,000—\$5,300, in fact—since it started three years ago. Why is the government and why is the Premier still short-changing workers?

Hon. Paul Calandra: As I said, it's just the opposite, Speaker. When we took power, when we took office in the province of Ontario, Ontario was in the midst of one of the largest declines that it had had in generations. We had lost some 300,000 manufacturing jobs in the province of Ontario. The once economic engine of this country, one of the most powerful economies in all of North America, had been brought to its knees by the high cost of electricity, by overregulation that had left Ontario one of the most overregulated jurisdictions in North America.

We knew we had to do something right away to bring those jobs back to Ontario. That's why we set out to reduce taxes for the people of the province of Ontario. To encourage business development, we cut taxes for our small, medium and large job creators. We cut hydro prices so that there would be an incentive to invest here in Ontario. Again, the hard work of the Minister of Economic Development helped to ensure that people wanted to invest here. The hard work of the Minister of Health made this an important jurisdiction that people could rely on. The massive investments that we are making in infrastructure will make jobs for generations of Ontarians—

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

Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, we all saw what the government did. One of the first things they did was decide to attack workers. That's what they did three years ago: They took away the minimum wage increase. They took away their paid sick days. That's what this government did.

When housing is more expensive, transportation is more expensive, food costs are more expensive—so much more is going up here in the province of Ontario, and the Premier has literally taken \$5,300 out of the pockets of workers over the last three years. A \$15 minimum wage is simply not going to cut it. It would take a minimum wage of at least \$17 just to make up for what this government took out of the pockets of workers.

My question is, the Premier has all but admitted that he was wrong to take away the minimum wage increase three years ago. He was wrong to implement a low-wage policy then. Why is he not announcing today a minimum wage that at least puts back in the pockets of working people what this Premier took out?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The Leader of the Opposition is obviously making it up on the fly. We were right in 2018 when we said the Ontario economy needed help. We were right to focus on reducing electricity prices. We were right to focus on eliminating useless and outdated regulations. How do I know we were right? Because jobs started coming back to the province of Ontario in numbers that we hadn't seen for generations.

The Leader of the Opposition was wrong when she insisted that we have a carbon tax that would cost the people of the province of Ontario hundreds of dollars—a tax that she still supports. The Leader of the Opposition was wrong when she and her friends in the Liberal Party voted against tax cuts for our small, medium and large job

creators. The Leader of the Opposition was wrong when she voted against important measures that the Minister of Education brought in to make child care more affordable. The Leader of the Opposition was wrong when she voted against subways. She was wrong when she voted against long-term-care investments. She was wrong when she voted against health care—

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The next question.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The House leader's revisionist look at the history of this government's performance is something else; I can tell you that.

My next question is actually for the Premier. It's really clear that nurses and health care workers are leaving in droves because of this government's low-wage policies. That's what's happening in our province. It's not vaccine policy that's driving nurses out of their profession; it's that they are overworked and underpaid and undervalued by their government. Bill 124 made sure of that, Speaker. But they deserve, at the very least, the safest possible workplaces that we can give them.

Weeks ago, the Premier asked for advice on what to do about vaccine mandates in health care. Lo and behold, yesterday, the Minister of Health admitted, acknowledged that she had all the information needed for the government to make the decision. My question is, when will the Premier make a decision on mandatory vaccines for health care and education workers?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the Leader of the Opposition for the question. This is an important question, because we've seen what's happened in other jurisdictions that have brought forward mandatory vaccination policies. In British Columbia just recently, they've had to cancel some of the surgeries that had already been postponed because of COVID-19, because there were 4,000 workers that were going to be put on leave. We don't want to see that happen in Ontario. That is why the Premier sent out the letter.

We are reviewing the responses right now to ensure that, whatever determination is made, we protect the health and well-being of everyone in Ontario, whether it's preventing COVID or taking care of people who need to have those surgeries. They've waited long enough. They need to have those surgeries and we need to make sure that we have sufficient health human resources to care for them.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The science table already weighed in quite some time ago. The science table weighed in on October 19. We're now well into November, Speaker.

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Mandatory vaccine policies protect health care workers. They protect patients. They protect visitors. They protect everyone. They will further protect our health care workers from getting sick. The science table said, “Requiring that hospital workers be vaccinated is an evidence-based policy that protects Ontarians.”

So my question, again, is will the Premier and the minister actually listen to the advice that they’re getting from the science table and from others who are telling them that vaccine mandates in health care and education are necessary to keep Ontarians safe?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Our government has been listening to the science and the evidence since this pandemic began well over a year ago—20 months ago, virtually. We’ve been listening to what the science advisory table has to say. We’ve been listening to the Chief Medical Officer of Health. We’re listening to experts across the province. We’re listening to people who are on the ground in the province: the CEOs of hospitals and of different health organizations. What the recommendation is, is that everyone should receive a vaccination. That is what we’ve been saying since day one. We are increasing the numbers. Over 88.2% of the population of Ontario has now received a first dose; 84.5% a second dose.

But there are other considerations that come into play here as well, and that is the health human resource issue, which has been strained as a result of COVID-19. It is our obligation and our responsibility to make sure that we are going to have sufficient health human resources to take care of all of the people in our hospitals who need care.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Premier asked for advice by October 19. The Ontario Hospital Association has weighed in, as has the science table, which I’ve already mentioned, but this government has never taken decisive action during this pandemic. We saw it with the Hunger Games rollout of the vaccines when they arrived in our province. We still see it, with no concrete plan for children, knowing that the vaccine is coming our way for young ones. The advice is in, but all that Ontario is missing is a government that takes action, that takes decisive action. That’s what we’re missing.

My question is, when will this government finally take action and mandate the vaccines that their experts are telling them they should be doing in hospitals and in education? It needs to be done, Speaker. When will they do it?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Please stop the clock. There are some constant interjections coming from the government side. It’s very distracting. I’m trying to listen to the person who has the floor and has the question. It’s difficult to tell who’s interjecting when people are wearing masks. I would ask all of you to please show respect for your colleague in the House and allow me to hear the person who has the floor.

Please start the clock. Minister of Health to respond.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Decisive action has been taken by this government at every step along the way during this pandemic, starting with building up our testing strategy, building up our assessment centres, making sure that we tested people and making sure that we vaccinated people.

Ontario has one of the highest vaccination rates in the world and that is because of the people of Ontario coming forward to take these vaccines, to make sure that we can vaccinate people in every part of this province. With 88.2% of people having had a first-dose vaccine and 84.5% having had the second dose, clearly there is a successful plan in place. And clearly, there is a successful plan ready to go for children aged five to 11.

The other issue that we’re dealing with, and we need to deal with this very cautiously, is the issue of, if we bring in a mandatory vaccination program, what will be the effect of on our health human resources? That is the responsible step to take, to make sure that people who are in need, wherever they are in the province of Ontario, will—

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

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier. A public Facebook post by the Silver Lakes golf course dated March 23, 2021, reveals that the previous week, the golf course hosted the Minister of Transportation as well as the Associate Minister of Transportation, whose father is a co-owner of this golf course. At the time, this golf course was directly in the path of the proposed Bradford Bypass highway. But one month later, the ministry revealed a route change that spared the golf course.

There is no clear reason or rationale as to why the minister and the associate minister would be at this golf course at the same time. Why was the associate minister with the Minister of Transportation at the site of this proposed highway if he wasn’t lobbying for his father’s business? Will somebody on that side of the House recognize how inappropriate this is?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: That sounds like a Taras Natyshak question. She’s taking your question, Taras.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. The Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries will come to order.

Please start the clock. Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I rise and I’m pleased to have the opportunity to address the member opposite’s question and her comment. Let me be clear: Minister Cho has been screened from the file pertaining to the Bradford Bypass since his election in 2018. Neither myself nor anyone in my office has had any conversations with Minister Cho about the Bradford Bypass.

But let me also be clear: Minister Cho and his family, immigrants to Canada, have worked hard to contribute greatly to our community, and they are success stories that should be celebrated. The depictions of the Chos as anything but success stories are unacceptable, and you should be ashamed of yourself.

Congestion is a real problem. It robs people of time with their families, it robs workers of productive time at work and it makes it harder for farmers to get their goods to market. It also contributes to GHG emissions. The opposition wants to put its hand in the—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member will take her seat. I'll remind all members to make their comments through the Chair.

Supplementary question.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm not going to take any lessons from you on what you can be ashamed of and what stands as ethical actions in the province of Ontario—no way.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to remind the members again to make their comments through the Chair.

The member from Waterloo has the floor.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Ontarians now know that the main beneficiaries of this \$1.5-billion, four-to-six-lane highway through the greenbelt are well-connected landowners with political and donor ties to the PC Party of Ontario. One of these beneficiaries is the father of the Associate Minister of Transportation, who himself has donated over \$10,000 to the PC Party since 2016. These are facts. I said it yesterday and I will say it again: This reeks.

With all the transportation infrastructure projects that need funding in this province, why is the Premier prioritizing destructive and unnecessary highways through our greenbelt, whose main beneficiaries happen to be the Premier's buddies and donors? Who are you choosing in this decision-making process? Because we see it very clearly.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Once again, make your comments through the Chair, please.

Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Mr. Speaker, the opposition doesn't see it. The main beneficiaries of this highway and other new highways are the drivers of Ontario. Commuters in York region and Simcoe county have been calling on governments to build the Bradford Bypass for decades. Congestion is a real problem, and members of the opposition just want to keep their heads in the sand and not recognize this reality that plagues people—drivers, commuters, families, workers, farmers. It has been a problem for decades. It's a problem today. As Ontario welcomes millions of new people every five years, the problem is only going to get worse.

Our government doesn't shy away from taking decisions that will benefit Ontarians. That's why we're going to build the Bradford Bypass and the 413.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Donna Skelly: Since 2008, we have been hearing calls to increase the average daily direct care received by residents to four hours. Many of my constituents were disappointed that from 2009 to 2018, the Liberal government only managed to increase the average of daily direct care by 22 minutes per day. Speaker, that is just not good enough.

Throughout the pandemic, I have seen first-hand all of the great work that nurses and PSWs working in long-term care have done in my riding of Flamborough–Glanbrook and right across Ontario. Front-line health care workers, residents and families are tired of past governments that were all talk and no action. Will the Minister of Long-Term Care tell this House what he is doing to ensure that our residents receive the care they deserve?

Hon. Rod Phillips: I'd like to thank the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook for that question and the work she does for her constituents. The member is right: Our government has now a legislated commitment in the legislation I proposed to four hours of care. That means that instead of 22 minutes, which was the experience of the nine years before we were in government, care will improve by one hour and 22 minutes. That means we need to hire 27,000 new PSWs, new nurses for our long-term-care homes.

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Recently, we announced the first step towards that: \$270 million to hire the first 4,050 new long-term-care staff. That includes \$1.5 million this year just in the riding of Flamborough–Glanbrook. That will be raised to \$9 million annually by 2024.

This government realizes that we need to build a system that supports our seniors. We understand that the need for staff is critical among that, and that's why it's such an important part of our plan to fix long-term care.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: This newly hired staff will go a long way to providing quality care to our residents in long-term care across Ontario and right in my riding of Flamborough–Glanbrook.

While it's great to have investments like this in place to hire new staff, we need to make sure that we can retain this staff. It's vital that we have enough staff to deliver high-quality care to residents. The best way to do this is to provide opportunities for long-term-care staff to advance the careers in their field.

Speaker, does the minister have a plan to support the training and advancement of long-term-care staff and ensure we can retain this staff?

Hon. Rod Phillips: Again, I thank the member for her question. She is right: We need to protect the progress we're making by making sure that there are staff available.

That's why last week, with the Minister of Colleges and Universities, we announced \$100 million to support two new, innovative programs to train thousands of PSWs and registered practical nurses to move up to the next step in their career ladder.

The first initiative is partnering with WeRPN and the Ministry of Health to provide tuition support for eligible PSWs and RPNs who wish to become either RPNs or RNs, respectively. We're also partnering with colleges in Ontario and the Ministry of Colleges to increase access to nursing programs and create 500 additional enrolments.

The CEO of WeRPN, Dianne Martin, said, "WeRPN is thrilled to collaborate with government to create the

BEGIN initiative that will give PSWs and RPNs new opportunities to grow their careers while expanding Ontario's nursing workforce." This is just one of the many initiatives and investments we're making to make sure that our seniors receive the care that they deserve.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. The Premier's personal lawyer Gavin Tighe was up in court again last week, defending the Premier's failed attempt to appoint his long-time friend Ron Taverner as OPP commissioner. We all remember Ron Taverner in here.

Speaker, Mr. Tighe, you'll remember, is a close ally of the Premier and was a high-profile recipient of another gravy train appointment in 2018. But what we know now is that this guy has been raking in public money for years. Public accounts has revealed that Mr. Tighe's law firm, Gardiner Roberts, has made \$771,000 since the Premier was elected. That's three quarters of a million dollars, paid for by the people of Ontario.

Can the Premier explain how exactly he has managed to find this staggering amount for his buddy while the people across Ontario have lost wages, have lost their jobs and have lost their livelihoods?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply on behalf of the government, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think the important part of that question is the fact that we are starting to see the Ontario economy rebound. As I said earlier on, in 2018 we saw a province that was in decline—a province that was in decline, ostensibly, because of the years that the Liberals and NDP shared in office. They failed to make important investments. They overregulated the province. They caused hydro and electricity rates to skyrocket and forced manufacturers, small, medium and large job creators, to leave in droves, losing 300,000 jobs in the process.

We decided to do things differently. That's why the Minister of Labour has put a focus on the skilled trades. They, of course, voted against those important initiatives. That's why we're bringing in important transit and transportation initiatives: to bring the economy, to get it moving. They, of course, have voted against that. We heard about gridlock in the city of Toronto. New subways: They voted against them. The subway for York region: We've long been waiting for a subway in York region. They voted against it. Highways in the member's own riding: They voted against them.

So when it comes to creating jobs and economic growth, Mr. Speaker, I know that the people of Ontario can trust this side of the House and not—

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

Supplementary question?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Speaker, when no reasonable answer can be given by the government House leader to a very flagrant abuse of public tax dollars, the government House leader deflects. That is his MO. Maybe that's why

he just got a \$27,000-a-year pay raise, because that's what he seems to be best at.

Speaker, the Premier's low-wage policy for workers affects everyone, like nurses, water safety mechanics and snowplow operators, but we now know that that low-wage policy doesn't extend to the Premier's buddies, like Gavin Tighe, who is hauled into court every time the Premier lands himself in hot water, which is a lot. Cash has flowed freely to the Premier's buddy's law firm while everyday Ontarians have had to struggle to make ends meet. It would take a minimum wage worker, at \$15 an hour, more than 24 years to earn what the Premier's buddy's law firm has raked in in three years. Why are the only people that have benefited from the Premier's generosity his buddies—the wealthy lawyers, developers and corporate insiders?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think that question in itself highlights why nobody takes that member seriously. In fact, in his own community, when they wanted to talk about transit and transportation and the widening of the roads, they didn't actually go to that member, they went to another member. When they wanted to talk about a new hospital for that community, something that this member failed on for years, they actually came to this side of the House and said, "Can you get us a new hospital?" and we got them that new hospital. The Minister of Transportation got them an expanded highway, and it's ostensibly because they know that this member really adds no value to the community.

Now, when you talk about the important things that are happening in the economy, we have brought jobs and economic growth back to the province of Ontario—

Interjections.

Hon. Paul Calandra: And I know it hurts them. I know it hurts them, Speaker. You hear them catcalling across because they are so bankrupt of ideas, just as bankrupt as the province was when they shared power with the Liberals. We've turned the corner. It upsets them, but it makes us happy and it will make Ontario even more prosperous.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Rick Nicholls: My question is to the Minister of Health. Minister, you've stated that no child has been vaccinated without having had parental consent. You've also stated that the side effects to the vaccines are being reported. Well, I've received correspondence informing me of some very disturbing news:

—severe skin blistering after having his second shot, but his doctor wouldn't report it to VAERS;

—a teenage daughter received the vaccine without the mother giving consent; and

—recently, a 54-year-old doctor died in his sleep after receiving his third Pfizer dose, a booster.

Many who had COVID chose not to seek hospitalized treatment for fear that they would be given remdesivir, a drug recommended by the Ontario science table for hospitalized patients at over \$3,000 per treatment, yet the

World Health Organization cautioned against the use of the drug as being ineffective, plus it had significant renal and liver toxicity. They also feared being put on ventilators, with high risk of death.

My question is, Minister, what are you willing to do to address these inconsistencies in reporting and concerns about pharmaceutical treatments that could cause more harm than good?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Speaker, what I would say, through you to the member, is vaccination against COVID is your best protection. It will save your life. It will save your life, and we've seen that by the countless millions of Ontarians who have already received the vaccine. We're recommending it for everyone. We're preparing for children aged five to 11 to receive the vaccines, but no one will receive a vaccine without it going through very careful scrutiny.

These vaccines have been approved by the World Health Organization, the Food and Drug Administration in the US, Health Canada and the National Advisory Committee on Immunization. All of those organizations have indicated that it is far safer for you to receive the vaccine because it will prevent you, in most cases, from being hospitalized and being in intensive care. But ultimately, what's most important is they will save your life. That's what's most important.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Back to the minister: I've been in contact with a number of medical experts in Ontario and the US who are widely accredited in their fields of expertise. They've expressed their willingness to make themselves available for a publicly accessible discussion via Zoom to discuss effective early treatment for and prophylaxis measures against COVID-19, to reduce the risk of hospitalization and death and risk of long COVID.

Minister, the other day I asked you to welcome an open debate that engaged doctors on both sides of the vaccine issue and the therapeutics for early outpatient treatment of COVID. Many face unemployment because they are hesitant to receive the vaccines, creating a labour crisis in all sectors, including health care.

So, Minister Elliott, would you agree to facilitate this discussion between your senior health team officials and engage these individuals on this topic of public interest? Overall, it will give our public health officials an excellent opportunity to inform the public about their views on this topic and to exchange ideas of interest for the benefit of all.

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The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Again, members, please make your comments through the Chair.

Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: The short answer to your question is no. It is very commonly accepted in Ontario by medical advisers that we're speaking to, by the Ontario Medical Association, by our Chief Medical Officer of Health, by the science advisory table that the best way to deal with COVID-19, to protect your health, the health of

your loved ones, the health of your community is to receive the vaccine. There is no other answer to that. It will save your life.

ECONOMIC REOPENING AND RECOVERY

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is to the Minister of Health. This pandemic has tested us, and many Ontarians are still searching for the light at the end of the tunnel. With vaccination numbers rising and key health indicators improving, I've heard from many constituents in Whitby who are eager to get back to some of their pre-pandemic routines.

Could the Minister of Health please tell us how the government plans to safely reopen Ontario while managing COVID-19 for the long term?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member from Whitby for your question and for your excellent representation of the residents of Whitby.

Ontario is doing well compared to other jurisdictions, thanks to the continued efforts of Ontarians and our government's cautious, phased approach to reopening. Because of this, we are now in a position where we have a plan for lifting public health and workplace safety measures in Ontario.

Together in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, we released a plan to safely reopen Ontario and manage COVID-19 for the long term, which outlines the province's gradual approach to lifting remaining public health and workplace safety measures by March 2022. This plan is built for the long term and it will guide us safely through the winter and out of this pandemic while avoiding lockdowns and ensuring that we don't lose the hard-fought gains we have already made.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Back to the Minister of Health: We know the challenges that Ontarians have faced throughout the pandemic. Ontarians are counting on the government to do everything possible to ensure a cautious approach so that no business will have to close their doors due to another lockdown.

Many of my constituents are still eager to know more and have questions about the plan to reopen. Can the minister tell us when we can expect to move forward with the next phase?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Our government's plan is based on a phased approach and will be guided by the ongoing assessment and monitoring of key public health indicators and health care indicators—such as the identification of any new COVID-19 variants, increases in hospitalizations and ICU capacity, and rapid increases in transmission—to ensure that public health and workplace safety measures are lifted safely and carefully. We know that we still need to be vigilant and want to make sure we don't lose these hard-fought gains.

With the plan having begun on October 25 and with the lifting of capacity limits in most settings, in the absence of concerning trends in public health and health care, we will

continue on to the second phase on November 15. Furthermore, we are happy to have been able to announce that based on key health indicators continuing to improve, by March 28, 2022, we intend to lift remaining public health and workplace safety measures.

VETERANS

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: My question is to the Premier. The federal Veterans Affairs Canada provides a disability award to any veteran who applies after suffering a debilitating injury, such as the loss of a limb. But Ontario has a practice of taking this money from the veterans who need it the most, clawing back these funds from the injured veterans who need Ontario's social programs that provide basic needs like housing support. This is because Ontario considers this one-time award for their permanent injury as income.

No veteran should go to bed hungry at night. No veteran should fear the loss of the roof over their head. Will the Premier make this right by, today, ending the clawback policy for disability awards in Ontario?

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

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Thank you to the member opposite for this question. I know that this is something that she is incredibly passionate about, and I thank her and her family for their service to our country.

Our veterans have made tremendous sacrifices to make our country and province what it is today, and we need to be there for our veterans when they need us. That's why our government passed a new law last year to expand the Soldiers' Aid Commission program to include all Ontario veterans and their families, regardless of when and where they served.

This was the first meaningful change in their mandate after years of neglect by previous governments which saw the commission's financial assistance constrained to a very limited group of former servicemen and -women. I'm pleased to add that to support this expanded mandate, the commission's funding has been increased by about 600% to \$1.55 million each year.

Our Premier and our government will continue to stand behind every man and woman who has served in our armed forces.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I did stand here last year and I asked for the award that was given because I put pressure on this government, but the Royal Canadian Legion Ontario Command operates a program that everyone in this chamber will agree does important work, Operation: Leave the Streets Behind.

The provincial president wrote a letter last week outlining clearly what is at risk with this practice of treating a disability award as income. It can lead to some low-income veterans becoming homeless. It is shameful to consider that a veteran's physically debilitating loss would result in homelessness. No veteran should have to worry that the Ontario provincial government will claw back

their basic needs like shelter until their disability award is spent.

Will the Premier end this shameful practice of clawing back injured veterans' disability awards and honour our veterans ahead of Remembrance Day, not with ceremonies alone but with actions that ensure injured veterans who are struggling with poverty continue receiving assistance for basic needs like food and shelter?

Do the right thing. Make the change today.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciate the supplementary question. I hope that all members of this House will join in supporting the Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism's new bill to ensure mandatory policies are in place that allow workers to wear poppies, because I know we all want to recognize the valiant sacrifice of our brave men and women in our armed forces.

I'd like to speak a little bit about the Soldiers' Aid Commission and how it provides assistance for veterans and their families. The Soldiers' Aid Commission provides veterans and their families up to \$2,000 over a 12-month period for household goods like health-related items, hearing aids, glasses, prescriptions and dental needs; home-related items, like repairs, moving costs, replacement and repair of roof and furnace; specialized equipment like assistive devices, wheelchairs, personal items and employment-related supports.

We're going to continue to support our seniors through this expanded mandate of the Soldiers' Aid Commission, and we look forward to working with all members of this House to make sure—

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

The next question?

LAND USE PLANNING

M^{me} Lucille Collard: My question is for the Premier. Good governance is about making responsible investments where investments are needed. Our schools definitely need more investment, and there is a backlog to catch up with.

School boards submitted their priorities for new infrastructure back in the spring, and there is still no approval for investments, yet this government is still planning on spending \$6 billion on Highway 413 that will destroy the environment and provide no relief. The Liberal Party has committed to spending that money on new education infrastructure, where the investment is needed.

What is the Premier's reasoning for spending billions on a highway that nobody wants, except for a few developers and speculators, instead of on our education system?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to thank the member opposite for the question. I will remind the member that under the former Liberal government, the repair backlog in Ontario schools rose to \$15 billion, creating a maintenance backlog that children in every region of Ontario are paying the price for today. But thanks to the leadership of our Premier and the investments on an

annual basis of \$500 million, we are remediating that backlog. We are investing in new schools every single year, net new schools that are being added to the province that are modern, that are accessible, that are Internet connected, that provide STEM education opportunities that are critical to our future prosperity.

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We've also invested \$1.6 billion, of which 600 million additional dollars was provided to improve the air standards, the ventilation of those schools.

It's not an either/or proposition. We can build infrastructure for the next decade for future growth while continuing to improve the schools that our children depend on, now and into the future.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: If you build it, they will come. This rule of transportation planning is the reason why adding new lanes almost never results in less congestion.

The government speaks as if it is inevitable that new residents in the 905 region will need to drive on highways, but that's not taking into consideration the impact of the pandemic and the fact that people may not need to commute as much to urban centres for work as we adapt our ways of living. Rush hour is not the same. People are working from home.

Rail transport is the most environmentally friendly way to travel. The greenhouse effect of gas emissions per kilometre on railway transport is 80% less than cars. If the government would instead prioritize rail travel, residents of these areas would be able to use this greener alternative.

What is the government's plan to get people out of cars and into trains?

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

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I thank the member opposite for the question.

Our government has the most ambitious transportation plan that has ever been unveiled in Ontario. We have a \$28.5-billion new subway plan for the GTA. We have the largest expansion of GO rail in Ontario's history. We have a massive infrastructure plan that's going to get people out of their cars onto rail and into subways.

We also understand that we do need new roads. We're welcoming millions of new people to this province over the next few years, and we need roads for our trucks to get our goods to market.

Commuters spend hours idling in traffic. That increases greenhouse gas emissions and it reduces people's quality of life. While members of the opposition want to pretend like congestion isn't a problem today and it won't be a problem tomorrow, our government is committed to doing what we can to improve the quality of life of Ontarians.

SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Community Living organizations in my riding do incredible and compassionate work

to serve our loved ones with varying levels of abilities every day. I'm grateful for their work and commitment. Shockingly, under the previous government, housing support for people with disabilities was unaffordable and scarce and left many unsupported once they transitioned out of childhood support, putting strain onto them and their families.

There's a need for more independence and housing that will allow people the freedom they want and deserve. Would the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services tell us what this government is doing to help people with disabilities achieve greater independence in living?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa West–Nepean and parliamentary assistant to reply.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Thank you to the member for Perth–Wellington for that question. I know that he has been a passionate advocate for some of our most vulnerable citizens throughout his time in office.

Our government recently released Journey to Belonging: Choice and Inclusion, which is our long-term plan for developmental services reform. Part of that plan for developmental services reform includes ensuring that individuals are supported to find suitable housing in their communities. These supports are especially needed for those who may be transitioning to the adult system or who are living with aging family members.

That's why our government also invested an additional \$13 million to help people with developmental disabilities access more inclusive housing options in the community and to expand the Adult Protective Service Worker program to support more independent living. This investment will mean more people with a developmental disability can receive the assistance they need to find an accessible and affordable home.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Speaker, I'm sure we've all heard from hundreds of people around Ontario on this issue, and their message is clear: They need access to support and services that are available, easier to understand and more flexible to meet individual needs.

People have said that it can be confusing trying to navigate support from multiple government programs. People are frustrated waiting for developmental services because they don't know what support they can expect to receive and when. Can the minister tell this House how this program will make sure these concerns won't fall on deaf ears, as they did with the previous government?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciate the supplemental question from my colleague. The member is right when he points out that this \$13-million investment aligns with the goals of Journey to Belonging. We're moving quickly to improve current supports and streamline processes for those accessing services, by simplifying the assessment process, improving Passport to better address people's needs, building skilled staff capacity and introducing initiatives that will support individuals through natural life transitions such as into school or adulthood. When fully implemented, this investment will see more than 1,200

people with developmental disabilities receiving the help they need to find accessible and affordable housing.

Speaker, as our government makes both immediate and long-term improvements to developmental services in Ontario, we will continue to engage our service partners, individuals with lived experiences and families on how we can—

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

Next question.

TREATIES RECOGNITION

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Speaker.

Remarks in Oji-Cree.

I come from Treaty 9 territory. Our lands are resource-rich but the quality of basic infrastructure—water, health care and education—is poor. This government has said it's open for business to develop the Ring of Fire in Treaty 9 territories, promising benefits for all those who make agreements with the province. But, you see, Speaker, we already made that deal under Treaty 9.

My question to you is how do you intend to honour any new agreements, given that Ontario does not honour its responsibilities in Treaty 9?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the honourable gentleman. The Ring of Fire offers an enormous opportunity for the people of the province of Ontario and our First Nations who will be a very, very important partner.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: “Our” First Nations?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I apologize; they're not our First Nations. First Nations—I do apologize to the member for that.

A very important partner in this, Mr. Speaker—the member is absolutely correct. This could provide the province of Ontario with billions of dollars in economic activity. We've heard the Minister of Economic Development talk about how important the Ring of Fire is to bringing on board some of those other investments in electric vehicles.

Of course, we're going to have to work not only with First Nations but with other partners in the area, and I'm very happy to hear the honourable member talk about this because he and all of his colleagues will be equally important in helping us open up this area.

He's correct; we waited for far too long. The fact that this resource has been sitting there for far too long I think is just another indication of how ill-prepared the previous Liberal government was to open up the economy over 15 years. We're getting the job done.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Speaker, I have children as young as eight years old—I see them emotional, crying. They just want clean drinking water. The treaties were intended to benefit all parties, but many First Nations' people struggle

in Third World conditions since these agreements were made. Yet mining and logging continue to happen in these territories.

With the economy still recovering, we hear that the development of the Far North is a major part of Ontario's recovery plan. I want to be clear, Speaker: This government has no right to request development on our treaty territories without a plan to improve baseline necessities like water and infrastructure.

I would like to know how the Premier plans to honour Ontario's treaty obligation to the people of Treaty 9 before allowing development.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, Speaker: by working with First Nations in the area and other partners in the area. We understand fully that this is a resource that cannot be developed if we do not all work together.

The member raises very important points when it comes to education and when it comes to basic infrastructure in the area. We're making those investments. A number of these remote and rural communities still don't have access to high-speed Internet. We're making that investment to ensure that even rural and remote communities across this province will have high-speed Internet.

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We're making the investments by working with community leaders to ensure that there are roads so that we can access the Ring of Fire and the thousands of jobs and the billions of dollars in economic activity that will come with it. We are very excited by this opportunity. I think all Ontarians are disappointed that it has taken so long to get here. This is a resource that we knew existed and should have been productive for the people of the province of Ontario generations ago. We're getting the job done, but we will work very closely with First Nations, because they have to be a partner in this.

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. A 2014 transportation study showed that the Bradford Bypass poses significant risk to communities and the environment. It will pave over 17 hectares of the Holland Marsh, destroy 39 hectares of wildlife habitat, 10 hectares of provincially significant wetlands, cause groundwater contamination and put Lake Simcoe and the greenbelt at risk—all while increasing climate pollution by 87 million kilograms a year.

The Premier will make significant alterations to his transportation schemes to protect a golf course. My question is, will the Premier make alterations to his highway schemes—which primarily benefit wealthy land speculators—so that we can protect the Holland Marsh, Lake Simcoe and the greenbelt, by cancelling the Bradford Bypass?

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

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I thank the member opposite for the question. Let's be very clear: With respect

to the Bradford Bypass, we are not reducing environmental protections. Current and future work on the Bradford Bypass will continue to be subject to all conditions under Ontario's robust environmental assessment process.

The first environmental assessment was done back in 2003. Many proponents of the Bradford Bypass said, "We've already got an EA in place. We don't need to redo one." But our government said, "No, we need to make sure that all the steps are followed." Therefore, we could resume the EA process and we are committed to seeing it through.

We must alleviate congestion before it gets worse for commuters and for the environment. The member opposite knows full well the impact of congestion on our environment. That's why we're committed to getting the Bradford Bypass built in an environmentally sustainable way.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, if the government had any credibility on reducing commute times, they would take the \$6 billion to \$12 billion they're planning on putting into the Bradford Bypass and Highway 413 and increase their investment in regional transit. They would increase the amount of investment they're making in affordable housing within existing urban boundaries so people don't have to move an hour away from their work just to be able to afford to find a place to live.

In a previous answer, the minister said, "We want to help farmers get their product to market." Well, then we need to not pave over farmland—the 2,000 acres of farmland that the 413 will pave over, not to mention all the sprawl it is going to unleash.

Will the government say yes to protecting Lake Simcoe, yes to protecting wetlands, yes to protecting prime farmland and yes to protecting all the jobs in the food and farming sector by saying no to these destructive highway projects?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: The member opposite talks about credibility on the environmental record. Well, I would like to ask the member opposite why he voted against our \$28.5-billion subway plan for the GTA. Why did the member opposite vote against our budget that funded the largest GO rail expansion in Ontario's history?

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to getting drivers off the road and reducing GHG emissions. We have the largest transit infrastructure plan in North America today. Our government is incredibly proud of our record on public transit, but we also know how important it is to address congestion in Ontario. Previous governments did not have the will to do so, but we believe that it is essential to improving people's quality of life. To reduce congestion time, we need to build new infrastructure, and that's exactly what we're going to do.

ÉDUCATION POSTSECONDAIRE DE LANGUE FRANÇAISE

M. Jamie West: Ma question est pour la ministre des Affaires francophones.

Les membres de la communauté francophone du Nord-Est se sentent ignorés. Ils font face à beaucoup de problèmes et de stress depuis que l'Université Laurentienne a déclaré faillite.

La direction de l'Université de Sudbury aimerait pouvoir rencontrer la ministre, mais le gouvernement conservateur ne retourne ni leur appel, ni leur lettre. Personne du gouvernement veut leur rencontrer ou leur parler. L'Université de Sudbury ne fait pas partie du processus de la LACC.

Monsieur le Président, quand est-ce que la ministre va prendre rendez-vous avec l'Université de Sudbury pour une rencontre?

L'hon. Caroline Mulroney: Je remercie le membre pour sa question. Bien sûr, il est très inquiétant que l'Université Laurentienne se soit retrouvée dans une situation où des mesures aussi radicales et immédiates sont nécessaires pour assurer sa viabilité à long terme.

Nous travaillons avec le ministère des Collèges et Universités pour assurer la pérennité de la programmation postsecondaire francophone dans le Nord. Mais comme le membre de l'opposition le sait très bien, le gouvernement continue de suivre de près la procédure de la LACC. Le gouvernement a clairement indiqué qu'il sera là pour soutenir l'éducation postsecondaire francophone à Sudbury et dans le nord de l'Ontario lorsque la Laurentienne sortira de la LACC.

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

M. Jamie West: Après mon élection en 2018, j'ai commencé à apprendre le français. J'ai été capable de lire mon premier livre en français cet été. C'était au sujet de l'histoire de ma ville. Je peux vous dire que les francophones de Sudbury ont dû se battre pour le droit d'avoir des écoles élémentaires, secondaires et des collèges qui sont gouvernés par, pour et avec les francophones.

Maintenant, la communauté francophone est unie et parle d'une seule voix. Elle veut que l'Université de Sudbury devienne une université par, pour et avec les francophones.

Ma question est simple : Est-ce que la ministre appuie l'Université de Sudbury par, pour et avec les francophones?

L'hon. Caroline Mulroney: J'aimerais féliciter le membre de l'opposition pour son travail sur son français, qui est vraiment excellent.

Monsieur le Président, j'ai lu le plan d'affaires de l'Université de Sudbury et je vais travailler avec la ministre des Collèges et Universités pour déterminer la meilleure marche à suivre pour l'avenir. Mais comme cette affaire est toujours devant les tribunaux, il serait inapproprié de commenter davantage.

Mais j'aimerais dire que notre gouvernement reconnaît l'importance de la gouvernance pour et par les francophones. C'est pourquoi c'est notre gouvernement qui a mis sur pied l'Université de l'Ontario français, et c'est pour cela que notre gouvernement a donné la charte à l'Université de Hearst pour reconnaître son

indépendance. Nous sommes là pour les francophones, pour l'éducation postsecondaire francophone et pour la gouvernance pour et par les francophones.

ÉDUCATION POSTSECONDAIRE DE LANGUE FRANÇAISE

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Le projet de l'Université de Sudbury par et pour les francophones doit voir le jour. C'est un projet que j'appuie à 100 % et que la communauté appuie. Il est essentiel à l'épanouissement et à l'accès à l'éducation en français dans le nord de l'Ontario.

L'Université de Sudbury est indépendante, a déjà sa charte et est prête à continuer à fournir une éducation de qualité à tous les francophones et francophiles de l'Ontario, du Canada et du monde.

Mais, à chaque fois qu'on parle de ce projet, le gouvernement nous répète : « C'est devant les tribunaux », pour refuser de parler, quand cette règle ne s'applique même pas dans ce cas. Ce n'est pas l'Université de Sudbury qui est devant les tribunaux; c'est l'Université Laurentienne.

Alors, monsieur le Président, une fois pour toute : Quand le gouvernement va-t-il accepter le financement public de l'Université de Sudbury? Et pourquoi le gouvernement se cache-t-il derrière une règle qui ne s'applique même pas dans cette situation?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Francophone Affairs.

L'hon. Caroline Mulroney: Comme la membre de l'opposition sait très bien, la situation est présentement devant les tribunaux, et un membre du gouvernement ne peut pas commenter sur une situation qui est devant les tribunaux.

Mais la situation à Sudbury est très intéressante. J'ai lu le plan d'affaires. Je travaille avec la ministre des Collèges et Universités pour développer un plan, une fois que la Laurentienne soit sortie de la LACC.

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

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Le gouvernement fédéral a dédié 121 millions de dollars pour appuyer l'éducation postsecondaire dans nos communautés de langue officielle en situation minoritaire et place un accent particulier sur la gouvernance par et pour. Pour avoir accès à ces fonds, les gouvernements provinciaux doivent faire demande. La date limite pour cette demande était le 15 octobre dernier.

Aujourd'hui, le 2 novembre, le gouvernement de l'Ontario n'a toujours rien soumis, alors que nos universités demandent très clairement pour cette aide. Ce n'est pas la première fois que ce gouvernement laisse des millions de dollars du gouvernement fédéral sur la table.

Monsieur le Président, est-ce que le gouvernement va finalement soumettre les demandes de financement des institutions postsecondaires par et pour tels que l'Université de Sudbury? Oui ou non?

L'hon. Caroline Mulroney: Je remercie la députée de l'opposition pour cette question. C'est très bien que notre gouvernement travaille de très près avec le gouvernement

fédéral sur cette question. C'est notre gouvernement qui a eu un partenariat avec le gouvernement fédéral pour mettre sur pied finalement l'Université de l'Ontario français, une revendication de près de 40 ans de la communauté francophone.

Ce n'est pas le gouvernement libéral précédent qui l'a fait, monsieur le Président; c'est notre gouvernement qui l'a fait, en partenariat avec le gouvernement fédéral, et on est très fier de cette réussite.

Alors, on va continuer d'être à l'écoute de la communauté francophone pour qu'on puisse être prêt lorsque la Laurentienne sortira de la LACC.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Premier. A recent PressProgress article revealed that this Conservative government is considering contracting out employment services for social assistance recipients to Maximus, a for-profit company with a treacherous track record. This is the same company that caused serious harm to individuals with disabilities in Kansas because of a backlog issue and lost documents. Kansas eventually brought back most services in-house. In Kansas, it was found that oversight and training at Maximus were lacking.

Social assistance recipients have been neglected by this government, and the Liberals before them. Recipients with disabilities live in deep poverty, without enough money for housing or food. This government refuses to adequately raise social assistance rates.

In BC, Maximus was fined at least three times and cost the province almost 50% more than was originally projected.

So Speaker, my question is this: Why is the Premier contracting out Ontario jobs and prioritizing padding the bank accounts of for-profit companies with billions in revenue and terrible track records, rather than supporting and protecting existing Ontario social assistance workers, who have well-paying, unionized jobs, and the vulnerable people who they support?

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

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Of course, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, our government has been there to support some of our most vulnerable through, for example, the \$1 billion in the Social Services Relief Fund.

But now, as we begin to emerge out of the COVID-19 pandemic, thanks to the hard work of all Ontarians and our health care system and all those who have been vaccinated, we're now going to begin to pivot towards how we get the Ontario economy back working again and get Ontarians into good-paying jobs.

Ontario's employment and training programs are critical to building the skilled workforce that we need to rebuild and revitalize Ontario's economy after the COVID-19 pandemic. As the Auditor General highlighted, the current system has not produced results for the people of Ontario. In fact, even before the pandemic, only 1% of

people on social assistance were finding employment every month. That's why we've launched three pilot programs as we move forward on our work to strengthen employment services for those on social assistance. We're going to keep doing this important work.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Question period has ended.

There being no further business at this time, this House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1133 to 1500.

REQUEST TO THE INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table a request by the member for Essex to the Honourable J. David Wake, Integrity Commissioner, for an opinion pursuant to section 30 of the Members' Integrity Act, 1994, on whether the member for Willowdale, Stan Cho, the member for Etobicoke North, Doug Ford and the member for York-Simcoe, Caroline Mulroney, have contravened the act or Ontario parliamentary convention.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated November 2, 2021, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 111(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

VIEWER DISCRETION ACT (IMAGES OF FETUSES), 2021 LOI DE 2021 SUR LES ENVOIS SOUS PLI DISCRET (IMAGES DE FOETUS)

Mr. Kernaghan moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 41, An Act to regulate the mailing of images of fetuses / Projet de loi 41, Loi réglementant l'envoi d'images de foetus par la poste.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member care to briefly explain his bill?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: To begin, I would like to thank the board of the Viewer Discretion Legislation Coalition: Katie, Natalie, Kristine, Devyn, Sarah, Tom, Sam, Christine, Janice, Al and Deidre.

The bill provides that no one shall send a graphic image of a fetus by mail or otherwise distribute such an image unless the image is contained in an opaque envelope, the exterior of the envelope includes a description of the contents and the exterior of the envelope clearly identifies the sender. The penalty for violating this prohibition is a fine of \$100 per image.

ONTARIO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM DAY ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LA JOURNÉE DE LA LIBERTÉ DE RELIGION EN ONTARIO

Mr. Sabawy moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 42, An Act to proclaim Ontario Religious Freedom Day / Projet de loi 42, Loi proclamant la Journée de la liberté de religion en Ontario.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'd like to invite the member to briefly explain his bill.

Mr. Sherif Sabawy: The bill proclaims October 27 each year as Ontario Religious Freedom Day. Ontario Religious Freedom Day will serve as a reminder that Ontario continues to protect and advocate for religious freedoms. It will be a day for Ontarians to remember and reflect on our religious persecution, and so to show respect to the victims of religious persecution around the world.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I move that, pursuant to standing order 7(c), the House shall continue to meet past the ordinary hour of adjournment until midnight on the following dates: Wednesday, November 3, 2021; Thursday, November 4, 2021; Monday, November 15, 2021; Tuesday, November 16, 2021; Wednesday, November 17, 2021; Thursday, November 18, 2021; Monday, November 22, 2021; Tuesday, November 23, 2021; Wednesday, November 24, 2021; Thursday, November 25, 2021; Monday, November 29, 2021; Tuesday, November 30, 2021; Wednesday, December 1, 2021; Thursday, December 2, 2021; Monday, December 6, 2021; Tuesday, December 7, 2021; Wednesday, December 8, 2021; and Thursday, December 9, 2021, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Khanjin has moved that, pursuant to standing order 7(c), the House

shall continue to meet past the ordinary hour of adjournment until midnight on the following dates: Wednesday, November 3, 2021; Thursday, November 4, 2021—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Dispense? Dispense.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard some noes.

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

All those opposed will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Mr. John Vanthof: On division.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): On division.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

ABORTION IMAGES

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It gives me great pleasure to present these petitions on behalf of the Viewer Discretion Legislation Coalition, and especially their rapid response team, who travelled to London, Toronto, Kitchener, Ottawa, Hamilton, Sudbury, Thorold, Brampton, North York, Ajax, Sarnia and Mississauga to collect the signatures on this petition.

It’s entitled “Call on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to Block Disturbing Anti-Abortion Images.”

It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas an anti-abortion group, the Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform, is distributing unwanted flyers to people’s homes and displaying placards on major streets in London featuring horrifying and graphic images of aborted fetuses;

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

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

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

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

I fully support this petition, will affix my signature and give it to page Fraser to deliver to the Clerks.

LAND USE PLANNING

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: I have a petition from my community in Oakville North–Burlington.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“Whereas the Millcroft golf course represents more than 60% of the community’s overall green space, is home to many species of wildlife (some endangered), and acts as a flood management system; and

“Whereas there is currently a proposal to re-zone the golf course for residential development;

“We call on the city of Burlington, the region of Halton and the province of Ontario to work together to preserve the Millcroft golf course lands as green space for the people of the community and beyond.”

I approve this petition and affix my signature.

LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Jim Gordon, who used to be mayor of my city—he also used to be an MPP here in this House, a representative of the Conservative Party—who wants me to read these petitions. It goes as follows:

“Whereas Laurentian University has announced, on April 12, 2021, a debt restructuring exercise comprised of the abolition of 69 programs (28 of which in French), the dismantling of the Laurentian federation, and the firing of more than 100 faculty members; and that these actions will have devastating local, economic and human repercussions on the francophone community of northern Ontario;

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“Whereas the Franco-Ontarian community has demanded French-language post-secondary institutions since the 1960s, and that the demonstrations held on December 1, 2018, have shown this community’s commitment and desire to have post-secondary institutions managed by, for, and with the francophone community;

“Whereas on March 12, 2021, the University of Sudbury and the Assemblée de la francophonie de l’Ontario announced their intention to transform the University of Sudbury into a French-language secular university;

They “petition the Legislative Assembly” as follows:

“Ensure forthwith the repatriation of all programs and courses offered in French and the transfer of all material, physical and human resources ... associated with the delivery of French-language services and francophone programs at Laurentian University, available and offered as of April 9, 2021, to the University of Sudbury;

“Impose a one-year renewable moratorium to all francophone programs offered at Laurentian University...;

“Establish an implementation commission tasked to ensure the transfer of said French-language programs to the University of Sudbury and to support this institution’s development, in order to ensure the sustainability of French-language post-secondary education in northern Ontario and to prioritize current and future francophone students’ needs;” and finally

“Ensure, by all means possible, that current students enrolled in French-language programs impacted by the Laurentian University’s restructuring exercise be able to

obtain their degree in the program that they were enrolled in as of April 9, 2021, without having to take extra courses or pay extra costs to those set out initially.”

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

TREATIES RECOGNITION

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank the students and the professors from the social work program at Laurentian University, including Elizabeth Carlson-Manathara, Jamie-Leigh LeTourneau and Amanda Deforge, for creating this petition regarding the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas treaties are living promises by the crown and First Nations that are part of the constitutional fabric of Canada and that outline mutual obligations and benefits for respectful co-existence in shared territories; and

“Whereas the Robinson-Huron Treaty promises annual compensation (treaty annuities) for the sharing of lands, resources and the wealth created to First Nation treaty beneficiaries, and while a provision was included in the treaty to ensure the annuity amount increased as resource revenues increased, the annuity was increased once in 1874 from \$1.60 to \$4, and has not changed since; and

“Whereas the failure of the crown to live up to the terms, spirit and intent of the treaty prompted the 21 Robinson-Huron Treaty First Nations to file a statement of claim in 2014 to the crown (both Canada and Ontario); and

“Whereas Superior Court of Justice Judge Hennessy ruled in the first two phases of the case that (1) the crown has a mandatory and reviewable obligation to increase the treaties’ annuities when economic circumstances warrant, and (2) that the provincial government of Ontario and the government of Canada were jointly and equally liable to respect the treaty; and

“Whereas the province of Ontario maintains that treaty commitments remain valid today and states that it is ‘working to rebuild trust and relationships with treaty partners and Indigenous peoples,’ and yet in contradiction to these statements, Ontario plans to spend taxpayer money to appeal Superior Court of Justice Judge Hennessy’s decisions, fighting First Nations and fighting against the honourable fulfillment of treaty obligations; and

“Whereas the government of Canada has chosen not to appeal Judge Hennessy’s decisions and has asked that Ontario’s appeal be dismissed and has opened the door to pursuing negotiation, and the 21 treaty First Nations have waited long enough for justice;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to ensure that the Ontario government honours and upholds the Robinson-Huron Treaty by abandoning its appeals of Justice Patricia Hennessy’s decisions in phase 1 and phase 2 of the Robinson-Huron Treaty annuities case and engages in good-faith negotiations of the terms of just compensation.”

I support this petition [*inaudible*] Robinson-Huron Treaty territory and during treaty week. I’ll affix my signature and provide it to page Fraser.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It’s my pleasure to introduce a “Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario.” I want to thank Linda Sterling and Rebecca Snider from my riding of Windsor West.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government has underfunded optometric eye care for 30 years; and

“Whereas the government only pays on average \$44.65 for an OHIP-insured visit—the lowest rate in Canada; and

“Whereas optometrists are being forced to pay substantially out of their own pocket to provide over four million services each year to Ontarians under OHIP; and

“Whereas optometrists have never been given a formal negotiation process with the government; and

“Whereas the government’s continued neglect resulted in 96% of Ontario optometrists voting to withdraw OHIP services beginning September 1, 2021;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately commit to legally binding, formal negotiations to ensure any future OHIP-insured optometry services are, at a minimum, funded at the cost of delivery.”

I fully support this petition, will sign it and give it to page Noor to take to the table.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Doly Begum: I have a petition to save eye care in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government has underfunded optometric eye care for 30 years; and

“Whereas the government only pays on average \$44.65 for an OHIP-insured visit—the lowest rate in Canada; and

“Whereas optometrists are being forced to pay substantially out of their own pocket to provide over four million services each year to Ontarians under OHIP; and

“Whereas optometrists have never been given a formal negotiation process with the government; and

“Whereas the government’s continued neglect resulted in 96% of Ontario optometrists voting to withdraw OHIP services beginning September 1, 2021;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately commit to legally binding, formal negotiations to ensure any future OHIP-insured optometry services are, at a minimum, funded at the cost of delivery.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my signature to it and give it to page Zada.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I, too, am pleased to introduce a petition entitled “Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario,” signed by hundreds of residents from my community of Essex county.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government has underfunded optometric eye care for 30 years; and

“Whereas the government only pays on average \$44.65 for an OHIP-insured visit—the lowest rate in Canada; and

“Whereas optometrists are being forced to pay substantially out of their own pocket to provide over four million services each year to Ontarians under OHIP; and

“Whereas optometrists have never been given a formal negotiation process with the government; and

“Whereas the government’s continued neglect resulted in 96% of Ontario optometrists voting to withdraw OHIP services beginning September 1, 2021;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately commit to legally binding, formal negotiations to ensure any future OHIP-insured optometry services are, at a minimum, funded at the cost of delivery.”

I support this petition, will affix my name and send it to the Clerks’ table via whichever page comes here first.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Catherine Fife: I’d like to thank Pierce Family Vision eye care. They have a sign outside their office saying, “Fight for sight,” and they collected these signatures for me.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government has underfunded optometric eye care for 30 years; and

“Whereas the government only pays on average \$44.65 for an OHIP-insured visit—the lowest rate in Canada; and

“Whereas optometrists are being forced to pay substantially out of their own pocket to provide over four million services each year to Ontarians under OHIP; and

“Whereas optometrists have never been given a formal negotiation process with the government; and

“Whereas the government’s continued neglect resulted in 96% of Ontario optometrists voting to withdraw OHIP services beginning September 1, 2021;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately commit to legally binding, formal negotiations to ensure any future OHIP-insured optometry services are, at a minimum, funded at the cost of delivery.”

It’s my pleasure to affix my signature to this petition and give it to page Emily.

TREATIES RECOGNITION

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas treaties are living promises by the crown and First Nations that are part of the constitutional fabric of Canada and that outline mutual obligations and benefits for respectful co-existence in shared territories; and

“Whereas the Robinson-Huron Treaty promises annual compensation (treaty annuities) for the sharing of lands, resources and the wealth created to First Nation treaty beneficiaries, and while a provision was included in the treaty to ensure the annuity amount increased as resource revenues increased, the annuity was increased once in 1874 from \$1.60 to \$4, and has not changed since; and
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“Whereas the failure of the crown to live up to the terms, spirit and intent of the treaty prompted the 21 Robinson-Huron Treaty First Nations to file a statement of claim in 2014 to the crown (both Canada and Ontario); and

“Whereas Superior Court of Justice Judge Hennessy ruled in the first two phases of the case that (1) the crown has a mandatory and reviewable obligation to increase the treaties’ annuities when economic circumstances warrant, and (2) that the provincial government of Ontario and the government of Canada were jointly and equally liable to respect the treaty; and

“Whereas the province of Ontario maintains that treaty commitments remain valid today and states that it is ‘working to rebuild trust and relationships with treaty partners and Indigenous peoples,’ and yet in contradiction to these statements, Ontario plans to spend taxpayer money to appeal Superior Court of Justice Judge Hennessy’s decisions, fighting First Nations and fighting against the honourable fulfillment of treaty obligations; and

“Whereas the government of Canada has chosen not to appeal Judge Hennessy’s decisions and has asked that Ontario’s appeal be dismissed” and has opened the door to pursuing negotiations “and the 21 treaty First Nations have waited long enough for justice;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to ensure that the Ontario government honours and upholds the Robinson-Huron Treaty by abandoning its appeals of Justice Patricia Hennessy’s decisions in phase 1 and phase 2 of the Robinson-Huron Treaty annuities case and engages in good-faith negotiations of the terms of just compensation.”

I fully support this petition. I’ll be affixing my signature to it and providing it to page Noor to deliver to the table.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank the good people of Wellington–Halton Hills for this petition that reads as follows:

“Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario....

“Whereas the Ontario government has underfunded optometric eye care for 30 years; and

“Whereas the government only pays on average \$44.65 for an OHIP-insured visit—the lowest rate in Canada; and

“Whereas optometrists are being forced to pay substantially out of their own pocket to provide over four million services each year to Ontarians under OHIP; and

“Whereas optometrists have never been given a formal negotiation process with the government; and

“Whereas the government’s continued neglect resulted in 96% of Ontario optometrists voting to withdraw OHIP services beginning September 1, 2021;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately commit to legally binding, formal negotiations to ensure any future OHIP-insured optometry services are, at a minimum, funded at the cost of delivery.”

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

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for petitions.

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Mr. John Vanthof: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane on a point of order.

Mr. John Vanthof: Speaker, I rise on a point of order seeking your clarification and ruling regarding what we believe to be the misapplication of standing order 3 to reschedule committee business.

Yesterday, the deputy government House leader, the member for Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill, moved that four committees be allowed to meet at the call of the Chair. As you know, Speaker, this essentially confers unlimited authority as to when the government can conduct committee business and opens the potential for committees to meet during question period, afternoon routine, during constituency weeks, on weekends, statutory holidays and beyond the regular times of adjournment without actually identifying a purpose for doing so.

This is a new practice. Prior to this Parliament, only one government in the last 20 years has once used a routine motion to grant itself blanket authority to conduct committee meetings for something they might call later. That was on November 7, 2002. However, this was done with prior consultation of the House leaders before it was moved, and the motion specifically limited these meetings to dealing with government bills.

Since the 2008 standing order changes, when the sitting times of the House were modified to regularize the hours of the Legislature, motions to meet at the call of the Chair have been limited in scope to a particular item, such as a bill or a select committee study, and were contained within substantive motions that were moved with notice or moved without notice via unanimous consent. In fact, prior to October 2020, there was no time within the last two decades where this power was conferred in a general sense for business that had yet to be determined.

While no one on this side will dispute that the government has a right to advance its agenda, there is a broadly

accepted understanding that the business of the House should be conducted in a way that respects the rights of members to carry out their duties and participate in parliamentary proceedings without undue interference.

This is the reason we establish specific meeting times and Parliaments have historically ensured that committees are scheduled in such a way that generally avoids conflicts with events, such as question period, routine proceedings or constituency weeks, recognizing that these too are important elements of a member’s responsibilities. In the instances where governments have deemed it necessary to allow for committee business to run concurrently with these practices, it is always for a specific purpose or item, not the vague, undetermined approach this government seems to favour.

Yesterday’s motion marks the third time the government has given itself these unchecked powers in the last year via routine motion, which understandably raises questions as to why the official opposition has waited until now to voice its objections. As you can appreciate, the pandemic has had an effect on the business of the House in ways that few of us could have anticipated. This latest misuse of standing order 3 makes it clear that the government is taking advantage of the pandemic to circumvent established precedent and has made it necessary for us to formally seek a ruling.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’ll touch on it for a bit. I apologize for being late on this. I wasn’t aware the member opposite had any issue with this motion.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, of course, this is something that passed previously in this House. It is a routine motion. I believe this particular motion that the member now finds to be offensive was passed by this House, if I’m not mistaken, yesterday, and it was passed on division, which means that the opposition did not rise in their place to object to this motion.

Now let’s talk about what this motion does. It gives the committees of this House the opportunity to sit more frequently so that they can discuss bills that have been passed by this place. I can’t understand why members of the opposition would be opposed to committees sitting more often to hear and debate bills that have been passed by this House. That presumably is the job of members of provincial Parliament. It is presumably the job of members to hear comments on bills from people.

It shouldn’t surprise me—this is the same party that, of course, was so hesitant and resistant to our modifications of the committee rooms, as you will know, modifications that brought video and technology so that those committee rooms could be broadcast. Of course, that was never done before it has been by this House.

More specifically, again, to this motion: We’ve seen this before. Every time we try to extend opportunities for members opposite to participate in debate, it is usually the NDP who are opposed to that. Providing more questions to the independents—the NDP were opposed to that.

Bringing more equality on our committees, including giving the opposition the ability to serve as Vice-Chairs in committees where Conservatives were the Vice-Chair and the Chair—they deemed it as too hyper-bipartisan.

Now to unpack for a second: This is a party that accused the government of trying to work too co-operatively with it, and they didn't like it. We were trying to work too hard to be co-operative with the NDP, so they opposed it.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

1530

Hon. Paul Calandra: Here you go, colleagues: How many times have I been up in this chamber and the NDP start screaming and hollering back and forth? What they're too afraid to say out in public—they go to what they usually typically do, the underhanded motion, the underhanded discussions.

If they would have had an issue with this yesterday, one would have thought that one of them would have done what members do: rise in their place and say, "I disagree, and we want to have a vote."

Well, the reality is, we're having votes in this place because this government insisted that even through a pandemic we sit and that people have their voice and their votes counted. That's why we're here actually doing it. That's why we've given them the opportunity to rise in their place.

The deputy leader of the NDP rises in his place today to say, "Well, now I'm offended. You're too bipartisan. You're trying to work too much for us. Dammit, I don't want to have more time to debate bills on committees." That's what this is about right now. Think about it for a second. The members opposite do not want to have more time to debate bills. They don't want more time on committees. It is unbelievable. I hope the people in the province of Ontario understand what it is the opposition are asking of us.

So I say this: A routine motion brought to the floor of the House that could have been debated on when it was brought to the floor of the House wasn't. A vote could have been forced—just so people understand, we're not asking for a massive amount of them to get up out of their chairs and debate; we're asking for five of them. Five of them could have got up, and we could have had a vote on this. But it wasn't important yesterday.

Speaker, we know what this is about. This isn't about the committees. It's about them trying to delay important legislation that is on the floor of this House with respect to making it easier for people to be within the trades, making it better for people who are working hard to get ahead. That's what this is about. They don't like the labour legislation that we have brought forward that has been applauded by so many people, and they are trying to delay that.

I guess this is what tends to happen when a party has run out of ideas. It should not surprise any of us. I don't think it surprises any of us on this side of the House that the official opposition is completely out of ideas so that's why they don't want committees to sit. They don't want committees to sit, Speaker.

I would hope in some—and I know my staff will take a look at it, when the last time we had a government that received a motion of confidence unanimously supported by the entire opposition. I don't think this has ever happened in my lifetime. But that has happened. And now we have an official opposition that is basically saying, "You're doing such a good job, your bills are so good, we don't need to have time in committee." I thank the members opposite. They never ever cease to amaze me.

Speaker, you know I've said it right from the beginning: It's the bonds across the aisles—it's that bridge-building that we like to talk about in the Conservative Party. It's the bridge-building.

I didn't know that it was so difficult—maybe I will spend some time with the deputy leader of the NDP. He has been here longer than me, so I thought that he would know that in order to force a vote or to express your displeasure on something, you could rise in your place and force a vote. They didn't do it the first time we brought this motion in many, many months ago. They didn't do it when it was brought in the second time. And now that there is important labour legislation that would impact so many people in this province in a positive way, what are they doing? They're trying to stall it.

Mr. Speaker, I would say to you this, just in closing: We will ensure that the people of the province of Ontario continue to have access to their members of Parliament, whether it is online—something that we brought in and spearheaded for colleagues; congratulations to all of these colleagues on this side of the House for making it happen. Whether it was the new procedures for voting so that this House could continue to sit during a pandemic, whether it was bringing cameras into our committee rooms so that there would be no more secret committees—again, all of those modifications done by this party.

Mr. Speaker, despite what the member says, I can tell you this: We are going to fight to make sure that all members, even the members of the opposition, have an opportunity to be in front of committees and to debate and discuss bills, even though the official opposition is saying here today that they have confidence in us and that our bills are perfect. I appreciate that, but there is always room for the people of the province of Ontario to meet their members in front of a committee. We're going to make sure that they always have that opportunity to do so.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): On the same point of order?

Mr. John Fraser: Just in response—it's a hard act to follow: Given the love and camaraderie we have in this building right now and the desire to make our democracy even better, I'm taking it that the government House leader is saying that he's happy to travel Bill 27 and the bill for long-term care when it gets to committee.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I want to express my appreciation to the member for Timiskaming—Cochrane for raising this point of order and also express my thanks to the government House leader and the member for Ottawa South for their contributions.

I will consider the points that have been raised, and I will undertake to rule on the matter and report back to the

House in due course. We're able to continue the discussions this afternoon that are planned, so I will get back to the House when I'm prepared to rule.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WORKING FOR WORKERS ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 VISANT À OEUVRER POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 1, 2021, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 27, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters / Projet de loi 27, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'emploi, le travail et d'autres questions.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to rise in this House and speak on behalf of the residents of Timiskaming–Cochrane and on behalf of my party colleagues. To tell you the truth, I was just listening to the government House leader and I forgot what I was going to talk about.

I give credit where credit is due: There is no one in the House who can tell a tale like the government House leader. He was obviously extremely frustrated that he missed his opportunity yesterday to talk about the party that actually has a housing plan. That was very obvious, that he was just itching to get it out there—and that he did. I commend him for it. I disagree with his points.

But that being what it is, the bill we're speaking about is Bill 27. It's got a short form: the Working for Workers Act, 2021. This government is trying to brand itself as the government all about the worker. We probably all heard the news—the minimum wage: \$15 an hour on January 1, I believe. But they cut it three years ago, and they also cancelled paid sick days three years ago. They created a fire, and now they're trying to take credit for putting a bit of water on it.

Do you know what this really is, Speaker? Three years ago was their true colours. They didn't care about the workers three years ago. But now they need some of the workers' votes. They're fair-weather friends. They cut the minimum wage, and now it's getting close to an election, and they're going to bring it up almost to where it would have been if they hadn't cut it in the first place. So they're just hoping that the workers of this province won't recognize that they're fair-weather friends and enough of them might vote for them. And then they'll do it again.

1540

Actually, some of the evidence is in this bill. Part of this bill is about workers' compensation. I've been an employer for most of my life, and I know how workers' compensation works. I'd like to say on behalf of the vast majority of employers that we want workers' compensation. They want workers' compensation to work. Does anybody want to pay too much for workers' compensation? No. Let's be honest. But at the end of the day, they

want—we all want—workers' compensation to work, so if someone is injured on the job and their life is altered because of that injury, their life isn't destroyed. That's what workers' compensation is about.

In this bill, if there's too much money in the pot, then they're going to reimburse to employers. You could almost make an argument for that if there weren't workers in this province who are suffering incredibly because they haven't been well served by workers' compensation.

I'm going to be very upfront, Speaker: 10 years ago, I might not have made this speech, because 10 years ago I was an employer. I did everything I could to keep my employees safe. I'm not perfect. I didn't get workers' compensation, but I had an accident—I didn't realize, as an employer, how badly treated some workers are because of faults, cracks in the workers' compensation system, places where there are pockets of cancer and, now, where people are denied presumptive coverage from COVID-19, as we speak.

This part of the bill isn't working for them. Schedule 6 is not working for workers in any way. It is absolute proof that this government is a fair-weather friend to workers. You are for workers when it suits your election goals. You try to hide schedule 6 and say, "Oh, but you big employers"—because this isn't really for the little employers. The people who know their employees personally don't want their employees to be destitute if something happens on the job. This is aimed at the big ones.

That is also par for the course for this government. When it came to looking out for businesses, we know who they looked out for: the big box ones. Schedule 6 is exactly the same. It does not belong in any bill that's called the Working for Workers Act.

The second thing I'd like to talk about—I spoke on this bill a little bit last night, and we ran out of time. I spent a fair bit of time on schedule 4 last night—I think five minutes—before I was—

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: The government House leader just tried to say that the NDP, the official opposition, don't want to debate things. I would have gladly debated schedule 4 for hours last night, but I was stopped at 6 o'clock. So we're going to start again.

Schedule 4 is about the Ministry of Agriculture. I'm not going to go through the whole thing, but basically, if you believe that this is about workers—and I will give the government the benefit of the doubt; it's included in a workers' bill—we've seen from the workers' compensation that it's actually not. It gives the Minister of Agriculture much more power to collect personal information from farmers, but it doesn't actually specify what that information is going to be used for. It was inferred by some of the speakers. It was inferred, perhaps, in the briefings. But that's not what it says in the bill. It says, "We're going to collect a lot more information and, yes, we're going to be careful with it." That's all it says. The farm community is rightfully worried because personal information for a farmer is about their home, their family.

I distinctly remember when we were discussing Bill 156 and each of the rural members got up and talked about how a farm is their home, their family. I agree.

Yet, in this bill, those same members seem to be inferring, “Yes, although it’s their home and it’s their farm and it’s their family, we are going to ask for their personal information. I promise you, we’ll be careful.” But they don’t say what they’re going to use it for. If they’ll use it to make sure the temporary foreign workers or migrant workers are properly treated or make sure they can be included in provincial vaccination strategies, great. Say it in the bill. Don’t give yourself all kinds of powers that can be misused later.

Remember, you have to look at what’s actually in the bill. If I recall, just when Bill 156 was being spoken about, there was a huge outcry in the agricultural circles because someone made a freedom-of-information request for information regarding agriculture, regarding farms. It was in the farm press, all over, and farmers were nervous because they thought it was an activist organization that wasn’t in favour of agriculture. They were worried. It turned out it was someone who was looking for addresses to do a sales route. Regardless, they were worried, and rightfully so.

Yet here, a few months later, the government is putting in a bill that says we’re going to get a whole lot more information, but we’re not specifying why.

Again, I’m shocked that these rural members actually—the government House leader talked about sitting in their place. Well, obviously, the rural members are sitting in their chairs at caucus and not saying a word, because no farmer would read this and feel that warm, fuzzy feeling.

I question why the Minister of Agriculture in this great province didn’t specify that this part of the bill, schedule 4, was about temporary foreign workers or was about migrant workers. Why is it so broad? It leaves the possibility of being abused and misused—and I’m not even saying by this government or this minister, but by subsequent governments.

Remember, any law that you pass and any rule that you change in the House, you also have to live with it, and the people of Ontario also have to live with it when you’re on the other side.

Now I’d like to change to schedule 1, Employment Protection for Foreign Nationals Act, 2009. Again, I give credit where credit is due: This part makes sense. We need people with credentials. We need more people in this great province, and there are people who want to move to Ontario. Ontario is a great place to live. It has its problems, but we’re all here because we believe in Ontario.

1550

I’ve heard many accounts of people who immigrated, as my parents did, as my wife did. You get here, you are qualified, but because you don’t have any Canadian experience, you can’t work in your field. And if you can’t work in your field, you’re never going to get any Canadian experience.

My question is, why did you leave out a lot of the medical profession? Why did you leave out the one thing

that we’re short of? In my part of the world, in northern Ontario, we are short of doctors, we are short of everyone in the medical field. Why didn’t you give the people in the medical field the ability, perhaps, to work in their field and gain the experience so they could actually do what they’re trained to do? I don’t think this government understands it.

I’ll give you an example, Speaker. Now we’re dealing with optometrists. I have an optometrist—actually, her husband called me from my riding last night. He was so frustrated because his wife—they are a young couple, and they are thinking about leaving the province because they can make a better living anywhere than in Ontario right now, and the government doesn’t seem to be reacting. They’re not even looking at the people who are actually working here now. It’s a huge problem.

This bill has a few things in it that make sense. Even a broken clock is right twice a day—so there’s got to be. But there are so many things in this bill that could have truly been groundbreaking and could have truly been, in the case of the agricultural, specific so it won’t cause concern in the farming communities, so you won’t have to go around saying, “Oh, trust us.” Because do you know what? You’re burning that trust.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for questions and responses.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Thank you to the member opposite for his remarks. He referenced a broken clock at the end. Members of this Legislature know I’m very passionate about fixing the clock. Hopefully we can get that done sometime soon.

Speaking of clocks, of course, one of the things that I’m very proud of in this legislation is the right to disconnect that has been included in this legislation, to make sure that people have a better understanding with their employer about when they’re on or off the clock. I’m wondering if the member opposite could speak a little bit about whether he supports this initiative and why it’s important to Ontario workers.

Mr. John Vanthof: I’d like to thank the member for that question. I didn’t get to it in my remarks.

Actually, I had a discussion on this very issue last night. I had supper with my daughter. She’s a corporate lawyer. She gets emails all the time and works all the time. They work way harder than farmers. We had a long discussion about whether this—and it’s a worthy initiative. But again, it’s not setting out rules and saying you have to have a policy, and maybe it will be enforced and maybe not. It’s a window dressing step. We’re not opposed to the idea. But there’s not a lot there, and that’s an issue. I appreciate the step. That part is getting lots of play on radio, but nobody is saying, “But there are actually no rules.” That’s a problem. It’s nice window dressing, but we don’t really know what the policy is going to be.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question goes to the member from Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane for his comments on this piece of legislation, particularly around schedule 6.

I'm thinking of the workers at General Electric in Peterborough. This is one glaring example which involves the denial of esophageal cancers despite strong and consistent scientific evidence showing that workers exposed to metalworking fluids have an elevenfold increased risk of this kind of cancer. Metalworking fluids were heavily used at the GE plant without effective controls for 30 to 40 years. Yet there are still 178 outstanding claims. These are people who have been fighting for decades for justice.

How do you think those workers feel, knowing that this piece of legislation is going to cause the payback of those unpaid premiums to a large corporation? And what should the member for Peterborough say to those workers who have been denied justice in this province?

Mr. John Vanthof: That is a very good question.

Although I can't speak on behalf of the member from Peterborough, what the bill kind of says is, it sucks to be you. The case of cancer in a workplace that is basically proven, and yet these people have to fight, spend their whole lives fighting—that's not what workers' compensation is supposed to be.

Since they changed workers' compensation to be more like a private insurance company—and we know, again, with private insurance companies, it's deny, deny, deny, deny. This is becoming the same.

When you're suffering from cancer, you shouldn't have to spend the time you have fighting. So the government—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The member from Ottawa South has a question.

Mr. John Fraser: I want to thank the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane. It is important to come and listen to debates. The point he made about schedule 4 is really important.

On another note, just a few weeks ago, I had two doctors contact me because their home addresses are listed on the government's website as their location of business. Nobody thought about that. So the concerns of farmers are real, and we debated it in this House.

Why do you think there are no provisions in this bill that would do the same kinds of thing as we do with PHIPA, Personal Health Information Protection Act, to protect the addresses and the livelihoods of farmers?

Mr. John Vanthof: Again, thank you very much to the member.

I can't guess why the government is doing what they're doing. I hope that it's not a question of, they just didn't take it seriously enough. To tell you the truth, it seems like a bit of, "We have to do something with the migrant workers, because we don't want"—right?—"so we'll just blanket this," and they haven't thought about the ramifications, the collateral damage that can happen when personal information is made accessible through our system.

Accountability is important. Accessibility is important. But protecting people is also important, and protecting those personal addresses of farmers is important. I'm not sure this government has taken that seriously.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction.

Hon. Nina Tangri: I do want to thank the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane for his remarks and the support that they're providing to this bill.

I do recall back in 1990 to 1995, when the members opposite were in government and they also spoke of tackling the temp agencies and foreign credentials. They talked about it back then, subsequent governments have talked about it, and we've really not come very far since then. The Liberals promised and promised and promised and never delivered.

One thing that was really important was eliminating the Canadian work experiences—we heard it time and time again from many, many members, from many people who are new to this country.

Can the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane please tell this House why they do not support helping immigrants work in careers that they've trained for all their lives?

Support this bill, take this bill forward, and let's get those people working so they don't have to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The member for Timiskaming–Cochrane to respond.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you to the member for the question. I appreciate her comments in the House and her questions.

As I said in my remarks, there are parts of this bill that I think are supportable, particularly—and I made it pretty clear—about foreign credentials. It's very frustrating. You come to this country, you are trained and you can't work in this country because you don't have Canadian experience.

1600

But I believe that was a human rights case in 2013. This isn't groundbreaking from this government. It's just basically following a human rights case. And it has taken a long time. It's too bad that you took so long and still didn't address some of the issues, like medical credentials, that are impacting people, especially the people in rural Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Scarborough Southwest has a question.

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to ask the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane to continue on that thought, actually, and add a little bit. This bill talks about foreign credential recognition and allows for some opportunities for many professions; however, it excludes a huge chunk of people, a group of people who have been fighting hard, especially during this pandemic, and who are in dire need to be recognized, and that the province is in dire need of: medical professionals. If the member could share a little bit about that as well.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank the member, my colleague, and give her in response a personal—I just had a meeting a few days ago with a doctor recruitment group in my area. They're called the Worker Bees. They're from Matheson, Iroquois Falls and Cochrane. The doctor

shortage there is close to disaster proportions. I brought up the issue of this bill, because they'd heard about it: "Foreign credentials. Do you know what? We could find—" and I said, "No, we can't, because people in the medical profession aren't included." Now, hopefully we can get them included. That would be something, but right now, the Worker Bees, and not just the people on that committee—in Cochrane right now, there's one doctor for 5,000 people—5,000 people, one doctor, and nothing for miles. That's why they're so concerned that this bill is missing the mark on medical credentials.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: I will be sharing my time with the member from Orléans.

Look, I think we have to state right off the top that, given this government's approach to workers from the summer of 2018 until now, the title of this bill, "working for workers," would be best described as an oxymoron.

Let's just review what has happened since the summer of 2018. The government took away paid sick days, they took away equal pay for equal work, they took away other protections for workers and they cut the raise to the minimum wage to \$15 an hour. The Premier came in in the summer of 2018 like a wrecking ball, destroying almost every improvement in Bill 148. It was hard to watch this side of the House every day get up and stand up in ovations, cheering on the Premier as he stuck it to minimum-wage workers. He literally kicked them to the curb. Today, he wants to hug them.

At the time, the government claimed that this \$15 increase was going to devastate the economy and it was going to kill jobs. We all know now that that argument is false. We have a Nobel prize winning—

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Economist.

Mr. John Fraser: —economist here—thank you—David Card, whose groundbreaking research simply says that employment doesn't fall when wages rise. So where are we now? Three years later, and today the government is announcing \$15 an hour, not because they believe in Card's work, but because there's an election just around the corner.

It's important to point out that every minimum wage worker has lost about \$6,200 since then. That will be about \$7,000 by the time it actually arrives; more if they've been working two jobs. And the Premier today—it's like he set a fire and he ran over and put it out, and now he wants us to pin a medal on his chest. It's incredible. You can't ignore the damage that has been done. This morning, the Premier said, "Wages haven't kept up with the increasing cost of living." Well, no kidding. It's your fault—not totally, but in large part.

According to a recent report by CIBC Economics, the pandemic is hitting lower-wage job earners harder, the same people the Premier likes to say are front-line heroes: you know, the grocery store clerks, the cashiers, the gas station attendants, the cleaners, the cooks. The people who make our everyday lives easier, the Premier made their life harder. That extra money that those people needed over

that time wasn't there. It forced them to make tough choices, like how to pay the rent, putting food on the table, buying a prescription, heating that apartment, kids' clothing, school trips. The damage can't be undone.

The Minister of Labour said this morning that minimum wage earners can't wait another year for an increase. Here is my message, Minister, with all due respect: You made them wait. The Premier made more than three quarters of a million workers and their families wait almost three years. It's incredible that the minister would say that. It's like stepping into a punch.

This government took away paid sick days, and then it took more than 400 days of almost everybody dragging them screaming and kicking to give temporary days. Again, they want a pat on the back. That's not supporting workers.

In 2018, the Premier took away protections for temporary workers, like equal pay for equal work and ending perma-temps, and the government's response three years later is to protect workers by licensing temp agencies and requiring them to pay a security bond—a good measure, but there are a whole bunch of pieces missing in there that protect workers. In reality, this bill doesn't replace the protections they took away from temp workers when they gutted Bill 148.

Here is what Deena Ladd, executive director of Workers' Action Centre, has to say: "If this government is about truly protecting workers and wanting to make sure that workers have access to decent jobs, then there has to be a limit on perma-temping, they have to make sure that the client company is liable for injuries, they have to do things like not allow companies to have workers work for less wages and benefits than regularly hired workers if they're doing the same type of work."

So this bill also intends to ban non-compete clauses in contracts. I think that's a good thing for workers. But as with anything else in much of this government's legislation, especially this legislation, there's a lot left to regulation. It also mandates employers with more than 25 employees to create a disconnecting-from-work policy. That's a good thing. It's a good start. Is it great? Well, it's not clear exactly what the boxes around those policies—who is going to enforce it? Good idea; not great. Worth supporting, but missing some pieces.

The bill also talks about protections for foreign temporary workers. That's really important. People come to this country to feed their families, and sometimes to help feed our families, and actually support our economy. We have to do more to protect them. So I think that's a good measure. There's probably more that we have to do, but I'm glad that it's there.

Access to trades and professions: again, another good measure. Look, it just makes sense that we ensure every person is working to their full potential. It's the right thing to do. It also just makes economic sense. If somebody else has paid, spent the money to train themselves or governments have spent money to train them, we should be utilizing that. What the bill doesn't do is—it's the political will to get some of those things done. Because, historic-

ally, there are some regulators of some regulated professions that that have been fairly obstinate about opening this up. That's going to require some tough regulations and some tough actions by ministers, and they need to be prepared to do that.

I want to talk a bit about schedule 4. I was really happy the member from Timiskaming brought this up, because I would not have realized it unless he had. They haven't done enough to protect farmers in that, protect their information. They have a genuine concern, just like how those doctors I talked about earlier have a genuine concern. So I think you can probably do something in that bill when it gets to committee. And I wasn't joking this afternoon when I said I hope that this minister takes this bill to committee, because I think it's important that we get there.

1610

I want to leave some time for my colleague from Orléans here, so I'll sit down.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member did say he would be sharing his time, so we cede the floor to the member from Orléans.

Mr. Stephen Blais: It's always tough to follow the member from Ottawa South. He's a very passionate and eloquent speaker.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank, from the bottom of my heart, all the front-line workers who have braved through the conditions of this last year—after all, this is the Working for Workers Act: the grocery store and convenience store clerks; the pharmacists and cashiers at the drug store; the truck drivers and logistics managers, who ensured that food and other staples were delivered to our communities. The list goes on and on, but these essential workers were there when we needed them most, and it's far beyond time that the province and their provincial government be there for them.

This is called the Working for Workers Act, and as the member from Ottawa South mentioned, it might be considered an oxymoron. We've seen recently that the government is focusing a lot of attention, a lot of time and energy, on trying to undo many of their shortcomings, undo many of the mistakes that they made when they first came into office. It's Back to the Future: They're correcting all of the irrevocable damage—or they're trying to—that their own actions created upon taking office.

Remember, this was the government that cancelled the \$15 minimum wage three years ago. They said that it would drive away jobs, and we know that not to be true. They had the option to allow workers' pay to stay in line with inflation, and they chose to ignore that option. In fact, they chose to roll that pay back. That decision took \$6,200 out of the pockets of hard-working Ontarians.

Now, \$6,200 may not be a lot of money to the Premier and his friends—and, in fairness, it may not be a lot of money to most of us in this room. But \$6,200 to the single mom with two kids, working two jobs, is a lot of money. And over the last three years, the costs of living in our province have skyrocketed: Gas for your car is up. Groceries are up. The cost of housing is up. Everything you

need to provide basic quality of life for your family is up, and the attention of the government to this issue is down. That's the problem.

So \$6,200 would have gone a long way to help those people working on the front lines, those essential workers the Premier has spent the last 18 months, 19 months trying to thank. But actions speak louder than words, and as the old saying goes, "Money is even louder"—\$6,200 is a lot of money. It's money that could have put food on the table. It's money that could have kept a roof over their heads. It's money that would have helped minimum wage earners survive, especially for these last 19 months.

As has been said, for the better part of three years, the government attacked front-line workers, essential workers. They didn't need them. They didn't think they needed them. Now, at the eleventh hour, with an election on the way, they're trying to finally win them over.

I'd like to spend just a little bit of time on one element of the bill that I don't think has been spoken about so far, which is the access to washrooms provisions. This is very good except for how an important and critical group of employees has been left out. Our transit operators work all day long, getting us from where we are to where we want to be—to work, to school, to errands, to appointments. They should be included in this legislation, especially because they often start in parts of our communities that don't have employer-provided washrooms at the beginning and end of their routes, and popping in to the coffee shop, popping in to that local business, may be the only opportunity they have to relieve themselves throughout the day.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for questions and responses.

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is to the member from Orléans. The member spoke about how expensive it is getting for Ontarians today. The cost of living is so expensive. I just want to turn back the clock a bit, to why the member is now sitting in a party with seven members.

The party, the former government, under the Liberals and under Kathleen Wynne, introduced some of the worst legislation that drove up hydro rates, which drove businesses out of this province. The reason why we as Ontarians—one of the reasons we are sitting here and seeing such high cost of hydro, for example, are policies brought in by your government, policies and actions that resulted not only in high hydro rates, but in the chief of staff for your government being sentenced to four months in prison. It was scandal after scandal. That is why you're now not even in opposition; you're down to seven people.

Will the member from Orléans admit that this inflation that we're seeing today is greatly because of the actions—

Mr. Stephen Blais: Well, I wasn't a member of the last government. I wasn't elected to this place in the last government, and I'm not going to speak about the last government. During that time—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Order, please, government members.

Mr. Stephen Blais: During that time, I was on Ottawa city council, bringing in something called the EquiFare, which reduced bus passes by 50% for low-income users. Those were the kinds of projects that I was working on to make life more affordable for people at the lowest income levels in our society, so that they can put a roof over their heads, so they can feed their kids. That's what I was working on. They've been working on slashing workers' pay for the last three years.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question goes to the member from Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the members from Ottawa South and Orléans. My question is for the member for Orléans.

Near the end of your debate, you talked about wash-room access, and it got me thinking about washroom access in the north. I know that the member from the NDP, the Thunder Bay–Atikokan member, has asked several times to have access to truck stop washrooms that are actually controlled by the Conservative government—provincial government, sorry—having those open so people driving on long roads, say, between Sault Ste. Marie and Thunder Bay, where there are very few washrooms, would have a washroom to go for. My question to the member is, do you think it would make sense that the government of Ontario, introducing a bill like this about access to washrooms, might want to include the fact that Ontario's washrooms on roadsides would need access as well?

Mr. Stephen Blais: I think that makes eminent sense. Unfortunately, we've seen that, from this government, they often reject ideas that make eminent sense, or fail to think about them in the first place. Of course, if there are washrooms along the side of the highway, they should absolutely be offered to those workers who need to take a break, especially in the north, where the distance between those facilities is often much greater than we have here in the south.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I would like to put a question to the member from Ottawa South. I really like your enthusiasm in regards to the medical workers and the medical profession, and I lived that issue with my wife. I met with your colleague, who was the Minister of Health. I asked the question: Can she do something for the health professions? She said, "We can't touch it. It's very dangerous because don't want to expose the lives of Canadians to danger." Can you commit to help in this, and I will work with you on it?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Ottawa South to respond.

Mr. John Fraser: I'll tell you two things: Number one, it's not even in this bill. Your government didn't touch it. And in government, we increased internationally medicinally trained physicians, and I believe it's the right thing to do. When I was saying that some regulated professions were tough nuts to crack, that's exactly what I was talking about. This government is not addressing that.

But I'm going to go back to the workers. Doug Ford wanted us—pardon my language; I withdraw it. The Premier wants us to believe that he's born again, that he's now a member of the proletariat and he's fighting for workers. Well, in 2018, he kicked minimum wage workers and their families to the curb. I don't know why anybody would believe him today.

1620

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I was listening very intently to both the members from Ottawa South and Orléans.

I remember that, under the Liberal government, the minimum wage was about \$11.40. With an election nearing then, they raised it to \$15, and this government of Doug Ford cut that as soon as they came in 2018. Now with an election coming, they're trying to restore the cuts. This seems to me cynical politics. I'm just want to ask the member from Ottawa South or the member for Orléans, does that mean they are following in your footsteps?

Mr. John Fraser: I don't think it's cynical at all.

My first job was a minimum wage, full-time job, as a parent with a new child, so I know what it means to people.

The government cut the raise to the minimum wage—and we could talk about how that should have been done sooner. It was the same party that froze the minimum wage before we came into government. So we know what they stand for. For the Premier to get up today and make it like nothing happened, that families aren't out \$6,200 or more, that they didn't have to make those tough decisions, is just incredible. It is so incredible that the Premier wants us to believe that somehow he has seen the light, that he has been struck on the road to Damascus.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I listened intently to the member from Orléans's response, and I want to say that I agree with the member from Orléans. He was not part of a previous government, because during that time he was actually messing up the Ottawa LRT.

I'm just going to read something here from the Ottawa Citizen, Mr. Speaker. It says:

"Decision on Judicial Inquiry into Ottawa LRT Comes Down to the Price of Accountability.

"No one will be able to give an accurate projection on what an inquiry would cost municipal taxpayers in Ottawa since it's impossible to tell how much unearthing needs to be done...."

My question to the member is, how can the member stand up here and talk about accountability and responsibility and finances when he is responsible for millions of wasted dollars for the citizens of Ottawa with the Ottawa LRT?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Of course, it was Conservatives from Nepean and Ottawa who cancelled light rail in Ottawa and cost taxpayers—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Order, please. Government members, order, please.

Mr. Stephen Blais: It was John Baird and Larry O'Brien, two prominent Conservatives from Ottawa, who cancelled it, and it cost taxpayers \$100 million.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Order, please.

Mr. Stephen Blais: In terms of accountability, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to meet with officials from OC Transpo and the mayor's office last week to talk about LRT in Ottawa, about stage 2 construction, about the progress of stage 3 and on—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Member for Carleton, order, please.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Order, please, member for Carleton.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I also met about the ongoing issues with the Confederation Line. I was shocked, Mr. Speaker, to learn when the—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Member for Carleton, first warning.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I was shocked to learn that despite all the questions in this place, despite all the aggravation and all of her concerns about light rail, the member from Carleton has not asked the mayor or OC Transpo officials for one single meeting about light rail—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): All members, please come to order. Come to order, please.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Member for Orléans, come to order.

Second warning to the member for Carleton. Three times and you're out. That's your second.

Come to order, please, all members. We have one minute left for a quick question and response.

The member from Essex has a question.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm going to try to bring some calm to this House as I'm apt to do. It's my skill set, Speaker.

This is a new one for me in this House. I've been here for nearly a decade. I've never seen a government attack its prior self. They are on a full frontal attack against the PC government of 2019. They are voracious in their attack against the policies of the government of 2019—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): You've got to pose a question.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: —and I hope they win that fight, Speaker. I truly do.

Mr. John Fraser: Yes, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm sorry, the member from Ottawa South. The member from Essex ragged the puck. There's no time for a response. Thank you for your attempt.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Please take your seat.

Further debate?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: This bill is very dear to my heart, actually. I really like to talk about it. I had hoped I could talk about that bill for a full hour, but I couldn't.

Since I immigrated over 26 years ago, I have had the pleasure to meet with thousands of immigrants—even during my serving as a professor, meeting with students and international students. All of those immigrants who I met had one thing in common: enthusiasm—enthusiasm when landing in Canada, which had been undeterred through the lengthy immigration process, of several years sometimes. They are enthusiastic. They want to come. They want to start their life. They want to get into a job. They want to do things for their careers and their families. They want to put their skills to good use in Canada, to contribute to the Canada of their dreams.

But upon coming here, many of these immigrants could not pursue the professions they had trained in, costing our province and our country billions in unused productivity. I can tell you from personal experience, Mr. Speaker, that many of these immigrants had to move on and pursue a different profession to provide for their families. In doing so, they lost their faith in the decision to come here. Some went back, some went to the US or, in some of the best-case scenarios, left their families and took jobs overseas, just to be able to stay in their profession. It's no wonder that only one quarter of internationally trained immigrants in Ontario work in the profession they trained and/or studied for. And not only that—they were accepted as immigrants here with a points system that gives them points for their profession, which they're not allowed to be in. This is because of bureaucracy, red tape, as well as unfair requirements, like Canadian experience. This is at a time when Ontario is facing a labour shortage, with over 300,000 jobs going unfilled.

This is why our government intends to introduce legislation that would remove barriers that internationally trained immigrants face here. Our proposed legislation would eliminate unfair requirements for Canadian work experience, reduce repetitive and costly language testing and ensure reasonable processing times for licence applications. Currently, the licensing time in some regulated professions is taking from 18 months to up to four years or more sometimes, while workers wait in limbo and are unable to provide for their families. For example, I had to work night shifts at Tim Hortons to make ends meet, even though I arrived here in Canada as a mid-level professional.

If these proposed changes are passed, our province would become the first in Canada to help level the playing field in certain regulated professions, so that workers coming here have the opportunity to build a better life for themselves and their loved ones.

This Canadian experience was even touching professionals who are moving from one province to another—if you move from a province that you have a licence for and come to Ontario, you might hit another

wall, saying, “You need X, Y and Z,” and you can’t get work in Ontario right away.

This would allow for the building of stronger communities for all Ontarians.

This will send a clear message to immigrants who came and are planning to come here that Ontario is ready to welcome you—to welcome your hard-earned skills, to welcome your dreams to ultimately contribute to our economy and prosper.

1630

The barriers we are proposing to remove for internationally trained immigrants, such as the requirement for Canadian work experience or licensing in certain regulated professions, will help to fill jobs in trades such as accounting, architecture, engineering, electrical and plumbing. These are the very trades we are facing shortages in. By making it easier for Ontarians to enter those very sectors, we will have a well-balanced market, which will ultimately result in a competitive free market for Ontarians who consume these services.

As I mentioned, many immigrants have left their profession of choice to pursue careers which they did not train and work for. My wish is that this bill empowers those very immigrants to fulfill their dreams in Canada and not let those years of hard work go to waste.

Many previous governments promised to open this file, and nothing happened.

I really appreciated the opposition member who talked about medical field workers. The previous government, in 14 years of power, didn’t even try as much as that—not talking about every profession; not talking about some of the medical field professions. They didn’t even come up with something close to that. So I don’t know, what is the point of discussing something—because they are missing this. What about the rest? Why didn’t you come up with something to help those immigrants before?

We know that the previous government was talking all the time about their support for immigrants and how they are wanting immigrants, but when it comes to reality, they did not move a hand to help those who are immigrants. Nobody wanted to open that file, at least in the past 26 years I was here.

Mr. Speaker, during my 14 years as an IT professional, I taught students who were highly qualified, with degrees up to PhD level in different aspects like physics, mathematics, phonetics or even public health, who are pursuing a college degree, a two-year diploma, on top of their PhD, because they have to change their careers. They can’t get to their profession. They sacrifice many years of study to have a PhD, for a two-year diploma so that they can get into the job market, because they can’t re-enter their main profession. This is sad. Sadly, they had to change their careers, because they faced several barriers to get to their profession.

This bill reflects the government’s priorities to help immigrants get into the job market faster. But this bill is more than that.

I’d like to address the right to disconnect. In many years of my past life, I was managing critical networks, and I

was on a pager 24/7. I carried a pager, and I could get paged to do a job any time of day, day or night. But the pager had some special rules: I had to get paid to carry the pager, and when I got paged for a job, I got overtime for that.

With today’s technology and being connected 24/7 and being online 24/7, and especially working from home during COVID-19, there have become no borders between work and family hours. I think, maybe as the opposition member talked about, saying that it’s not coming with meat, the legislation is not enforcing something—I don’t think that it can be enforced by law, saying, “Well, as an employee, I don’t want to accept an email from you after 5.” It’s not going to happen this way. But at least we are raising the flag that there should be some borders between work and free time, or your own time. It will give the employee the right to draw a line, saying, “I can’t do that,” or “I can do that.” Again, the work relationship between the employer and the employee is very special. They have to have that kind of discussion. It’s not going to be regulated by a law, but the law in this bill gives the employee the right to say, “This is too much. I can’t do that,” or “I can do this,” and he should not be penalized for that.

Also, another item I would like to cover here—speaking by extension about every worker, I want to focus on how this legislation also helps protect those employed by temporary help agencies. While most temp agencies play by the rules, over the past two years, we have found that some are unjustly making millions off the backs of Ontarians. It is simply unacceptable that some of these agencies are paying workers below the minimum wage and denying them employment rights, especially when in doing so they are also gaining a competitive advantage over law-abiding agencies by undercutting rates. This is why our government intends to remedy this through this bill. The legislation we are introducing would require THAs and recruiters to have a licence and meet specific requirements to operate in Ontario. Through this legislation, our government will draw up the most comprehensive process in Canada, requiring those operators to be vetted before being issued a licence to operate, and requiring a letter of credit that would be used to repay owed wages to workers.

This bill ensures that THAs will pay workers fairly by imposing penalties against unlicensed agencies and recruiters as well as the companies that use them.

I am pleased this bill will also include proactive inspection measures to ensure compliance with applicable requirements.

Our government is also proposing that we hire a dedicated team of officers to crack down on THAs and recruiters who are exploiting and trafficking domestic and foreign workers. This is because we firmly believe that no worker in Ontario should be going to work in fear, with their movements tracked and their passport locked away.

These proposed changes are strong, but we must be decisive to help protect vulnerable workers and ensure honest businesses feel safe addressing their staffing needs.

After all, haven't workers in Ontario suffered enough? Due to public health restrictions, it has been a tough year. I am proud that our government has done whatever was necessary to help those who have been laid off. As we open up the province, I am even prouder that our government is taking additional steps to protect workers.

This brings me to my next point. During the pandemic, when everything shut down and we were using online retail, delivery workers, including couriers and truckers, kept our province alive. They were integral to our supply chain, delivering food, PPE and all the other vital equipment that we required. Sadly, many of those heroes have been treated harshly, with businesses that they deliver to or pick up products from denying them access to the company's washrooms.

That's why our government is proposing, through this legislation, that business owners allow workers to use their washrooms. This is, after all, a matter of decency. It is the least a business can do to be civilized and courteous. That would also be subject to any health and safety concerns, in addition to other exceptions. Providing these hard-working workers with access to washrooms is a small change that will make a big difference, so they can do their jobs with the dignity and respect they deserve. This legislation is part of our government's broader efforts to protect and support vulnerable workers, such as those who have kept essential goods moving and the economy going through the pandemic.

1640

One more item I would like to talk about is WSIB costs. Our government is providing support through cutting WSIB costs through premiums. Our province's Workplace Safety and Insurance Board is going to cut premium rates in 2022 by \$168 million, bringing the total reduction in premiums since 2018 to \$2.4 billion. And now our government is also planning to allow for a significant portion of the WSIB's current reserve, currently valued at \$6.1 billion, to be distributed to safe employers. After all, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board covers over five million people in more than 300,000 workplaces across Ontario. Those proposed premium reductions, of an average of 5% for employers, total \$168 million that businesses can reinvest back in our economy.

Currently, the WSIB is not permitted to distribute surpluses to employers. This legislation will require that the WSIB return excess funds to employers once the board surplus reaches 125%, with the option to do so earlier.

I also would like to take the opportunity to speak about another important thing, the opportunity to recognize the fact that this week is Treaties Recognition Week. I wish to recognize two very important treaties that were signed over 200 years ago. The crown and the Mississaugas signed Treaty 13 on August 1, 1805, and it clarified an earlier treaty from 1787 involving lands east of Etobicoke Creek. The following day, on August 2, 1805, a provisional agreement was signed. Referred to as the "First Purchase" or the "Mississauga Purchase," this agreement involved 70,784 acres of land, involving all lands from Etobicoke Creek to Burlington Bay to an approximate

depth of six miles from the shoreline. The southern part of the city of Mississauga, from Lake Ontario to Eglinton Avenue, is located within this area, including my riding of Mississauga–Erin Mills. I am proud that the Mississauga we see today is the result of hundreds of years of efforts and hard work by numerous people. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the First Nations peoples of Canada and, more specifically, the Mississaugas of the Credit River.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The first question: the member for York South–Weston.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I would like to ask my question to the member from Mississauga–Erin Mills. He talked about a lot of issues which have nothing to do with the bill.

The federal immigration system, or the points system, is a system that, when immigrants come here, dashes their dreams of landing good jobs and living wages.

How do you feel now that this bill—folks, the Premier calls them heroes and front-line workers. There are many folks who are also professionals of health care, workers who this bill doesn't include. Is there a reason for that?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I would like to thank the member for that great question.

Actually, when it comes to the medical workers, there are many other binding guidelines and binding rules for issuing licences for medical workers. It was better to split that to be able to get something going, instead of waiting. That was, I think, the biggest obstacle when we talked to the previous government many times. I myself talked to the previous government many times about that, and I tried very hard with them. They kept coming back and having some obstacle from the authorities or the entities that were controlling the licensing for medical staff about the safety of Ontarians.

Again, yes, it can be worked on; yes, I promise and many people here promise to work on that. But we need your support. Can you commit to supporting that?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Now we turn to the Associate Minister of Digital Government to pose his question.

Hon. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to my colleague and my neighbour from Mississauga–Erin Mills for his remarks and for sharing his personal story and personal journey, just like many of us right here in this House.

As members know, there are many immigrants who are qualified individuals—and we see this even in our own ridings, especially in Peel region—but not able to work at their full potential. I know my colleague from Erin Mills briefly talked about this as well. What will this bill do to uplift these Ontarians? I know this is so important to so many residents across Ontario, but especially our ridings in Mississauga.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: In my riding of Mississauga–Erin Mills, 55% of the residents were not born in Canada—meaning first-generation immigrants. So I see that day in and day out. People come and complain.

The majority of the people who have good experience and skills in their career, like 20 years' experience or whatever—they can't accept starting as if no experience,

zero experience, and start from scratch, doing two years of Canadian experience to get licensing. The majority of them prefer to leave their families here, the wife and the kids, and take over opportunities overseas, somewhere in the world, anywhere in the world, and live out of a suitcase, being here for a month every few months. That's not helping the family life, not helping the Canadian promise, which is, Canada is good to build a family—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you very much. The next question goes to the member from Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member opposite. He spoke very eloquently about his treaty territory during treaties week. I think it's important that all of us recognize that we're all treaty people.

Earlier today, I tabled a petition actually asking the Ontario government to remove the appeal on the treaties for my treaty territory of the Robinson-Huron, 1850. I was wondering if the member opposite would join me in calling for the Ontario government to remove this appeal.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thanks to the member opposite.

I'm not 100% aware about the different consequences of this petition, but I definitely would like to dig a little bit more into it and see. Of course, if it's something fair for Canada and for Canadians, I would support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Perth-Wellington has a question.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: It's great to rise and ask a question of the member from Mississauga-Erin Mills. I listened intently to his speech and was certainly enthralled by his oratory, if I can put it that way.

1650

I have three boys. Two of them are in the trades and one is a police officer. They've been working in their chosen professions for a while, and they've certainly seen changes to their work from when they first started to where they are now. Technology certainly plays a big part in this. My electrician son wires up big machinery to run by itself—robotic equipment and stuff like that. Certainly, the police officer has seen quite a few changes in technology in his work—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): You have 10 seconds to pose your question.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Okay. Why is Ontario introducing this legislation now?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much for the great question.

Of course, coming from an IT background, I understand that technology now is advancing in every aspect of our day-to-day life—health, industry, business. Everything is different now.

Maybe COVID-19 accelerated the realization that our working habits and our working behaviours or patterns are going to change. I think this is a very proactive approach from our government to start looking into how we can plan for those changes, how we can protect employees, how we can make use of technology while making sure that it's not penetrating the personal lives of workers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question.

Miss Monique Taylor: As you know, Speaker, I spend a lot of time in the House. I've been here for all of the debate so far on Bill 27, and the members on the opposite side, the government side, like to focus on schedule 3. We have no problem with schedule 3, other than that it doesn't go far enough.

We do have some serious questions about this bill—and that's under schedule 6, where money is being given back to companies that is a surplus in the WSIB. Some \$3 billion is going back to companies, when injured workers in this province have been put into poverty for years and years and years. We need to do something better about it.

Can the member tell me why they refuse to help injured workers and continue to give money back to the employers?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much for the question.

I don't have all the breakdown details about who this money is already collected from. If this money is collected from the employer, I don't see the reason for putting that back to the employee. If it's paid by the employer and it's surplus, and we are trying to save that, I think that it's fair to return that to who paid it. If I pay something and then I get a discount, when I go back to the store, I will get the rebate for that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The Associate Minister of Digital Government has a question.

Hon. Kaleed Rasheed: I think what the member, during his remarks, also spoke about was the consultation and the entire process of how this bill was designed to help Ontarians.

I want to know if my colleague from Mississauga-Erin Mills, who did a phenomenal job during his remarks, can talk about some of the stakeholder interactions or discussions that happened in order to make sure that we present a good idea in front of Ontarians or for Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Back to the member to respond, in 35 seconds.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much to my colleague for the question.

It's not only our government saying that; in Mississauga, different levels of government have been talking about that. Even the municipal level is talking about how we have expertise in the city which needs to be deployed, but we can't deploy it, because there are obstacles in getting them integrated or getting them to be in the job. Some of that testimony is coming from the mayor of Mississauga, Bonnie Crombie. She is thanking us for whatever we did in this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We are out of time for that section.

Further debate?

Mr. Jamie West: Today we're debating the Working for Workers Act.

Speaking of workers, my community is in mourning. I want to take some time, just before the debate, to recognize a wonderful worker from Sudbury. She

suddenly passed away—she was only 30 years young. I was lucky enough to meet Katelane in 2020, during the education workers' strike. I walked the ETFO picket line with her. She was on the front lines of the teachers' strike, fighting for better conditions in her school, smaller classrooms—we know all the things. I could tell right away how much she cared about her colleagues, how much she cared about her students. I want to send my condolences to all the ETFO members who are grieving at this time.

I didn't know Katelane very well, but my constituency assistant Nicole did. She was good friends with Katelane. She had this to share, and I'd like to read it:

"Katelane was a beautiful and bright person. She loved to travel, go fishing and spend time with her family and her dog. She was known for her warm smile and passion for all things good. She made everyone feel like they were her friend right away.

"Katelane had her own jewellery company, loved to support all local businesses in our community. She was also a kindergarten teacher at R.L Beattie Public School."

Nicole wrote, "My heart goes out to all those who knew her, her family and especially her seven-month-old baby girl. She will surely grow up knowing what a light her mom was."

I just want to say, Speaker, on behalf of the NDP, we will continue to fight for all Ontario workers, teachers and their students. In solidarity, sister, rest in peace.

Speaker, Bill 27, the Working for Workers Act, is an omnibus bill. The government is promoting this as a pro-worker bill. I think it was summarized earlier as the government pretending not to be who the Conservative government was in 2018 when they were elected. They cut a lot of things in here, and now they're coming back. There are parts of it you can see as pro-worker, but the devil is in the details.

One of the things that I want to talk about is—and not just for this bill, but this bill as well—the continued failure of this government to speak with everyone. They consulted with some key groups, but they failed to have a meaningful consultation with the OFL. The Ontario Federation of Labour is having their biennial convention this week. They represent over one million of Ontario's workers. They are the largest labour federation in all of Canada. They reach out to the Conservative government on a regular basis. The Premier, who brags about everyone having his cellphone number, even though he's thrown that phone away, can't seem to phone them back.

The Minister of Labour should know that he should talk to labour because labour is in his title. Also, in his portfolio is the Occupational Health and Safety Act, and the core principle of the Occupational Health and Safety Act is the IRS system, the internal responsibility system, which literally spells out that the government and workers and employers should all consult and work together to make better workplace decisions.

I worked in health and safety for 17 years. I taught health and safety at Laurentian University. I can tell you from personal experience that when we fail to talk with

everyone who's going to be affected in my workplace, we got it wrong. Even with the best of intentions, we got it wrong. You never know as much as the people being directly affected, even if you think you do. That's a key message the Conservative government has to—especially when you're going to table a bill about workers, maybe talk to the workers.

I was looking into this, and the HRReporter had this to report: "The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) is calling for a halt to the Ontario Workforce Recovery Advisory Committee (OWRAC), saying that it is 'deeply flawed'....

"However, the OFL says the group lacks representation from labour, workers, or labour and employment law experts, despite having experts from other fields....

"Working people deserve a seat at the table and to have meaningful input into the decisions that will shape their futures."

That seems like common sense to me, Speaker.

David Doorey, a law professor at York University, had this to say—this is perfect: "The fact that the Ontario government struck a panel on the future of labour and employment law and didn't invite a representative from the labour movement but included bankers 'says everything you need to know about this committee.'" And I would argue—I'm stealing a page from the member from Waterloo; I would win—it says everything you need to know about this party.

I won't have time, I know, to get through all of the sections in here, but I do want to talk about schedule 6. This is a bill that's talking about workers, and schedule 6 basically is a huge gift to the best friends of the Conservative Party: big wealthy companies—not mom-and-pops. Let me explain it to you.

1700

Schedule 6 is going to allow surpluses in the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board's insurance fund to be distributed to businesses. We have heard this record before. This is a summer rerun.

I'll give you a quick history of the WSIB. Originally, it was called the Workmen's Compensation Board. It wasn't even "workers"; it was "workmen," back then. It was upgraded and became "workers." In 1915, it was brought in as the Workmen's Compensation Act, and it's known as the "historic compromise." What that means is that workers gave up the right to sue their employer. That's why we don't have those lawsuits you see in the States. We don't sue our employers. In exchange for that, you have a guaranteed protection from loss of income. That's what's supposed to happen.

Now, since 2018, they're talking about giving some money back to the employers. Since 2018, the Conservative government has dropped employers' premium rates by 47%. They justified the cuts because, in 2019, the unfunded liability had been paid off. That sounds great when you hear it. It's a great talking point. But let me just explain what that means. The unfunded liability is the difference between the projected amount, how much you think you're going to need to compensate Ontario's

injured workers, and the amount of insurance money that WSIB actually has. This unfunded liability was a manufactured crisis, and you're supposed to learn from your mistakes.

It started with the previous Conservative government, under Mike Harris. Mike Harris made a whole bunch of cuts. He changed it from "workers' compensation" to "WSIB." They actually got "workers" out of it. They call it "workplace." The amount of compensation was reduced. It used to be 90% of your pre-injury net earnings; they dropped that down to 85%. Workers who were permanently disabled—they permanently de-indexed their pensions, so that meant that you can't keep up with inflation. Inflation is super-high right now, but it's typically 2%, 3%. So imagine you have this much money and, every year, 2%, 3% eats away at it.

The Jackson report showed that Mike Harris's Conservative changes resulted in lots of cuts: \$9.3 billion in the cost-of-living cuts, \$3.3 billion as a result of the reduction of compensation from 95% to 85% of net worth, \$1.4 billion from the 50% reduction in injured workers' retirement income. Those are big cuts.

You want to talk about workers? It's a workers' bill.

What's interesting is the report also showed, if they hadn't reduced the money employers paid into the fund, the unfunded liability would have been pretty small, and if they kept it at those 1991 levels, unfunded liability wouldn't have existed at all, and it wouldn't have taken nearly 17 years to pay off.

So to recap: The previous Conservative government created the massive unfunded liability, and it took 17 years to pay it back. During that time, the Conservative government—and then the Liberal government; they joined in, as well—used that unfunded liability to cry poor and deny claims. They made workers' lives worse. "There's no money in the cupboard. We gave it all away. We finally paid it back." For some reason, I guess because the Liberal government did such a terrible job over 15 years, people were willing to dip their toe back into the Conservative government.

The Conservatives were re-elected, and they decided, "Let's reduce the premiums. What could possibly go wrong?"

Well, I'll tell you what is going wrong right now—and you know this in every one of your ridings, because you have injured workers in your ridings. Injured workers in Ontario face four times the rate of poverty as non-injured workers, and 46% of permanently injured workers in Ontario live in or close to poverty; 9% live in deep poverty. One in five injured workers are living in extreme poverty after an injury. Extreme poverty is less than \$10,000 a year, so that's a worker making less than \$1,000 a month. Over 40% of injured workers reported an income of less than \$15,000 a year.

I'm reminded that the government House leader was—just invented a minister position that gives him, I think, \$27,000 a year.

This isn't a party that cares about workers. This is a party that cares about their friends.

I'm just going to summarize. The previous Conservative government created the WSIB unfunded liability, they pushed injured workers into poverty, and that allowed their government and then the Liberal government to keep injured workers living in poverty, all the time saying, "Well, we've got to pay back this liability. What can you do?" You could not create it. Now the unfunded liability is finally paid back, and the Conservative government introduced this bill, the Working for Workers Act. In this bill, the Working for Workers Act—I feel like it's a joke. I know there are cameras, but it feels like Candid Camera. In a bill called the Working for Workers Act, the Conservative government is saying, "Workers, you should be really happy, because we're going to reward our Conservative buddies with \$3 billion. You, the 46% of workers living in poverty since the Mike Harris days, should be happy, because we're giving our wealthiest friends \$3 billion."

Let's be honest, Speaker: They're going to say it's good for all business. Small business will get a little bit—I mean a little bit. How much do you think Walmart is going to make or Loblaws is going to make? How much do you think those big box stores—remember how they were first in line to protect big box stores during the pandemic, how they shut down small businesses? They don't care about small businesses and workers. They care about wealthy millionaires and billionaires—and here's \$3 billion for them. This bill, the Working for Workers Act, is going to create a new unfunded liability that will ensure that injured workers continue to live in poverty. They'll live in poverty while their buddies get \$3 billion back. One in five injured workers is living in extreme poverty, and 40% reported an income of less than \$15,000 a year. And this government thinks, "How can we reward them? Well, let's get more of those workers living in poverty. Let's create a new unfunded liability. Let's create a situation where we can guarantee that for nearly 20 years you'll live in poverty; that if you're injured on the job—if you're a hard-working worker, if you're doing your job and you're injured through no fault of your own, then it's straight to ODSP for you."

This party is unbelievable. Their catchphrase in the last election about being for the little guy—I think "forgot the little guy" is a better phrase.

I want to read a quote from Willy Noiles. Willy is the acting president of ONIWG. Willy used to come here all the time, as an injured worker, to watch debate; he's not allowed to because of COVID-19. He would be here all the time, hoping that his presence would remind you of the injured workers living in poverty—how they're struggling, how they can't make ends meet, how it destroys their family, how they can't care for their kids. Willy had this to say: "Between 2010 and 2017, WSIB benefits paid out to injured workers were cut by more than half, and the Ford government's solution is to give employers more money back, more money on top of the 52% cut in premiums in 2018, 2019 and 2020. How about using the surplus to ensure workers are taken care of when injured at work? Now that's what we would call working for

workers.” I applaud Willy. If we’re going to have a bill called the Working for Workers Act, let’s actually work for workers.

I’m going to go on to some of the other schedules. Schedule 2—this is a great sound bite; it’s probably great in sound bites on the news—“requires employers with 25 or more employees to have a written policy about employees disconnecting from their job at the end of the workday to help employees spend more time with their families.” I was reading this yesterday, when I received a message from my House leader saying, “Tomorrow you’re sitting from 6 to midnight.” The irony is overwhelming. I know it’s not a typical workplace, but when we’re debating a bill about disconnecting from work, the government, who basically control when we sit, have decided on short notice, “Why don’t you guys sit until midnight?”

I feel like this isn’t even worth the paper it’s written on. Frankly, it’s a policy. All it is is that you’ve got to have a policy and write it up. Policies aren’t always that enforceable, and policies require a worker—typically a precarious worker—to call the Ministry of Labour, make a complaint and put his job on the line. You know—I know you won’t make eye contact, but I know you guys know—that workers won’t do that, right? Those scales of fairness are not balanced.

When this government came into place, after they cut minimum wage, after they attacked workers again and again and again, after Bill 124—if you want to talk about helping workers—capped nurses at 1% all the way through a pandemic. You guys just dug your heels in. One of the things you did, as well, is, you made changes to the Occupational Health and Safety Act. There was a health and safety poster you had to have in the workplace, letting people know about their rights. It was just a poster. You just hit “print.” It takes a page. You stick it on a billboard. You don’t have to put that up anymore—because why would workers want to know their rights?

This is going to be a policy. This will be another thing that maybe the workplace does. Good workplaces, I’m sure, will do it. They’ll hit “print.” There’s no requirement to post it; they’ll shove it in a drawer, and no workers will know and no workers will ever complain. But this Conservative government will be in the news every day saying, “Look what we did,” even though it has no teeth and it means nothing.

1710

I talked about this earlier in one of my questions—schedule 5 is about allowing delivery drivers to use company washrooms. There are some common-sense reasons why they wouldn’t—if it was a personal residence, things like that. I think that’s great. Access to washrooms is really important. However, in northern Ontario, we have very few rest stops that are owned by the provincial government, and they’re frequently closed and locked. They’re not serviced. If you’re a truck driver, if you’re a delivery driver, if you’re a tourist, it’s nice to use a washroom. Northern Ontario is beautiful. If you pull into one of those rest stops—it’s not just a rest stop, it’s not just a building; there are scenic views, there are things like

that. If you pull into one of these and the washroom is locked, you probably don’t want to get out of your car because—when you’ve got to go, you’ve got to go—it’s not going to be that pleasant. The view is wonderful, but the smell? Not so much. If you’re going to move this through, lead by example and commit to keeping these open, so that when people pull over to go to the washroom, they can go to the washroom in an actual facility and not beside a tree.

In this bill, they also talk about temporary help agencies. Again, I think this will be run up the flagpole.

I don’t think we can talk about temporary work agencies in this House without talking about Fiera Foods. A temp worker died at Fiera Foods—and they were a temp worker for five years. Temp workers—it used to be 30 days, a month or two, not five years. Fiera Foods got corporate welfare from the Liberal government; they got it from the Conservative government. They killed—I believe the count right now is five people. Five people died on their property. I say “killed” because that’s the word that is used in the Occupational Health and Safety Act. I’m not trying to imply blame, but I am saying that if you have five workers who died in your factory, maybe something is not going so well. Maybe there’s more to be done on protecting workers and eliminating clauses that allow people who work in the same workplace every single day for five years to not be “workers” in that workplace. I believe—and I’ll correct my record if I’m wrong—Fiera Foods has a “clean” safety record, because it’s the temp agency that has the injuries and deaths. What they do with those is they roll that company—if it gets too expensive, they start a new company at a new numbered name, and they get the contract at Fiera Foods and they don’t pay into it.

To summarize, because I have about a minute left: We have a bill about workers that really doesn’t help workers. It has some good sound bites in it, some great things—we’re heading into an election, you can tell, because they’re saying, “Workers, workers, rah, rah, rah!” They don’t care about workers; they never did, and they never will. They didn’t care about workers under Mike Harris—knock on a door and ask someone what they think of Mike Harris—and they don’t now. They create plans that push workers into poverty. They push injured workers who are struggling to find jobs into poverty, and they keep them there. And they reward their billionaire friends with bucketloads of cash. That’s unfortunate, and it’s wrong.

It’s a broken bill. I wish I had more time to discuss it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for questions.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I thank the member opposite for his remarks.

I want to address one very important question in this bill. This is affecting a lot of immigrants. Immigrants and the groups they work with have already said how the barriers are affecting them, and how the barrier of recognizing foreign credentials has been a great barrier for the workers and this should be struck down. We have done a lot of analysis as well, and this is part of what we produced in this bill.

Why would the member opposite not think that this is something we should be upholding?

Mr. Jamie West: I didn't speak to that section of the bill. The reality, though, is that it's another thing that does sound very good. There are issues. Frequently, pre-COVID-19, when I took a cab to the airport, the cab driver would have a doctorate and be a cab driver because his skills weren't recognized here. That is something to be addressed. But this bill fails to address, for example, health care workers. It doesn't help them at all.

Absolutely, yes, we have to help people who require the skills—to get the skills that are there. We need to help our workforce to move forward.

I have a personal example. My wife's friend is from Venezuela. She was a lawyer and basically had to do her whole law degree over again in order to practise law in Ontario.

So there are things to be fixed. But I think, especially in the middle of a pandemic, we should be laser-focused on how we get more people into health care, and this bill doesn't provide for that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Waterloo has a question.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I want to thank the member from Sudbury for his really impassioned commentary on this piece of legislation.

I want to go back to schedule 6. I am fixated on the experience of GE workers in this province, because it tells a very telling story of how governments have neglected worker safety. Of the 3,000 Ontarians the Occupational Cancer Research Centre estimates are diagnosed with cancer due to their work each year, only about 170 receive compensation. This is partly because there's an onerous burden of proof that was recently rejected by the Supreme Court of Canada.

The province is actively making it more difficult to have justice for those people who are injured.

What do you say to the people of Peterborough and Kitchener Centre and Kitchener-Waterloo who have been fighting for justice? This piece of legislation will have the excess premiums that were not paid to workers—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Back to the member from Sudbury to respond.

Mr. Jamie West: It's an excellent question.

In fact, the member from Niagara Falls, who is also our critic for WSIB and safety—he and I had had a meeting with the members from Peterborough from the GE plant, because their representative, who is a Conservative, refused to meet with them, flat out.

Workplace occupational disease is a hidden tragedy. The fees we pay for workplaces that don't pay to cover this, in terms of going to the hospital, in terms of all those cancers and the costs of it—we pay through the public purse because workplaces don't.

In my city of Sudbury, right now they're trying to get the diesel particulate matter levels lowered to at least what they are in Europe. They're known carcinogens. The Minister of Labour is aware of this. I've spoken with him. I've shared letters with him. He hasn't budged on it.

Also, the McIntyre Powder Project comes out of northern Ontario, and so does the sinter plant which actually had to be shut down because it caused so many workplace cancers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to stand in the House and ask a question today.

As we all know, this issue has been around for many years. Sadly, the Liberals had 15 years to fix it and didn't really do much of anything on it.

Mr. Speaker, the leader of the official opposition—the current leader, the member from Hamilton Centre—said back in 2006, “Fifty-two per cent of recent immigrants in Hamilton live below the poverty line. It's shocking and shameful that a province as affluent as Ontario has done so little to improve things. Immigrant women continue to be isolated and continue to represent the largest numbers of the face of poverty in our city. Employers in Hamilton are often unaware of their skills.”

I ask the great member from Sudbury: Our proposed bill will move significantly to help people who have other occupations and have criteria and accreditation from other countries to come here and get work more easily. So I'm asking him why his current leader of the official opposition, who voted with the Liberals for most of the years I was here to keep things in Liberal power, why they won't support—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you very much. We go back to the great member from Sudbury to respond.

1720

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you, great Speaker, and thank you as well to the great member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

Interjections.

Mr. Jamie West: Look, I have said that there are parts of this that are good, and the devil is in the details.

Let's talk frankly about immigrant workers, because many immigrant workers work in jobs because their credentials aren't recognized, where they don't get WSIB. Or they work in precarious workplace jobs. We've seen this with COVID-19, where women, in particular, and also immigrant families are being hit hardest by this. And if those workers are injured, it's policies in this bill, in this Working for Workers bill, that are going to push those families into poverty. And that's what I debated primarily: your policy to hand billions of dollars to the wealthiest people on the backs of the less fortunate in our province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Thank you to my colleague from Sudbury, who has eloquently spoken about this bill. This bill is not about workers. It is entitled Working for Workers, but it's not about workers. It's very strange, this. The workers need—really, we also highlighted the issue of the need for supporting workers, their credentials. This excludes them as well in this.

How can we improve a bill that really puts workers front and centre, that will be working for workers?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Sudbury to respond.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you as well to the member from York South–Weston. He advocates tirelessly for his members in his riding all the time. He's bringing forward their concerns. A lot of those are low-wage workers, Speaker.

When he was asking me the question, I couldn't help but think about my private member's bill to create a minimum wage floor for PSWs, calling on the government to recognize these health care heroes, who we all recognize have really hard jobs and make very little money, to create a wage floor for them. The government has voted it down, and since they voted it down, they have extended a temporary wage increase twice.

If you want to debate something that will help workers, let's bring that bill back. Let's debate an increase for PSWs, an increase for RPNs in long-term care and home care, so we pay them a decent wage so that we can attract more people into it, and so that we can all be successful and really take care of those health care heroes the way we should.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry has a question.

Mr. Jim McDonell: The member from Scarborough Southwest can be quoted in Hansard: "These organizations do a fantastic job trying to support newcomers who have settled in this beautiful country, one of the best countries in the world, filled with opportunities. But we have to make sure that we provide access, that we provide the ability for the organizations that are doing the work on the ground to be able to help these people find the job that they're qualified to do. There are newcomer organizations that are tasked to do that, but unfortunately without enough support—if we have a new system in place, then we should definitely work toward helping these people."

That's exactly what this bill does: It looks at removing these barriers that have existed. I've spent some time up in Sudbury, and I know that there are many people from all over the world and they have the same issue of trying to get access. So can the member explain why they say something on one side and then—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. We'll go to the member from Sudbury to respond to that partial question.

Mr. Jamie West: In speaking of saying one thing and then another thing, I want to remind everybody that the Premier of Ontario had a dog whistle about immigrants, saying that immigrants are lazy—implying that they're lazy.

Interjections.

Mr. Jamie West: Read the paper. The truth hurts, Speaker; the truth hurts.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Order, please. Government members, come to order, please.

Mr. Jamie West: It is absolutely what was said. It was a dog whistle to paint newcomers to the country as lazy. They can't now all of a sudden say that they care, with that dog whistle. The truth hurts.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Order, please.

Thank you so much for coming to order. Further debate?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, and good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. Things were going along swimmingly until the last comment, unfortunately.

Mr. Speaker, since we took office, our government's goal has always been to make Ontario the best place for people to work, to live and to raise a family. Legislation called the Working for Workers Act, which was recently introduced by the Minister of Labour, is just one more step towards that. This proposed legislation, we believe, would put Ontario in a better position in charting a path forward, because, as we all know, the way people work has changed. The COVID-19 pandemic has been the catalyst for that change.

This proposed legislation would make Ontario the first province in the country to make it easier for employees to spend quality time with their loved ones. We would do this by making it easier for employees to disconnect after hours and on the weekends. The legislation would require employers with 25 or more employees to develop what we call written disconnecting-from-work policies. These workplace policies could include expectations about the time it takes to respond to emails. It could include directives that encourage employees to turn on out-of-office notifications when they are not working.

We've all been there. We are relaxing with family after a long day at work, and then the phone starts buzzing with text messages or emails or phone calls regarding matters related to work. For example, a parent is at a Little League game and looking forward to cheering a child on, but they're constantly interrupted by texts from work. That parent is being pulled in multiple directions. They want to watch their child play, but they feel obligated to respond to these calls from work. It can create an awful lot of stress. Even if employees ignore the calls, at that point it's just difficult to enjoy that time with your family.

Speaker, with a written policy, everyone will know what the ground rules are, what the expectations are, everything related to responding to calls from work. Putting the policies in writing creates an environment that is less stressful for everyone. With this proposed legislation, our government is making it clear that we are prioritizing workers' mental health and the time that they are able to spend with their families and their loved ones. This change would encourage a better work-life balance. This legislation would offer better protection and support for workers, and it would attract workers to this province, especially during a period when we're dealing with significant labour shortages in certain sectors of the economy.

Another item in this legislation is the non-compete agreement. Our government wants to ban the use of non-

compete clauses or agreements that prevent people from exploring other work opportunities. We want to make it easier for employees to advance in their careers. This proposed legislation will prohibit employers from using non-compete agreements. They restrict employees from taking new jobs with another business in the same field after they leave the company.

The proposed changes would ban this unfair restriction. It would help people advance their careers and earn more money. Often, these non-compete clauses are for six months or even longer. To be clear, these non-compete agreements only benefit the employer. They do absolutely nothing to benefit the employee, and that is why our government wants to ban these types of unfair agreements. Prohibiting non-compete agreements will give workers, start-ups and small businesses across Ontario a fair shot at advancement.

Non-compete agreements can prevent workers from starting their own company. And it's not only highly paid professionals who are impacted by non-compete clauses in a contract. Non-competes can include fast food and warehouse workers, camp counsellors and seasonal staff.

Speaker, while the primary rationale of non-compete agreements is to prevent workers from sharing trade secrets with rival companies, it often comes at the expense of workers and the entrepreneurial spirit. Let me give you an example from the broadcast news business just south of the border in Buffalo. An anchor whose contract was not being renewed by their current employer had to wait six months before they could accept a position with another television station in Buffalo. During that wait time, the employee wasn't being paid. The non-compete agreement impeded this person's ability to work in their chosen field in their own hometown for six months. They obviously suffered financially. Their only option, if they did not want to wait out the non-compete clause, was to pack up their family and move to another city. Moving would have cost them financially as well.

1730

This unfair restriction that hurts employees is what our government intends to ban, and doing so would actually give Ontario a competitive advantage in attracting global talent. Employers would still be able to protect their intellectual property through narrower clauses.

Speaker, our government also wants to make Ontario more attractive to talent from around the world by removing barriers to employment, such as Canadian experience requirements for internationally trained individuals to get licensed in a regulated profession and to get access to jobs that match their qualifications and their skills. This change would ease the province-wide labour shortage by making it easier for immigrants who are trained in another country to start careers in their profession right here in Canada, right here in Ontario.

We have all heard the stories of people who have medical or engineering degrees from a foreign country who are doing menial jobs in Ontario because they are having a hard time getting licensed in their chosen profession. Restrictive rules that prevent an individual

from pursuing their profession in Canada is demoralizing for them, and it hurts the economy as a whole.

Five years ago, only one quarter of foreign-trained immigrants living in Ontario were employed in the regulated professions for which they trained or studied. Our government is proposing to help remove many significant barriers to professional employment that many foreign-trained immigrants do face, such as the requirement for Canadian work experience when trying to get licensed in certain regulated professions and trades. Speaker, if the Canadian work experience requirement does not result in a public health or safety risk, why not remove it?

The lack of Canadian work experience is often cited as the number-one barrier facing immigrants in getting a job that matches their qualifications. These professions include law, accounting, architecture, engineering, electrical and plumbing. These newcomers who want to work in their chosen professions are blocked from doing so for no other reason than bureaucracy and red tape. They have the experience, they have the qualifications, but they are prevented from contributing because of a requirement that, in many cases, is simply unnecessary. Just think of the number of vacant jobs that could be filled if certain barriers to employment didn't exist.

We all know that the province is facing a looming labour crisis. Hundreds of thousands of jobs are going unfilled. This summer alone, roughly 300,000 jobs in Ontario were unfilled, and that costs billions and billions of dollars in lost productivity. If these proposed changes are made, Ontario would be the first province in the country to help level the playing field in certain regulated professions.

Speaker, our government wants to go a step further. We want to reduce the burden of having to complete multiple official language proficiency tests for both immigration and professional licensing. The pandemic has helped reveal deficiencies in our regulatory system. During emergencies, such as the pandemic, we need certain professions urgently. We simply cannot wait for a slow registration process. We need to allow applicants to register faster in their regulated professions.

The proposed changes would apply to non-health regulated professions and compulsory trades, such as professional engineers, architects, plumbers, electricians, accountants, hairstylists, teachers and early childhood educators. Currently, to get licensed in some regulated professions, it could take up to 18 months or longer. Workers are waiting in limbo, wasting their valuable time when they could be contributing to the economy. These proposed changes will better the lives of new Canadians. In fact, they will better the lives of all Canadians. These changes would give individual workers the opportunity to build a better life for themselves and their families right here in Ontario.

Speaker, our government recognizes how much immigrants enrich our province. Our government has been working for quite some time on changes that would help these highly-skilled, foreign-trained immigrants find work

in their field of expertise. The Ontario bridge training program is a good example. We are investing \$67 million over three years on programs and services that connect newcomers with in-demand jobs within their communities. We want to make changes that would contribute to building strong communities for all of us. We want to make it as easy as possible for newcomers to find jobs, to get established in their communities and to build a life here in Ontario. That's why our government's proposal to streamline the credentialing process for skilled immigrants is a vital step forward toward that goal.

Let me speak for a moment about the proposed changes to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board that we were hearing the member for Sudbury speak to just moments ago. Our government wants to allow surpluses in the WSIB's insurance fund to be distributed to businesses when that fund gets to a certain level. The WSIB covers over five million people in more than 300,000 workplaces across the province. If passed, this legislation would require the WSIB to return surplus funds to employers once the surplus reaches 125%. There is an option to return the surplus to employers sooner. Allowing businesses access to surpluses would help them cope with the impacts of COVID-19.

We want to allow a significant portion of the WSIB's current reserve, which is valued at \$6.1 billion, to be distributed to employers that have a good safety record. And I want to stress that: This money will only go to employers who have a good safety record.

Speaker, a few weeks ago, the Minister of Labour came to my hometown of Hamilton to announce that WSIB is cutting premium rates this coming year by \$168 million. This would bring the total premium reduction since our government took office to \$2.4 billion. In addition, our government wants to allow for a significant portion of WSIB's current reserve, which is valued at \$6.1 billion, to be distributed to employers who, as I've said, have this proven safety record.

The Minister of Labour made the announcement at Donut Monster, a very popular local bakery in Hamilton's Locke Street neighbourhood. Donut Monster is one of many businesses across the province that will see its WSIB premiums reduced next year. Donut Monster's owner, Heidi Vanderkwaak, is thrilled with the rate reduction. In fact, she plans to use the extra money to increase wages for her bakery staff. As Heidi sees it, the extra money will give her just a little bit more of a competitive edge. She said supports such as these go a long way to help keep businesses viable and competitive, and able to attract employees as they continue to deal with the impacts of COVID.

Our government knows that shopkeepers and independent business people on Locke Street in my hometown of Hamilton and every other street in the province need just a little bit more help, and that's why our government is taking action to modernize the WSIB. We want to support local employers and protect local jobs. This initiative by our government will save employers hundreds of millions of dollars. This is money that can be reinvested in new

jobs, technology, and health and safety precautions. Injured workers can rest assured that they will continue to be protected and will receive the benefits and services they are entitled to receive.

Our government wants to reduce administrative costs and burdens for businesses by enabling the WSIB to work with the CRA to create a one-stop shop for submitting payroll deductions. This approach would be much more efficient. If there is one complaint that I hear from business owners, it's that the administrative burden is just too high. They welcome anything that reduces the tasks they need to perform to comply with government regulations. They don't want to waste their time with things such as these administrative burdens. They want to spend their time doing what they do best, and that is serving their customers, and working on behalf of their clients.

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Speaker, our government also wants to require temporary help agencies and recruiters to have a licence to operate in this province. The proposed changes would allow officers to levy penalties against an unlicensed THA or recruiter or a business that is using an unlicensed operator. Businesses that use deceitful recruiters could be required to repay workers for charging them illegal fees. Our government is serious about protecting these vulnerable workers, and that is why we want to hire a dedicated team of officers to crack down on temporary help agencies and recruiters who are exploiting and trafficking domestic and foreign workers. These people are some of the most vulnerable people in Ontario's workforce. Many workers go along with these deceptive practices, such as charging illegal fees, because they're afraid of losing their jobs. Our government's message to dishonest and deceitful employers is clear: Any employer who abuses the rights of their workers, no matter what passport that worker holds, will find an officer knocking on their door. Time is up for the rule-breakers. If passed, this legislation would be the toughest of its kind in Canada. It will ensure every worker in the province has their rights protected.

Inspections by ministry officers have shown there are some bad actors working in the temporary help agency sector. We have found that these bad actors are paying workers less than the minimum wage and they are denying their workers other basic employment rights. By undercutting rates, they are gaining an unfair advantage over their competition: people who are abiding by the rules. We are putting these rule-breakers on notice. Their deceptive and deceitful treatment of vulnerable workers will get the attention of law enforcement, and there will be consequences for breaking the law.

This year, government inspectors targeted temporary help agencies used on farms, retirement homes, food-processing plants and warehouse facilities. As of just a few weeks ago, the inspectors found over \$3.3 million owing to these employees. Approximately half of what is owed has been recovered. Inspectors found non-compliance in areas such as minimum wage, record-keeping, hours of work, holiday pay, overtime pay and vacation pay. Before the licensing system takes effect, we want to hire this

dedicated team of officers to address labour trafficking by cracking down on illegal practices and recovering unpaid wages for workers who have been exploited.

Speaker, in 2019, one of the largest labour human trafficking investigations in the province resulted in 40 foreign workers being rescued. Investigators found that they were living in squalid conditions and being paid peanuts. The workers who were here on visitors' visas from Mexico were working at resort hotels. They were employed through a temporary help agency. After all the deductions for food, rent and mattresses, the workers were being paid very, very little.

Our government's move to crack down on bad actors ensures a level playing field. It will result in a fairer industry for THAs, their clients and assignment employees alike. Our government has been applauded by representatives in the industry for taking a bold step, which includes enforcement initiatives against the illegal operators who thumb their nose at the system.

Speaker, many of the proposed changes that we speak about were informed by the recommendations made by the experts on the Ontario Workforce Recovery Advisory Committee. The committee's members conducted a thorough consultation with workers, employers and union representatives, and these proposed changes complement the work that our government has already been doing to improve and expand our workforce.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): It's time for questions.

Ms. Catherine Fife: The member from Flamborough—Glanbrook talked about bad actors. One of the worst actors in this province is a company called Fiera Foods where they've used over 70% temporary workers.

Those working conditions in that factory are horrible, painful, dehumanizing, one would say, and actually five workers died: Ivan Golyashov, Aydin Kazimov, Amina Diaby, a worker whose name has been withheld by the family and Enrico Miranda. Those five people died in that factory. But according to WSIB, they have an almost perfect record, so they will benefit by this legislation because those temporary workers are essentially off the record; they don't count. This legislation essentially allows that; it's permissive.

Why, as you discuss bad actors in the province of Ontario, has the government brought forward legislation which actually will reward a company like Fiera Foods because those people, in the eyes of your government and this legislation, their lives don't count, and they will benefit from the WSIB back payments through the premiums?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for the question. I don't know the specifics of that particular case, so I can't speak to it, but I can tell you that the changes that the minister has introduced to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act will reward people who do play by the rules, who do protect their workers, and allow them to be reimbursed funds that have contributed to basically what is a surplus in WSIB funds.

I mentioned Donut Monster in Hamilton. This is a very popular local bakery that believes in treating its employees with respect. They pay them a good wage, and they're going to use the additional funds they get from this return from WSIB towards hiring more people and increasing their wages.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question goes to the member from Sarnia—Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Speaker. It's good to see you in the chair. I wondered if the member could speak a little bit more—some more details that maybe you didn't get time to put in your original remarks about the non-compete clause and how that will help businesses.

Ms. Donna Skelly: To the member from Hamilton Mountain—he was asking about the non-compete clause. It's an important clause. I worked in television for years, and we had a non-compete clause. When you have another job opportunity or you're looking for work and leave, you are restricted to where you can work for six months to a year within your specific jurisdiction. We will remove that because, for many people, those contracts really do favour the employer and not the employee.

That's why we believe you should have an opportunity, especially when we're competing and trying to bring in workers around the world to help fill these jobs in Ontario. We need to create an environment. They want to come here and make more money. They should be able to come here. They should not have non-compete clauses that restrict them from seeking future work or even opening their own company. If they want to do so, we'll remove that barrier and let them be the best they can be in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Sudbury has a question.

Mr. Jamie West: I want to follow up on what the member from Waterloo talked about. Fiera Foods had five workers who were killed in the workplace—five workers. Those five workers were temporary workers, so they're not employees of Fiera Foods even though they may work there for years and it's the only workplace they work at. That's a loophole, especially considering that workplace has—70% of those workers were temporary workers. Don't you think that in a bill called "working for workers," it would be more beneficial—instead of providing \$6.1 billion to companies like Fiera Foods that have a lot of employees and are going to get a lot of that money back because they have a clean record, even though they have five fatalities—wouldn't it make more sense to close that loophole so that temporary workers aren't temporary for five, six, seven years?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Again, I don't know the specifics of this case. At this point, it would be hearsay for me to react to anything like this.

I will say, however, I believe that hard-working Ontarians that pay into WSIB, that play by the rules, that do everything possible to ensure the health and safety of their employees, should be rewarded if there is a surplus of funds. Especially after they've gone through these challenges with COVID, we have to do everything possible, take every tool in our tool kit to make sure that

they can compete, that they can survive and thrive once we get beyond the pandemic. This is one other way of helping businesses get ahead coming out of COVID.

If we have a surplus, they should be rewarded for their health and safety record. They should be given some of that money back to reinvest in the company as they see fit.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question goes to the member from Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: Several times during the opposite member's debate, she talked about the \$6.1 billion that would be provided to these large companies.

In my debate, of the 20 minutes I spoke, I spoke for at least 15 minutes, maybe 17 minutes, about how the Mike Harris Conservatives created this unfunded liability by doing the exact same thing your government is proposing to do. That took 17 years to pay off, and it created a situation where one in five injured workers is living on less than \$10,000 a month.

Is the member opposite comfortable with one in five injured workers in her riding living on less than \$10,000 a month?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Again, it's always nice to hear from the member from Sudbury, one of my favourite cities in the province.

I support what we are proposing. Is it going to address all of the problems with the WSIB? No, but what it is going to do is give people who play by the rules a break; it really is. We're not talking about people who are abusing the system. It's not going to impact in any way people who are eligible for a payment through the WSIB. We're simply saying that if there is a surplus, especially now, once we've gone through COVID-19, let's do what we can to reimburse, to help people who have paid into it, who have played by the rules, who have kept their workforce safe through the pandemic. Let them be given a little bit more of this money. They will be able to invest it back into their companies, and we, as Ontarians, will all benefit from that economic injection of cash.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Oakville North–Burlington has a question.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: I have a question for the member. Could you advise us, are stakeholders supportive of the direction our government is taking with this legislation?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Yes, the stakeholders are so supportive of this legislation. Let me reference one from my hometown of Hamilton: "Important announcement by Min @MonteMcNaughton, intro legislation to address ON labour shortage by removing barriers & empower career building opportunities for newcomers, recognizing & developing skills across many in-demand sectors that help our economy & communities thrive."

That was from Joe Mancinelli who is with LIUNA. LIUNA, of course, is based out of Hamilton, Ontario.

This is from the vice-president of Blue Mountain Resort, "We are glad to see government take this important step to protect workers and to support businesses striving to provide safe and positive work experiences."

Speaker, I could go on and on. Why don't I?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): You can for 10 seconds.

Ms. Donna Skelly: "Thanks to the Conservative government and the leadership of Monte McNaughton and Premier Doug Ford, the temp business will now be on the government radar and will be regularly inspected in our workplaces—"

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you very much. The next question goes to the question from Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: On Friday, MPPs across the province were visited by injured workers. I know the member opposite from Flamborough–Glanbrook also had a visit. I'm not sure she met with them, but they have been to her office several times. It's unfortunate that she wasn't there, because some of the information they left us was—and I'm going to read directly from one of their letters. It says:

"ONIWG was assured by WSIB leadership that when the unfunded liability was resolved, they would make injured workers whole; that they would begin to restore benefits that had been carved away. Instead, when they did resolve their unfunded liability, the government announced a 30% rebate in employers' premiums in the fall of 2018, followed by another 17% rebate in 2019"—and now another rebate.

When are injured workers going to be a priority in this province—to take them out of poverty?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for that question.

I would like to continue with the support we're getting, for example, on WSIB premiums:

"At a time when Ontario is looking to stimulate recovery, lower operating costs will help businesses get back on their feet faster. Today's announcement is welcome news for workers and employers in all corners of the province, as the savings can be better spent on job creation, new technologies, infrastructure, and safer workplaces."

That's from Rocco Rossi, CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

And from the senior director of provincial affairs for the Canadian Federation of Independent Business: "Great news for small business from Minister McNaughton on cutting WSIB premium rates by an average of 5%. The pandemic continues to present massive challenges, and the savings will help businesses reinvest where it is needed most."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for five more minutes of debate this afternoon. I turn to the member from Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It is my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 27, Working for Workers Act.

I have about five minutes today, and then I'll be able to finish the rest of my time tomorrow. So today I'm going to focus on something that I think is very important, something that really needs to be highlighted during this debate, and that is Bill 124.

Bill 124, which was brought forward by this Conservative government, freezes the wages of health care workers and education workers, both predominantly women-

dominated professions in this province. This government has decided that front-line heroes like nurses, who worked day in and day out, hours on end, during this pandemic to try to save lives or to comfort those who were dying from COVID-19—they worked day in and day out to provide that care. Many of them left work with visible marks or scars on their faces from wearing N95 masks—that's once they were able to actually get the appropriate PPE. This government expected them to go in every day and work “short,” meaning there were not enough of them, and therefore the ones who were there had to work long hours. Many lived in trailers or hotels away from their families because they were terrified of bringing COVID-19 home and making their own families sick or potentially killing them with the virus. These front-line heroes, as the government likes to call them, were at the bedsides of sick and dying people when their family members couldn't be there in person to comfort them. And then they were expected to go home and take care of their own families, to help their children through online learning or hybrid learning. They saw terrible things, and many have gone through horrendous, horrendous trauma that none of us will ever see or be subjected to—thankfully, we will never ever be subjected to that. This government brought in and passed Bill 124 to suppress their wages at a 1% increase, which is, actually, when you take in the rate of inflation, a cut to their salaries.

Speaker, I bring this up because I want to contrast the priorities of this government. While they are suppressing the wages of nurses, those who provide care and support to those of us across the province, the government House leader was given a \$27,000-a-year raise. I want to contrast that—that his salary went up \$27,000 a year. I ask him: How many hours did he miss from his family, when he was standing at the bedside of someone who was sick or dying? How many hours did he spend living in a trailer or a hotel because he was terrified of taking this virus home?

I also want to point out that this morning the same government House leader stood in this House during question period and said that the members on this side of the House, those of us in the NDP caucus, were catcalling when we were raising concerns and issues with what he was saying in this House. Speaker, I think we all know that language like that—“catcalling” is used to sexualize women. It is sexist. So I don't think that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I'm sorry to interrupt the member—not for anything other than that we're out of time for discussion of this topic this afternoon.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): It is now time for private members' public business.

Report continues in volume B.

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Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associée déléguée aux Petites Entreprises et à la Réduction des formalités administratives
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Deputy Speaker / Vice-président

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	
Vacant	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Randy Pettapiece
Teresa J. Armstrong, Toby Barrett
Lorne Coe, Rudy Cuzzetto
Goldie Ghamari, Randy Hillier
Christina Maria Mitas, Judith Monteith-Farrell
Michael Parsa, Randy Pettapiece
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Ian Arthur
Ian Arthur, Will Bouma
Stephen Crawford, Catherine Fife
Ernie Hardeman, Mitzie Hunter
Logan Kanapathi, Sol Mamakwa
Jeremy Roberts, Dave Smith
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Julia Douglas

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Président: Logan Kanapathi
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Mike Schreiner
Jill Andrew, Robert Bailey
Will Bouma, Guy Bourgouin
Chris Glover, Mike Harris
Logan Kanapathi, Sheref Sabawy
Amarjot Sandhu, Mike Schreiner
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Président: Gilles Bisson
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian
Deepak Anand, Aris Babikian
Gilles Bisson, Lorne Coe
Wayne Gates, Robin Martin
Norman Miller, Billy Pang
Amanda Simard, Marit Stiles
John Yakabuski
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lucille Collard
Lucille Collard, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Natalia Kusendova
Jim McDonell, Suze Morrison
Randy Pettapiece, Gurratan Singh
Donna Skelly, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Présidente: Laurie Scott
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Rima Berns-McGown, France Gélinas
Goldie Ghamari, Faisal Hassan
Jim McDonell, Sam Oosterhoff
Laurie Scott, Vijay Thanigasalam
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Taras Natyshak
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Christine Hogarth
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett
Jessica Bell, Stephen Blais
Stephen Crawford, Rudy Cuzzetto
Christine Hogarth, Michael Mantha
Taras Natyshak, Michael Parsa
Amarjot Sandhu
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Aris Babikian
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Fraser
Aris Babikian, Lorne Coe
John Fraser, Vincent Ke
Laura Mae Lindo, Paul Miller
Billy Pang, Jeremy Roberts
Dave Smith, Daisy Wai
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Présidente: Natalia Kusendova
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Bhutila Karpoche
Aris Babikian, Jeff Burch
Amy Fee, Michael Gravelle
Joel Harden, Mike Harris
Bhutila Karpoche, Natalia Kusendova
Robin Martin, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan

**Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight /
Comité spécial de la surveillance de la gestion des situations
d'urgence**

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Tom Rakocevic
Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
John Fraser, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Robin Martin
Sam Oosterhoff, Tom Rakocevic
Donna Skelly, Sara Singh
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell