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of Ontario



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Mercredi
27 mars 2024

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Clerk: Trevor Day

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Trevor Day

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 27 March 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 27 mars 2024

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Mr. Trevor Jones: I move that the standing orders be amended as follows:

Standing order 7(f) is deleted and the following substituted:

“As soon as possible after New Year’s Day, the Clerk of the House shall publish a calendar which shows the days on which the House shall meet according to the standing orders.”

Standing order 9(f) is deleted and the following substituted:

“No later than 6 p.m. on any day that the House meets, the government House leader may indicate in the House that no business is to be called during orders of the day on the next sitting day’s morning meeting, and in such case the House shall meet at 10:15 a.m. on that next sitting day.”

Standing order 36(b) is amended by deleting the words “to the minister or to his or her parliamentary assistant” and substituting the words “to a minister or to a parliamentary assistant.”

For the duration of the 43rd Parliament, standing order 40(e) is suspended and the following provisional standing order is substituted:

“40(e) Following ministerial statements a representative or representatives of the official opposition and an independent member or independent members may comment for up to a total of eight minutes, commencing with the official opposition.”

Standing order 42(b) is amended by adding the following at the end:

“but shall not read the text of the petition.”

Standing order 46(c) is deleted.

Standing order 49(a) is amended by deleting “on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday.”

Standing order 50(b) is amended by deleting “If a recorded vote is requested by five members, division bells shall be limited to 10 minutes.”

Standing order 61(d) is amended by deleting “If a recorded vote is requested by five members, division bells shall be limited to 10 minutes.”

Standing order 62(b) is deleted and the following is substituted:

“Upon tabling or upon the appointment of committees pursuant to standing order 110(a) and assignment of ministries and offices pursuant to standing order 113(b), the estimates shall be deemed to be referred to the standing committees to which the respective ministries and offices were assigned.”

Standing order 63(b) is amended by adding the following subclause following subclause (ii):

“The estimates of the Office of the Premier and the estimates of the Cabinet Office shall constitute one selection and represent a single turn taken under standing order 63(b)(ii).”

Standing order 63(d) is deleted and the following is substituted:

“63(d) The time for the consideration of the estimates of each ministry or office shall be determined by the respective committee.

“(i) The estimates of the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, if selected by a committee, shall have no time allotted to them, and when these estimates are considered, the Chair shall put, without further amendment or debate, every question necessary to dispose of these estimates.

“(ii) The estimates of the Office of the Premier and the estimates of the Cabinet Office shall be allotted time jointly and shall be considered concurrently.”

Standing order 65(a) is deleted and the following is substituted:

“Upon tabling or upon the appointment of committees pursuant to standing order 110(a) and assignment of ministries and offices pursuant to standing order 113(b), all supplementary estimates shall be deemed referred to the standing committee to which their ministry or office has been assigned.”

Standing order 70(b) is amended by deleting “If a recorded vote is requested by five members, division bells shall be limited to 10 minutes.”

Standing order 85(a)(ii) is amended by deleting “\$150” and substituting the words “a fee in an amount prescribed by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which may be amended by that committee from time to time.”

Standing order 85(c) is deleted and the following is substituted:

“Where, at the request of the applicant, a standing order is suspended with reference to a private bill, a charge shall be levied in an amount which shall be prescribed by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, and

which may be amended by that committee from time to time.”

For the duration of this Parliament, the following provisional standing order is added:

“85(h) Until the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs has set new fees pursuant to standing order 85(a)(ii) and 85(c), the fees shall remain at the amounts indicated in the standing orders as they were on the first day of the 43rd Parliament.”

Standing order 85(g)(ii) is amended by adding the words “given further consideration by the House or” after “not.”

Standing order 99 is amended by deleting:

“The rules of procedure and the fees and costs related to applications for private bills are set out in the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly. Copies of the standing orders, and the guide, Procedures for Applying for Private Legislation, may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly’s Internet site at www.ola.org or from:”

and substituting:

“The procedures related to applications for private bills are set out in the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly and the costs of applications are set by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Information is available at www.ola.org, or may be requested from:”

Standing order 100(c) is amended by deleting “eight” and replace with “nine.”

Standing order 110 is deleted and the following is substituted:

“Within the first 10 sessional days following the commencement of a Parliament, the membership of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs shall be appointed, on motion with notice, for the duration of the Parliament, which committee is empowered:

“(a) at the beginning of a Parliament, and from time to time as may be required, to appoint or revise, for the duration of a Parliament, the membership of the standing committees referred to in standing order 110.1 and those select committees which the House has resolved should have their membership appointed under this standing order and shall make a report thereon to the House, which report shall be deemed to be adopted;

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“(b) to review on its own initiative or at the request of the Speaker or the direction of the House and to report to the House its observations, opinions and recommendations on the standing orders of the House and the procedures in the House and its committees;

“(c) to advise the Speaker and the Board of Internal Economy, and to report to the House its observations, opinions and recommendations on the administration of the House and the provision of services and facilities to members;

“(d) to act as an advisory body to the Speaker and the House on the television broadcast system and to conduct reviews, at least on an annual basis, of the televising of the legislative proceedings and of the guidelines established by the House with respect to the television broadcast system;

“(e) to be the committee which is empowered to review and consider from time to time the reports of the Ombudsman as they become available; and, as the committee deems necessary, pursuant to subsection 15(1) of the Ombudsman Act, to formulate general rules for the guidance of the Ombudsman in the exercise of his or her functions under the act; and to report thereon to the Legislature and to make such recommendations as the committee deems appropriate;

“(f) and to be the committee provided for by section 33 of part III (regulations) of the Legislation Act, 2006, and having the terms of reference as set out in that section, namely: to be the committee to which all regulations stand permanently referred; and to examine the regulations with particular reference to the scope and method of the exercise of delegated legislative power without reference to the merits of the policy or objectives to be effected by the regulations or enabling statutes, but in so doing regard shall be had to the following guidelines:

“(i) Regulations should not contain provisions initiating new policy, but should be confined to details to give effect to the policy established by the statute;

“(ii) Regulations should be in strict accord with the statute conferring of power, particularly concerning personal liberties;

“(iii) Regulations should be expressed in precise and unambiguous language;

“(iv) Regulations should not have retrospective effect unless clearly authorized by statute;

“(v) Regulations should not exclude the jurisdiction of the courts;

“(vi) Regulations should not impose a fine, imprisonment or other penalty;

“(vii) Regulations should not shift the onus of proof of innocence to a person accused of an offence;

“(viii) Regulations should not impose anything in the way of a tax (as distinct from fixing the amount of a licence fee, or the like); and

“(ix) General powers should not be used to establish a judicial tribunal or an administrative tribunal,

“and the committee shall from time to time report to the House its observations, opinions and recommendations as required by section 33 of part III (regulations) of the Legislation Act, 2006, but before drawing the attention of the House to a regulation or other statutory instrument, the committee shall afford the ministry or agency concerned an opportunity to furnish orally or in writing to the committee such explanation as the ministry or agency thinks fit;

“(g) to be the committee provided for in subsection 7(1) and section 12 of the Queen’s Park Restoration Secretariat Act, 2023, and subsection 108.3(1) and section 108.5 of the Legislative Assembly Act and, without limitation, to have the general mandate to inquire into and make recommendations respecting any project to restore the Legislative Building at Queen’s Park including any relocation of legislative operations to a temporary location throughout the project.”

The following standing order is added:

“110.1 The standing committees shall be:

“(a) Standing Committee on Justice Policy;

“(b) Standing Committee on Social Policy;

“(c) Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy;

“(d) Standing Committee on the Interior;

“(e) Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs which is empowered to consider and report to the House its observations, opinions and recommendations on the fiscal and economic policies of the province and to which all related documents shall be deemed to have been referred immediately when the said documents are tabled;

“(f) Standing Committee on Government Agencies which is empowered to review and report to the House its observations, opinions and recommendations on the operation of all agencies, boards and commissions to which the Lieutenant Governor in Council makes some or all of the appointments, and all corporations to which the crown in right of Ontario is a majority shareholder, such reviews to be made with a view to reducing possible redundancy and overlapping, improving the accountability of agencies, rationalizing the functions of the agencies, identifying those agencies or parts of agencies which could be subject to sunset provisions, and revising the mandates and roles of agencies, and to review the intended appointments of persons to agencies, boards and commissions and of directors to corporations in which the crown in right of Ontario is a majority shareholder, excluding reappointments and appointments for a term of one year or less, according to the following procedures:

“1. A minister of the crown shall lay on the table a certificate stating that the Lieutenant Governor in Council intends to appoint a person to an agency, board or commission or to the board of directors of a corporation, together with a copy of the position description and a summary of the person's qualifications, which documents shall be deemed to be referred to the committee.

“2. Upon receipt of a certificate as referred to in paragraph 1, the Clerk of the Committee shall distribute to each member of the subcommittee on committee business a list of intended appointees in respect of whom a certificate has been received.

“3. The subcommittee shall meet at its own initiative, at the request of the committee, or at the request of any member of the subcommittee, to select from among the intended appointees referred to in paragraph 1 those intended appointees the committee will review. Each member of the subcommittee, other than the Chair, may choose one or more of the intended appointees for review from the certificates provided by the Clerk of the Committee.

“4. The subcommittee shall report to the committee on the intended appointees for review. Upon receiving the report, the committee shall determine a date for the review of the intended appointees as selected by the members of the subcommittee. The report shall specify the amount of time allocated for the consideration of each intended appointee and the date on which each will be reviewed. An equal amount of time shall be allocated for review of each member's selections, and where a member of the sub-

committee has selected more than one intended appointee the time available to review that member's selections shall be allocated among his or her selections.

“5. Upon notice from the Clerk of the Committee that an intended appointee has been selected for review, the minister shall ensure that the committee receives a copy of the intended appointee's résumé or biographical information and a description of the responsibilities of the position.

“6. A subcommittee member may choose to defer the consideration of one or more of the intended appointees that the member has chosen until a future meeting of the committee at which intended appointees are to be reviewed so long as the consideration of the intended appointee has not previously been deferred.

“7. In reviewing an intended appointee, the committee shall not call as a witness any person other than the intended appointee.

“8. At the conclusion of the meeting held to review an intended appointment, the committee shall determine whether or not it concurs in the intended appointment. Any member may request that the committee defer its determination to the next meeting of the committee, but in any event no later than seven calendar days. In its report, the committee shall state whether or not it concurs in the intended appointments and may state its reasons.

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“9. Whether or not the House stands adjourned, the committee shall release its report by depositing it the same day with the Clerk of the House and upon receipt of the report by the Clerk the report shall be deemed to be adopted by the House.

“10. A report that the committee will not review an intended appointee shall be deemed to have been made by the committee and adopted by the House in any of the following cases:

“i. a report respecting the intended appointee has not been made by the committee within 30 calendar days following the day on which the minister tables the certificate referred to in paragraph 1,

“ii. the subcommittee does not at its first meeting following the day on which the minister tables the certificate select the intended appointee for review, or

“iii. the intended appointee has not been selected for review by the subcommittee within 14 days following the day on which the minister tabled the certificate.

“11. The committee by unanimous agreement may extend any of the deadlines in paragraph 10.

“12. The Clerk of the Committee shall give the minister who tabled the certificate written notification of any decision respecting the appointment made by the committee or the subcommittee on committee business.

“13. During any adjournment of the House that exceeds one week, the committee shall meet on such day or days as may be determined by the subcommittee, but in any event not more than three times per month.

“(g) Standing Committee on Public Accounts which is empowered to review and report to the House its observations, opinions and recommendations on the report of the Auditor General and the public accounts, which docu-

ments shall be deemed to have been permanently referred to the committee as they become available.”

Standing order 113(a) is amended by deleting the words “standing orders 110(a), (b), (c), (d), (e), and (g)” and replacing it with the words “standing orders 110(a) and 110.1(a), (b), (c), (d), and (e).”

Standing order 113(b) is amended by adding the following at the end:

“The Office of the Premier and the Cabinet Office shall be assigned to the same standing committee.”

The following new standing order is added:

“113(c) If the estimates are tabled in the House prior to the appointment of committee membership pursuant to standing order 110(a) or prior to the assignment of ministries and offices to committees pursuant to standing order 113(b), all ministries and offices shall stand assigned to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs until membership has been appointed and assignment has been completed.”

Standing order 115(b) is deleted and the following is substituted:

“Notwithstanding clause (a), each independent member may deposit, with the Clerk of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, his or her request to be appointed to at least one standing committee. An independent member may state his or her committee preference but such statement of preference is not binding.”

Standing order 115(d) is deleted.

Standing order 115(e) is deleted and the following is substituted:

“At any time before or during a committee meeting, a temporary substitution in the membership of a standing or select committee may be made provided a notification thereof, signed by the member acting as the whip of a recognized party, is filed with the Clerk of the Committee. If notice of a substitution is delivered while a committee meeting is in progress, the notification shall be delivered by hand to the Clerk of the Committee.”

Standing order 115(f) is deleted.

Standing order 119(a) is amended by deleting “110” and replacing it with “110 and 110.1.”

Standing order 128(a) is amended by deleting the words “standing orders 110(a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and (g)” and replacing it with the words “standing orders 110(a) and 110.1(a), (b), (c), (d) and (e).”

Standing order 143 is deleted; and

That the Clerk is authorized to renumber the standing orders and to make such other consequential, editorial or other minor changes as may be required to ensure a consistent form of expression throughout the standing orders.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Let me just thank the deputy government House leader for introducing this latest round of standing order changes, which I think continue to build on the hard work that we are doing to modernize how the assembly works.

Madam Speaker, you know that this government has been seized with ensuring that the standing orders reflect

a 21st-century Legislative Assembly and the work that all members are expected to do.

One of the hallmarks, of course, of standing orders is that they are a living, breathing document that is to change in time so that we can reflect modern circumstances within an assembly.

For far too long in this place, the standing orders remained unchanged, and that certainly was the case prior to us coming into government. In fact, I’ve heard a number of members on both sides of the House remark at the speed and the number of changes to the standing orders that have occurred during our time of office, and that there were probably more standing order changes that have occurred under the last number of years than happened at any time outside of the first years since Confederation, when this place was being organized. I take great pride in having accomplished that; I think it is one of the greatest achievements that this government has made. It is part of ensuring that our democracy works better.

I have no illusion that all members will always be happy with the changes to the standing orders that we have brought forward, but I am very, very comfortable in asserting and challenging anybody who would counter that the changes that we have made and the changes that we are making will not make this a better, more representative Parliament for all parliamentarians.

I just want to take a brief moment, because I think it is quite important for us to look back at some of the other standing order changes that we have made, and I want to do this in the context of what I am sure will be a barrage of criticism that you constantly get when you do these things; it’s what you always hear. If a government brings something forward, you’re going to get the barrage of criticism. But the hallmark of good government, the hallmark of good legislation, is to really fundamentally see, in the absence of the government, what would the other parties do differently? What would they change from what you brought forward?

In that context, I want to look over some of the items that we have done on the standing orders. I have a lot of time, so I’m sure you’ll permit me to reflect back on some of these things.

Back in 2019, some of the initial changes that we brought on—you won’t remember, Madam Speaker, because you weren’t elected at that time, and, frankly, it’s good that you don’t remember these, because, in fact, our Legislature, I think, was not as democratic a place as it is today because of these changes. So those members elected in 2022 will have a much different Legislative Assembly than those who were elected in 2018.

0930

But let me go over some of the changes. In 2019, a modification in the daily order of business to increase the profile of members’ statements by moving them from the afternoon to the morning, before question period: Now, that might seem like a little thing, but members will know, at 1 o’clock or 3 o’clock, when we’d come into the place and do members’ statements, the chamber is completely empty. Members are usually at committee meetings. It is

not the time of day when the galleries are full. And we decided to elevate members' statements—to do it at a time when the chamber is full, when galleries are full and when most of the media are here watching and when most of the attention of Ontarians is faced on question period. We would do members' statements before question period. I ask very sincerely to members opposite, would that be something that they would remove from a future standing order change if they ever got the opportunity to do it?

You know how proud I am of being a Canadian. We returned the royal anthem to the once-a-month singing, when we do our national anthem. We returned the royal anthem. I'm a very proud monarchist and was very, very happy that we were able to do that.

We explicitly permitted—imagine this, Madam Speaker; I know you will find this amazing—the use of laptops, tablets and smart phones in a non-disruptive manner in the chamber. Imagine, a 21st-century Legislature did not allow members to use your smart phones, your laptops, your iPads in the daily functioning of your business, but that was something that was in the rules in this place. Would the members opposite remove that standing order? I highly doubt that they would, Madam Speaker.

We outlined the format for introduction of visitors in the chamber. Members will know it still goes on a little bit longer, but members will know that that would go on for a very, very long period of time, and members would be making speeches as opposed to introducing the visitors. So we did that. I doubt that they would change that.

We eliminated the need for a minister to verbally refer a question to a colleague during question period, which is the practice in other Canadian Legislatures—again, you will not remember, Madam Speaker, because you were elected in 2022—and we still have it. Every day a question comes, and 99% of the questions go to the Premier. Under the previous system, the Premier would have to get up in his place and refer the question to the appropriate minister, which actually kills time and means less questions for the opposition to have, and ultimately, the appropriate minister would also answer the question anyway. So it gave more time to the opposition, and it was a procedure that was used in no other Legislature in Canada and, frankly, no other Western parliamentary democracy.

We allowed the electronic distribution of background materials to reports and sessional papers that are tabled in the Legislature. Imagine that before we made this change, you were not able to electronically distribute these documents. Is this something that the opposition will take away if they ever get the opportunity to serve on this side of the House? I doubt it.

Now, we know for sure that the Liberals, the independent Liberals, who have systematically refused to accept the verdict of the people of the province of Ontario, have—

Mr. Ted Hsu: The verdict is that we got elected.

Hon. Paul Calandra: You hear the member for Kingston and the Islands: “I got elected”—as independent members. They are not a party. But the arrogance of the Liberals to suggest that the votes of the province of Ontario were wrong not only in 2018 but in 2022 and that

we should forget about the verdict of the people of the province of Ontario and restore them to a party in this Legislature—that is the arrogance of the current Liberal Party. I wish you could say it was the current Liberal Party, because that is typical Liberal Party arrogance.

But despite that arrogance, we provided a motion: changes to the standing orders that provided time allowing independents to reply to opposition day motions, because before we came here, independents could not reply to opposition day motions. They hum and holler, but who gave them that opportunity? This government gave them that opportunity. Who didn't give independents that opportunity? It was 15 years of Liberals, who never ever once thought that independents should have a voice in this place. They're going to hum and holler and scream, “Oh, you're taking our rights away,” but, systemically, we've given it back. Will the Liberals or the NDP take that away? I hope not and I highly doubt it.

We allowed for members to co-sponsor private members' bills by up to four members, including members belonging to the same party. How often have we brought private members' bills to this place where more members wanted to participate, to bring cross-party unity, to bring members of a caucus who have worked on something? We allowed that to happen. Will the opposition take that away? I highly doubt that they will. But do they hum, holler and scream at these standing order changes? Absolutely. They will take none of it away but, I guarantee you, they'll hum and they'll holler.

We allowed debate of the same bill in the one-hour morning and afternoon sessions of the Legislature, so that we can more effectively use the Legislature's time and give more opportunity for members to participate.

We permitted the temporary committee substitutions for afternoon sessions of the committee with at least 30 minutes' notice, and we'll have more on that in these standing order changes.

We established time for questions and answers following each speech given during debate on government bills, replacing the two-minute comments. Now, Madam Speaker, you will not remember this, but when bills happened in the place, members actually didn't debate—so a debating chamber that had no debate. You gave a little speech about your bill or government legislation, you'd get up for two minutes, and then you would sit down, but there was no debate back and forth. That's a hallmark of the Liberals, right? Because the Liberals don't like debate, so why should we have debate in the chamber? So it's clear to me that if they ever got the opportunity, they would take this away, because for 15 years, they didn't put it in.

I know my colleagues in the NDP actually like debate. We debate quite a bit on policy. We have disagreements on things. We have vigorous debate back and forth. But for 15 years the Liberals thought it best not to engage in debate back and forth, because for 15 years they systematically destroyed the province of Ontario. So why let members debate what it is that they were doing? “Let's crush that. Let's crush the representation in the Legislative Assembly.” That was a hallmark of 15 years of Liberal

rule, and we decided in 2018, starting with the changes in 2019, that we were not going to have that, that a flourishing democracy in the 21st century needed to have—go figure—debate in the House on the bills, and that that was good for democracy.

The Liberals will take that away. I'm hopeful that the NDP won't, but we'll see.

Interjection.

Hon. Paul Calandra: That's up to the people.

We're permitting temporary committee substitution in the afternoon sessions, with at least 30 minutes' notice.

We established time for questions and answers, as I said—we've done that. This was in our first standing order changes back in 2019. I don't recall how people voted on that, so I'm not going to suggest whether they voted yes, but I do remember the speeches. Everybody was dead set against it. Oh, my God. The world was going to fall apart if we made these changes. If we allowed debate to happen in this place, the world was going to fall apart. So I hope we'll hear from the opposition, in particular the Liberals, who I know are going to get up on their feet today and hum and holler because they don't like debate in this place. Which one of these from 2019 will they take away if they ever got the opportunity? Which one will they take away?

In the fall of 2020, a whole host of additional changes, Madam Speaker—frankly, I knew as far back as 2020 that the people would return us with an even larger majority in 2022, so we started on making even more changes to increase the ability for members to participate and for democratic reform. What did we do? We enhanced the focus of private members' business by considering one item per day on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

I remember the hollers on this. "Holy mackerel, if you focus on one private member's bill a day, what's going to happen? How am I going to bring my people? We should do it on Thursday." Thursday afternoon, when the House is empty, is when we used to do private members' business here. Thursday afternoon between 1 and 4, we would stuff three private members' bills into one day and then that would be the end of it, right? That, I didn't believe was a good focus for private members' business. So what did we do? We made it once a day Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday so that a PMB can be the focus of everybody's attention on that day.

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And then—well, I'll get to that; well, I'll get to it right now, because we're talking about PMBs—we said the vote had to be deferred. You've got to be able to vote on a PMB, not just a few people but everybody. If you're bringing a private member's bill here to this House, then all members should have the right to vote on that bill, so, while you debate it one night, after question period the next day, the entire House is here and you vote on that PMB. You stand in your place and you be counted—a change that we made and brought to this place, and I think it is a change that has worked very well in ensuring that private members' business is elevated in this place. Will the opposition take that away? I'm hoping to hear in some of their remarks if they will take that change away. I'm

particularly interested in the member for Kingston and the Islands, who's humming and hollering, because you know where I got that standing order from? The federal Parliament, where we both served. He was very silent there with respect to some of the private members' business. So we'll see if he's still feisty about the changes.

I already talked about how we'd defer private members' votes so that all members can have the opportunity to speak. Again, I think that is one of the better changes. I have to say, the PMBs happening on a daily basis so there's one focus with a deferred vote where all members are held accountable, I think, is one of the better changes that we made.

We also changed debate time, making debate time more equitable by adjusting the length of questions and answers to five minutes for any speeches shorter than 10 minutes. I think all colleagues will understand and remember why we did that.

Allowing more debate time on legislation by extending the sitting day if the afternoon routine lasts longer than 60 minutes. That's a very technical one—extending the day if routine proceedings go more than 60 minutes. What does that mean? That means that if for some reason there are obstacles or something happens in the daily routine, as opposed to reducing the amount of time that members have to debate something, we'll actually extend the day so that we can continue on the process of debating very important bills. We know the Liberals will probably want to take it away, because they're never really here past 5 o'clock anyway, so they'll probably take that away anyway. I challenge more than one of them to stand up and disagree with me on that right now. I doubt that they will.

We established a take-note debate. We created the provisions for a take-note debate—this was in the fall of 2022—allowing the debates to take place after the House would normally adjourn so that we are not impacting House business. This is something that we never had before in this place, a take-note debate. We have utilized it in the last Parliament on a couple of very, very important issues. It allows members to speak freely on issues of the day that are very, very important. We've used it on a couple of occasions in this place. I think there were very successful debates that highlighted important causes for members. I then again ask, is that something that will be taken away in the standing order change? Those colleagues who were here in the last Parliament will recall the humming and hollering on that provision.

We allowed deferral of closure votes so that the schedule of the House could be more predictable and so that more members can have the opportunity to vote, which I thought was really good.

Something that we created, Madam Speaker, another exciting provision: We created more opportunity for debate in the Legislature by adding a 30-minute report stage when a bill is reported back from committee. What does that mean? Why would any government that has passed a bill add a provision in the standing orders that allows for more debate on a bill that just came out of committee? Why would any sane government with a

massive majority, both in the last Parliament and in this Parliament, add this provision? Why did we add the provision? Because it would allow the independents, who don't necessarily serve on a committee, to have a debate and talk about the issues that they were not able to participate in a committee on and raise that here in the House.

How many times, colleagues, have the independents risen in their place to take advantage of this important provision in the standing orders—10, 20, 30? We've had hundreds of bills—zero. In fact, the only ones that have triggered that have been us, to give them more opportunities in the last Parliament to debate something that the member from the Green Party, if I'm not mistaken, wanted more opportunity to debate.

So while they hum and they holler and they scream and say, "We don't get enough time. You've got to give us more time," when you give them more time, do they use it? No, because for them it is all about show, no substance. It's all about convincing the people of the province of Ontario that the people are wrong and that the Liberals are right. The people are wrong, and the Liberals are right. They should be a party because—you know what—the people were wrong; they were wrong, and they should be a party.

I've got something here from—in fact, I think this quote says it best. I'll get to this quote again later because I think it's important—the Liberal House leader: "Worst of all, these changes were put forward without consultation at all with the independent members"—I mean, it's tabled; we're debating it, and they have a right to vote on it, but I digress. "The independent members represent more than 1.8 million people."

I get elected in my riding. I feel I represent 125,000 people. I'm not arrogant enough to assume that because I was elected in the government I represent 16 million people, like the Liberals do. That small grouping of seven, eight—whatever it is—they, like any other member here, represent everybody. We represent the people in our riding, in our constituency, and we do it very, very effectively. I would suggest that most members in this place do it very effectively, but the difference between Liberals and NDP and Conservatives, frankly, is that we don't bring an arrogance to Parliament that they do. We don't bring an arrogance to Parliament that they do because we are strong believers in this place. I'm a very strong believer in how this place works.

We went even further. We actually gave the independents and the opposition more opportunities to ask questions in question period. That is something that we did. We allowed more questions for them to hold the government accountable. Guess who did that? We did that. That's right; we did that.

We closed an additional loophole that would allow a bill to be debated in the morning, afternoon and the night sitting. It was a loophole that existed. We eliminated that loophole so that there could not be a bill rushed through this Parliament without due debate time. And, of course, we made a number of minor amendments as well, back in 2020.

Colleagues will remember the outrage at these changes—two packages of changes—outrage at both of them. But I challenge the members opposite: Which one of those changes are you going to take away? I challenge them very, very clearly. As you're debating this, stand and let us know which one of the other ones you are going to take away. Which one of the very reasonable measures are they going to take away? Because I think that is very, very important for people to know.

We eliminated deferral slips in 2021 for all recorded division. You'll remember, Madam Speaker—or you won't, Madam Speaker, but when you went to defer a vote, you had to come out with a deferral slip and go up and defer. It's now automatic because we think people should have the opportunity to vote and their vote should be counted. So deferral slips are automatic.

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We allowed committees to recall themselves when the House stands adjourned. Again, what government with a massive majority would then write into the standing orders that committees, which I believe are one of the most important parts of this place, could recall themselves even when the House was adjourned? You would think that that should have just been in there, but it wasn't. And do you know why it wasn't? Because for 15 years, that group, which is now a group of independents, treated this place as an afterthought. They didn't want debate, neither in the House or in committee. We made the change so that the committees could work stronger and more effectively and so that they could be recalled even when the House was in adjournment.

Madam Speaker, you will remember this change—and I will say the opposition NDP were upset with this change, and I still, to this day, don't get it: We instituted bipartisan leadership on committees by requiring that Vice-Chairs of committees be elected from a party other than the party from which the Chair of a committee is elected. You remember this one, right? We thought that maybe the roles should be shared—it shouldn't just be a government Chair or government Vice-Chair—so we decided, "Let's allow the opposition to be Vice-Chairs of committees or Chairs of committees." And we would split—so we had to force them. And then I was actually accused of being too bipartisan. Do you remember that? Colleagues, you were here the last time. I was accused by the then opposition House leader, who's now the whip, of being too bipartisan; I was working too closely and too collaboratively, and it had to stop. The speeches on that—"My gosh, this guy is working too much with us. He has to stop. We don't want to be Vice-Chairs of committees. We don't want to be Chairs of committees. Stop it." I didn't know what to say about that. I have never been accused of being too bipartisan. Maybe I work too closely with the opposition; maybe I take that on myself, colleagues. Working together is something that I like to do. Forcing the members to be Vice-Chairs or Chairs of committees—I was very happy about it. I think it works out very well. I think it is something that is long overdue, frankly. And I tend to believe now that upon reflection, my good friends in the

opposition actually enjoy this and think that this is a good change to the standing orders.

Here's the other thing: Right now, on two of our committees, we have independents who are Vice-Chairs. We have the—I'm not sure what his title is, to be honest with you. He sits on the front bench there for the Liberals. He's their leader in the House but not their House leader. They've managed to double up positions with a caucus of eight people. They've red-taped themselves to death. They've doubled themselves up. He serves as a Vice-Chair. The leader of the Green Party serves as a Vice-Chair of another committee. I challenge anyone to find for me in any Western parliamentary democracy where independents serve as Vice-Chairs of committees. This change allowed that to happen. I wonder if they'll take that change away, colleagues. But they're going to holler about it and scream about it.

In fact, we went even a step further in this Parliament. Not only do we have two independent member Vice-Chairs, we actually have an independent member who serves as one of the deputy Speakers of this Legislative Assembly. I challenge any member—I challenge the Liberal members, any one of the six or seven or eight of them, whatever it is—to stand in their place and tell me, in any other Western parliamentary democracy, where that has happened. I guarantee you they will not find that.

How does that happen, Madam Speaker? You will know that the Legislature votes on the Speaker, but how do the rest of them—how do you and the other Speakers? It is via a motion from the government. The government puts a motion forward that is debated and voted on, setting the officers below the Speaker. It is not any other fashion; it is the government that brings that forward.

It is this government that put an independent member in the Chair as a Speaker. It is this government that allowed independents to serve as Vice-Chairs of committees. It is this government that allowed independent members to have a voice in question period. This is the government that gave up our questions so that they could ask a question or two, unlike any other parliamentary democracy.

These are the changes that we have made so far. It is this government that has allowed this place to be a chamber that actually debates bills. It is this government that has systematically, since 2020, been making changes to improve how this place works.

Now, let me go on to some of the changes that we're talking about now. I'm just only going to be brief on this one, because I don't want to conflate it in what we did. Let me just say, I think yesterday we had a very historic day in this place. We made changes that allow Indigenous languages to be automatically recognized in this place. I think all members were unified in their support of that. I don't want to say any more than that, but that was a change that was long overdue. It's very, very important. I think all members will agree with that. Very clearly, we separated it out, because we didn't want it to be the focus of what could be differences on this. But I thank all members for that, something that was probably—not probably—some-

thing that was very, very, very long overdue and, again, that we worked together on.

The other changes that we're bringing forward: We're permitting any parliamentary assistant to answer a late show question. For those who don't know what a late show is, if somebody answers a question and a member doesn't like it, they can ask for further debate in the evening. This is something that we had done in the last Parliament. The parliamentary assistant would be able to participate in the rebuttal and the reply. It worked very well, so we're just bringing it back.

The next one that we're doing—I'll acknowledge this a bit: We are extending the five minutes for reply to a ministerial statement to eight minutes and allowing independent members to use any time of the House as a group. Right now, in a ministerial statement—and I acknowledge that before the House left, I refused consent to allow the independent members to speak to something. It became something that it wasn't intended to be, Madam Speaker—

Interjection.

Hon. Paul Calandra: You hear the member opposite hollering and screaming about it, and she has every right to do that because it was—

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Yes, because you shut down women on International Women's Day.

Hon. Paul Calandra: No, I shut down the independent members from being allowed to speak to a motion, because the standing orders don't allow them to speak to certain motions without permission from the government. So in order for them to speak, they've got to ask for permission from the government.

Now, we're changing the standing orders to allow for the opposition to split their time, eight minutes guaranteed—three minutes. We'll come away, and we will put it on for the independents in proportion to the size of their caucus. They don't need to ask for permission anymore. It is automatic. It's guaranteed. The opposition and the independents will work together to have their time on any ministerial statement.

As you know, the standing orders, as they have been for a very, very, very long time, give the official opposition five minutes, and we're suggesting that an additional three minutes be added on so that the independent members can have that time. Nobody's ever suggested any other changes to it, so we're adding on time for the opposition to speak to a ministerial statement.

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Now, some have suggested that adding that amount of time for a small group of independents is too much time, given the size of the official opposition in comparison—I mean, the official opposition is twice the size. Some have suggested it's too much time. But what we're allowing them to do is, the clock will be extended to eight minutes with the lead-off happening by the official opposition. They can extend that time up to eight minutes.

Again, this never happened before, right? As I said, as independents, you need to ask for permission from the government to reply. Now again, not on an opposition day

motion because, you will remember, as I said—I want to clarify: not on opposition day motion, because on an opposition day motion, the independents never had the right to reply until we made that change that gave them the guarantee to reply. This is on a ministerial statement now, right? So we're now adding time, taking away time and adding it so that all members can participate in a ministerial statement without having to ask for permission.

Well, what does the independent member from Haldimand say. I can read the whole quote. This is what she said:

“I think people would be shocked if the House leader has the ability to tinker with these standing orders to the degree that is occurring. We are all elected officials who should have the same parliamentary privilege. And this erosion of parliamentary privilege is an erosion of democracy, in my opinion.... They're punting responsibility over to the NDP to ... wedge the NDP against the independent members. And you know, I believe that the NDP will treat us independent members fairly.”

So the independent member is now not worried about us as we worried about the NDP not giving them the time to speak. The independents would still rather ask me for permission than share an extended amount of time with—now, I know the opposition House leader. I know him. We work very, very well together. He's a very gracious and good human being, a wonderful parliamentarian, and I think that the opposition will be able to work together with this extended amount of time. I reject the member for Haldimand who insists that she ask me for permission to speak in this place. It's not the way it should be. It should be guaranteed in the standing orders, and that is what this change is going to do. It's part of this continuing bipartisan nature of working together, right? We can do that, and we will do it.

Now, we're going even further. We're allowing the procedure and House affairs committee to appoint and revise the membership of other committees. Now, this is a new committee, procedure and House affairs, that was brought together—as you know, we're in the process of decant of this building. We're looking for another place to exercise democracy while this building is closed down and undergoing an expensive renovation. So we created a new committee called the procedure and House affairs committee, which is a very powerful committee of this place, to be fair. We didn't take the chairmanship on ourselves; just so members will remember, we actually insisted in the standing orders that the Chair of this committee be from the official opposition. We thought that helps ensure accountability, especially in the process of decant.

But what we're saying is that the membership of committees will come from the procedure and House affairs committee. Presently, these motions, as you will know, occupy House time. The proposal would see that the House appoint the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and empower the committee to appoint other committees and their memberships. It's a practice that is already in use in the House of Commons. It works very well there, and we know that it will work here.

This is in reflection of comments made by the NDP. Again, in the spirit of working together and listening to

them, they did ask that appointments to committees be taken out of the government's hands because, again, Madam Speaker, in this place, the House leader can get up and appoint whoever he wants—or she wants, whoever the House leader is—to any committee that they feel. It takes up government time; it takes up the time of the government, but I can get up in my place after question period today and I can move anybody to any committee that I pleasantly feel without any regard. Well, now that will happen through the procedure and House affairs committee, where members from all parties will have the opportunity to comment and have a role.

I do have a quote here from that debate on how important it was to remove the House leader. It was a very impassioned speech. It was a great speech, to be honest with you. I enjoyed it a lot. But I'm not going to read the quote from the member because I think the member recalls how impassioned he was that it not be just the House leader that appoints people to committee. So I'm fulfilling the demands of the opposition, yet again working in a bipartisan fashion; we're doing that.

I'm also going to allow, if the House approves, substitutions on committees at any time and not just for 30 minutes. This just reflects the nature of what this place is, how busy members are, the fact that we are going to be approaching a decant at some point in time, that members will be scattered a bit more than they are right now. Some times, just through no fault of their own, members aren't there and need to be replaced. If you don't do it in the first 30 minutes, well, then everything changes.

Now look, Madam Speaker, to be honest, the reality is that, on committees today, Conservatives have an overwhelming majority—overwhelming majority. You remember, Madam Speaker, that, again, we went the distance here and we said, although we have such an overwhelming mandate from the people, in order to make committees work better, we did a motion in this House and unilaterally provided more opposition members to our committees. We thought that was important, because in committees, this place would have had one NDP member, eight or nine Conservative members, and that's not reflective of how a committee should be. So we unilaterally gave more opposition members to be on committees. We did that. We thought it was important to do back then, and I'm very proud that we did that.

We're also making changes to the standing orders that would forbid the verbatim reading of text of a petition, Madam Speaker. I just think that this is a loophole that needs to be closed. Petitions are one of the most important things that we do here. It is a very, very important thing that we do here—petitions. I know members collect petitions and they want to bring them and present them to the House. Many table them. Some get up in their place and make a statement on them. But they should not be allowed to be used as a 15-minute speech for a member, because then you frustrate the ability to actually present petitions. So the loophole that we are closing is allowing members to still, obviously, rise and talk about a petition—a petition, for instance, could be, “I'm very upset

that the previous Liberal government closed over 600 schools, predominantly in rural Ontario, destroying the fabric of the nature, and I'm presenting this petition," and then you sit down, as opposed to going on for 15 minutes about all of the bad things that the Liberals did in their time in government. Everybody knows that; they don't need to be refreshed on that. But we need more time to present petitions. There are some members here who present a lot of petitions. They do a lot of very good work, and this just closes that loophole.

We're also sending more power, again, to the procedure and House affairs committee to amend private bills and the fees that were charged on private bills. This is a small thing, but I think it's an important update. I know all members know, but for the masses watching at home: Private bills are very small bills that, if a corporation needs to be revived, somebody can petition the House and we would revive that corporation. The fees haven't been changed to do that since 1929. In 1868, the fee was \$60. The fee was increased to \$100, and in 1929, the fee was at \$150, and here we stand today. It's \$150 to have that done. We are going to be asking the procedure and House affairs committee to review and come back with a fee framework that more closely aligns with today's reality. To be clear, these private bills are an important part—but there is a substantial amount of work that goes, not only by parliamentarians, but by officials who review these private bills; legislative counsel, which has to review all of these bills. We are going to be asking the procedure and House affairs committee to review that for us and come back with a new framework that works and then to be responsible for looking at that framework for us, as a Legislature, whenever it is required.

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We're also, of course, making changes that will ensure that when committees are struck, as I said, membership of those committees will go to the procedure and House affairs committee.

I know the independent Liberals are going to be suggesting that we're removing their ability to serve on committees. We're removing the ability, yes, for them to automatically serve on committees. We're putting it in the hands of the procedure and House affairs committee to decide what committees they should serve on or if they should serve on committees. This is consistent with every other Western parliamentary democracy.

Remember that we also added the ability for reports from committees to be debated in this place for 30 minutes, at any time when they're reported back. So not only do we give more questions to independents, not only do we give them the right to serve on committees, unlike other jurisdictions, not only have we made them Chairs and Vice-Chairs—not only have we put them in the seat—but we have also added a provision that allows for debate in this House.

This is what the Liberal independent House leader said—I'll read the quote entirely, and I'll tell you why I'm going to get to it. So—I think I've read it once, but I'm going to read it again: "Once again, the government has

demonstrated it is committed to silencing the voices of 16 members in the Legislature. Worst of all, these changes were put forward without any consultation at all with the independent members, despite many offers to work with them to make reasonable changes. The independent members represent more than 1.8 million people. Ontarians deserve to have their duly elected representatives empowered to participate in every aspect of the Legislature."

Madam Speaker, that member also serves as a presiding officer in this place, and I think that is a very difficult position for that member to be in. This is a presiding officer who has made a decision on a standing order, on changes that this House has not yet fully debated or passed, which by its nature will call into question any rulings that person makes when sitting in that chair. That is certainly something that that independent caucus is going to have to look at.

Moreover, we have a situation where this House now will have the opportunity to reflect on an additional series of standing order changes that I believe will make this place a more accountable Legislature, that will provide more opportunity for members to participate in debate, which grow and make it even, as I said, more democratic—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): My apologies to the government House leader. It is now time for members' statements.

Debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Read my lips: No new taxes. That's right; our government is getting it done for the people of Ontario by investing in housing infrastructure, highways, transit and health care without raising costs on families, businesses and municipalities.

Yesterday, our government tabled the 2024 budget, Building a Better Ontario, and, Speaker, our government is getting it done for the people of Ontario and Niagara. Now, like the rest of the world, Ontario faces uncertain economic times due to high interest rates and global instability. But in this time, we're continuing to press forward in ensuring that we're getting the job done for the families in my riding and the rest of this province. Despite the challenges facing us, Ontario is continuing to deliver on its plan to build by investing in infrastructure to get more homes built faster, attracting better jobs with bigger paycheques, all while keeping costs down for families and businesses and retaining a prudent path to balance.

For Niagara, building a stronger Ontario means:

- extending the gas cuts for families;
- expanding GO rail service to our region, increasing service levels;
- twinning the Garden City Skyway over the Welland Canal in St. Catharines;

—supporting the redevelopment of West Lincoln Memorial Hospital to completion, adding more primary care for 11,000 Niagarans;

—supporting the new South Niagara Hospital to completion; and

—supporting local grape growers and winemakers by cutting the 6.1% on-site farm tax, strengthening local economic development.

Speaker, as the Minister of Finance said yesterday, our only option in these uncertain economic times is to move ahead, and we're going to continue to get things done for the people of Ontario and all of Niagara.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. John Vanthof: In early March, Englehart hospital had to close their ER for a couple of days due to a physician shortage and, like many rural hospitals, is also facing ballooning budget problems because of agency health care staff—agency nurses.

So we were very interested, in looking at the budget yesterday, what that was going to do for rural hospitals. There was an increase in base funding to hospitals. That's a good thing, but the base funding increase was less than inflation. So, actually, that was a cut. It was less than inflation, and it didn't do anything to address—one of the biggest issues in hospitals is paying for agency nurses, agency PSWs. It's a huge issue, and it's an issue that this government seems to want to ignore—or, actually, almost seems to want to perpetuate.

When we see in our hospitals the biggest budget item is agency nursing and we know that the cost is massively inflated by the profit margins of the agencies, it's an issue that has to be addressed. Is there a role? Do we need agencies in some cases? In some cases, yes, but not at the extent of what's happening now. This government has missed the mark on this, and we don't know why, but they need to act now.

CRIME PREVENTION

Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Last Thursday, I had the privilege of hosting a community safety discussion at the Aurora town hall with the York Regional Police. In response to recent incidents of auto theft and break-ins in our community, we organized a town hall to provide our residents with updates on local safety initiatives led by the York Regional Police services.

With the rise in crime over the last few years, as a provincial government, we have committed to fighting this crime by investing millions of dollars to combat various forms of crime, from auto thefts, to enhancing court resources to prosecute criminals, to standardizing investigative practices, particularly for hate crimes, as well as addressing the Guns, Gangs and Violence Reduction Strategy.

The message was clear from the residents in attendance: an increased police presence and greater CCTV monitoring as well as stricter bail reform to ensure perpetrators

who are committing multiple crimes over and over will be kept in prison.

A heartfelt thank you to York Regional Police as they are on the front lines to support our community to protect us and keep us safe. Thank you to all of the vigilant residents whose partnership and proactive stance when it comes to safety helps drive our communities forward.

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HEALTH CARE

Mr. Jeff Burch: Kathy Kairies of Port Colborne is grieving the loss of her beloved husband Ernie Kairies, who died on Monday, October 16, 2023, at the age of 67. Her journey on the loss of her husband of 20 years is deeply personal and emotional. Ernie was a healthy, intelligent husband, father and grandfather, very active in his family's lives, and they continue to struggle with this overwhelming loss.

Kathy, a registered nurse for over 35 years, knew a delayed cancer diagnosis would lead to serious consequences or death, and that's what happened. Classic symptoms were either heart failure or cancer, and his heart was fine. But Ernie couldn't get an oncology appointment until he had a cancer diagnosis. That dragged on for months, with several painful biopsies. One of those biopsies was sent to British Columbia when there was a clinic in Toronto that could have done it.

Kathy said she witnessed so much wasted money and resources as she continued to advocate for her husband. The process was exhausting. It was stressful for Kathy to watch her husband suffering this whole time and the ongoing hardships in getting the proper treatment for him.

As she grieves, she wants other families to know what happened to Ernie. She says there is a lack of coordinated care in our region and across the province, which contributes to high costs and poor, inconsistent care across different facilities. There's a direct correlation between the decisions this government makes in the budget and the way the health care system works. Right now, it is in crisis.

I will continue to advocate for people like Kathy and her family as they are impacted by doctor shortages, underfunding, lack of staffing and hospital plans that are shrinking our health care services in EMS, urgent care and emergency surgical care at a time when our population in Niagara is growing.

We must do better, Speaker.

ELMIRA MAPLE SYRUP FESTIVAL

Mr. Mike Harris: Mr. Speaker, you'll be delighted to hear that this year, on April 6, is the 60th anniversary of the Elmira Maple Syrup Festival. Friends, this is the largest single-day maple syrup festival in the world. It holds a Guinness world record and this year, we're expecting roughly 80,000 people in a city that's built for about 15,000. So you can imagine how busy it's going to be.

But this year is going to be a little bit different. In late December of last year, we lost a champion of the Elmira Maple Syrup Festival: Doug McLean passed away. He served on the festival committee for over 35 years, twice as chair, and also ran the toy show for many years.

So, Doug, on the 60th anniversary, this one's for you, my friend. All the best to your family, and I can't wait to be in Elmira on the 6th.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING

MPP Lise Vaugeois: My former artistic home, the Thunder Bay Symphony Orchestra, continues to bring world-class performances and music education programs to communities throughout our very large region. The three orchestra concerts I attended this month alone were not only huge artistic successes, they were full houses. And there are always full houses for the collaborations between Indigenous artists and the TBSO. Everything that is under the control of the organization is on solid ground, but, unfortunately, not even full houses can make up for years of funding cuts.

Yesterday, I was shocked—there was no mention in the budget of restoring funding to the Ontario Arts Council. In fact, apart from some supports for film production, there was no mention of the arts at all. This is short-sighted. The TBSO is the epicentre of a unique industry in our community that diversifies the economic landscape. In recruitment materials for professionals and workers in all categories, the orchestra is a key selling point for the city of Thunder Bay, and I know that the centrality of arts organizations to community life is true throughout the entire province.

Artists, in all disciplines, are the lifeblood of our communities and it is long overdue that the government recognizes this and restores funding to the organization that supports it all, the Ontario Arts Council.

HOUSING

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: The housing crisis is the primary cause of the affordability crisis in this province. That is why last week, the Premier announced that Ontario will be investing over \$1.8 billion in housing-enabling infrastructure in order to help build 1.5 million homes by 2031. That investment is part of the commitments our government has made to help build more affordable homes across Ontario.

Speaker, the new \$1-billion Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program will help support core urban infrastructure that growing and changing communities need, such as roadways or waterworks. This funding is supporting our existing \$1.2-billion Building Faster Fund to help reward communities that meet or exceed their housing targets.

Our government is investing to build homes that Ontarians can afford and looking at new methods of housing, such as modular homes.

York region and my city of Markham are looking forward to working with our government in order to get

more shovels into the ground that will help build more housing, especially affordable housing.

I would like to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the associate minister and the PA for their hard work to help create more housing supply.

JAMSHED HASSAN

Mr. Ted Hsu: I rise today to honour an outstanding citizen of Kingston, Mr. Jamshed Hassan, affectionately known as Jimmy.

From Pakistan to California to Toronto to Kingston, 21 years ago, Jimmy fearlessly worked his way to where he is now. He opened a Pizza Pizza franchise when he got to Kingston—a store he still owns, and where he still sweeps the floors today.

Jimmy treasures the diversity of Canada, and he founded the Canadian Colours Kingston Foundation seven years ago to promote just that by gathering different parts of our community together.

Through his business, he has donated to local charities every year and used his contacts to organize drives to collect blankets and food for the homeless.

He's the producer and host of his own cable TV show, Community Voices, about local social and political issues.

And in 2022, he was elected to Kingston city council.

You'll find Jimmy at community events, at the mosque, in his store, in council chambers, at political events, or maybe he's away visiting his family in Pakistan.

He's a husband, a father to three boys, a successful businessman, a community leader and, most of all, proud to be Canadian.

Sometimes it takes an immigrant to remind all of us what Canadian citizenship really means.

It's an honour to call you a friend, Jimmy.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Yesterday's budget, Building a Better Ontario, was a very exciting day for Ontario families, residents, seniors and workers, including those in the health care sector.

When we got elected six years ago, we made a commitment to ending hallway health care, investing in infrastructure, growing our health care workforce and supporting those on the road to recovery in their mental health journey.

In contrast, the previous Liberal government wreaked havoc on our health care system, by freezing hospital budgets and their inability to sit at the table with our doctors.

Speaker, yesterday's budget had many wins for health care, such as an increase for behavioural supports, \$2 billion more for home care and 3,000 more nursing student spots at our colleges and universities.

We understand that more seniors want to grow old in their home, beside loved ones, and not in a hospital hallway. And this is true for seniors living with dementia.

Yesterday, we announced an investment of \$46 million to support the continued operation of 59 existing behavioural specialized unit beds and to add more than 200 new BSU beds.

We are also investing \$2 billion into home care, bringing stability to the sector and helping people manage chronic conditions like dementia at home for longer.

Our front-line heroes have always been there for us, and we will continue to have their backs.

ANTI-SEMITISM

Mrs. Robin Martin: Last Saturday evening, I attended a local Purim celebration at Temple Sinai in my riding.

During Purim, Jews commemorate escaping from tyranny with the help of Queen Esther.

Although Purim is normally joyous, this year it is clouded by uncertainty as over 130 hostages are still being held by Hamas terrorists, over 170 days after October 7.

Temple Sinai also commemorated the life of Judih Weinstein, a member of its congregation murdered by Hamas, whose body has not been returned to Israel or her family. Those present listened to a haiku recorded by Judih, which ended with the sentiment, “Now, more than ever, kindness and tolerance with an open heart.”

1030

On Sunday, I attended a rally at Queen’s Park, organized by Canadian Women Against Antisemitism, CWAA. On public land, the crowd sang along with gospel singers to Leonard Cohen’s Hallelujah and listened to women describe their experiences with anti-Semitism. People held up signs reading “Love thy neighbour” and waved the Canadian flag, and Judih Weinstein’s haiku was shared again.

At the same time as the CWAA event occurred, a Shut It Down for Palestine demonstration occurred. The objective, as the name implies, was to shut down the activities of others, including by blocking intersections and waving signs saying, “By any means necessary.”

Instead of persuasion, that strategy relies on power and intimidation. Power and intimidation are not democratic tools, and we cannot and will not be intimidated. This is our Queen Esther moment, and we must fight back against anti-Semitism and all attempts to impose tyranny.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Will Bouma: I’d like to welcome to the House Julie Barnard and her mother, Carole Desborough. Welcome to the people’s House.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: It is my pleasure to welcome the new executive committee members of the Tibetan Women’s Association of Ontario. They are Tsela Wangmo, president; Yangchen Dolma, vice-president; Tenzing Yangchen and Yeshe Choedon, secretaries and program coordinators; Migmar Lhamo, accountant; Lobsang Dolma, treasurer; Kyipa Tsering, religious coordinator; Dolma

Dolma and Rinzing Wangmo, cultural and Lhakar coordinators. Welcome to Queen’s Park.

Mr. Dave Smith: Today is Ontario Waterpower Association day here at Queen’s Park. There’s a reception at 5:30, and some of the people that you will meet there are up in the gallery: Paul Norris, the president of the Ontario Waterpower Association; Janelle Bates, director of communications; Jan Fonseca, communications and community outreach; Ryley Gutoskie; and Jessica Worosz.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: It is my pleasure to welcome to the House the board of directors from the Richmond Hill Board of Trade that are with us this morning. I’m happy to introduce George Vasilache, the chair of the board; Errol Da-Ré, first vice-chair; Jaclyn Zhang, second vice-chair; Payal Bhardwaj, director; Jason Colterman, director; Amin Panjwani, director; and also Monique Dennison, the executive director. Welcome to Queen’s Park

Mr. Billy Pang: It is my pleasure to welcome Ms. Karen Chow from Markham–Unionville. She is the mother of page Tyler Chow. Welcome to Queen’s Park, and thank you for coming.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I want to take the opportunity to introduce one of my staffers that is here today, manager of stakeholders, Giancarlo Da-Ré. He’s also joined here by his father, Errol Da-Ré, so I’d like to welcome both of them to this House and hope they enjoy question period.

Ms. Jess Dixon: It’s my pleasure to introduce two of my constituents and wonderful supporters, Adnan Khan and Daoud Yaqoob, otherwise known as Dave, who represent the Wright and KW Towing group of companies. Welcome to your House, and thank you so much for coming.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to welcome Taline Dorna and her family, who are here with us today. Taline has gone to great lengths to support her son following her cancer diagnosis, and in an effort to raise awareness of this disease, she penned a book, *The Extraordinary Eye*. She has been a great source of inspiration in our province, and I want to welcome her here to Queen’s Park.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I have a constituent here from the town of Oakville, David Blackmore. Welcome to Queen’s Park.

QUESTION PERIOD

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, Speaker. This question is for the Premier. If you’re one of the 2.3 million people in Ontario without a family doctor, if you’re a young family looking to find an affordable place to call home, if you’re a parent feeling deflated for having to cut back on your child’s extracurricular activities or if you’re someone who is shuffling between two or three jobs to keep up with the rising cost of everything, the Conservative budget is not for you.

So I want to hear from the Premier: Why didn't the budget contain any new measures to help make life more affordable in Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply for the government, the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Of course, we've seen interest rates and inflation, and an economy that's slowing down around the world. That's why we acted early to help the people of Ontario. In fact, it was the summer of 2022 that this government took action by lowering the gas tax. It was this government that doubled the low-income individuals and families tax credit so people making up to \$50,000 pay some of the lowest personal income taxes in the land. It was this government that introduced one integrated fare, so that transit riders are saving \$1,600 on daily commutes.

This is a government that's taking action. This is a government that has got the backs of the people, and this government will always have their backs.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: At a time when people are so desperate for a change in direction, yesterday's budget doubled down on the same tired approach that has left people worse off today after six long years of this Conservative government. It shows a government that is clearly out of touch and out of ideas.

The government voted down our plan to take away the administrative burden on family physicians that would have delivered on care for millions of people. The government's plans will barely cover a fraction of the 2.3 million people who don't have a family doctor.

Why has the Premier spent so much more but failed to address our doctor shortage?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Mr. Speaker, I thought we handed out copies of the budget to the opposition yesterday.

Let's talk about the investment in health care that this great Minister of Health has put forward, a vision for a health system in Ontario. Two years, a \$10-billion increase, some 5% to 6% a year, and where does that money go? Another big investment in primary care so that 600,000 more patients can have health care in this province; on average, an increase of 4% to the hospitals so they can continue to lower wait times for surgeries and keep emergency departments open; almost three quarters of a billion dollars to hire more registered practical nurses, more registered nurses.

My God—even Doris Grinspun gave us an incredible quote in the press yesterday. The RAO supports the work that this Minister of Health is doing.

Mr. Speaker, we are investing in health care. We are investing in the people of Ontario because you can't have a healthy economy without healthy people.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: These so-called prudent fiscal managers achieved the impossible: They turned a \$200-million surplus into a \$10-billion deficit in just 12 months. Yet this

budget still falls seriously short on the things that matter the most to the people of Ontario: health care, child care, affordable housing, education.

1040

So my question back to the Premier is, how does his government justify spending so much more to deliver so much less?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Mr. Speaker, we're not an island here. Maybe the NDP lives on an island called "their world," but in our world, we're dealing with the economic environment that we're in globally. We're dealing with higher interest rates and inflation. In that environment, Mr. Speaker, you have two choices: You could cut spending and put on the brakes or you could keep going. Well, this government chooses to keep going.

We are choosing to invest in workers and the people of this province by increasing the Skills Development Fund so we can train our workers to build those hospitals that this Minister of Health is building. This Minister of Transportation is building highways right across the province, public transit—that's what a government does when it has options in front of them.

Mr. Speaker, this government has a plan. It's got a vision. It's executing against that plan, and we will continue working on behalf of all 16 million Ontarians.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm going to go back to the Premier again. The budget doesn't just lack a vision for health care, it also lets people down when it comes to addressing the housing crisis. Last week, the federal government warned Ontario we are about to lose \$357 million from the National Housing Strategy because of this government's failure to meet the conditions of the agreement.

My question to the Premier is, did the government submit an updated action plan to ensure that Ontario isn't left with a \$357-million hole in our housing budget?

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the member opposite deals with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and Ontario's Big City Mayors. Of course, if she talked to them—you would know what their number one request was: to fund the infrastructure to build more housing. Guess which government delivered on that?

This is about all types of housing, working with our municipal partners, working provincially for affordable housing, for student housing, for seniors' housing, for front door and back door, for condos etc.

I can tell you this: One thing we learned, when we work together, when municipalities and provinces lock arms, we can do a lot. But do you know who else has to lock arms with us? The federal government. We are hitting all the targets they put in that commitment, and it is this Minister

of Housing, along with the head of the association of municipalities, who wrote a letter to the minister saying, “We’re hitting the targets. We need you to step up. Join us to build housing right across the province.”

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: First of all, Speaker, municipalities actually wanted the government to give them back the money they took from them.

There is no use blaming the federal government for this government’s failure to meet the demand for housing in our province. Ontario’s record on affordable housing has been an absolute embarrassment. The Premier has ignored the recommendations from his own Housing Affordability Task Force. He’s even ruled out affordable housing options that would bring so many people closer to the dream of home ownership.

So back to the Premier: Why has this government let Ontario fall so far behind on housing?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Again, thank you to the member opposite for that question.

I was listening to the head of the Green Party over there. He said, “You know, I want to see the priorities in the budget be housing, housing and housing.” And do you know what the priorities in the budget are? Housing, housing and housing. Come on over to our side.

We are putting in place so many measures. Let’s talk about the Building Faster Fund: \$1.2 billion to help reward and incent municipalities who hit their housing targets.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier was in Hamilton just recently, handing out a cheque. The Premier and his colleagues were in Pickering—and that colleague happened to be me—to hand the cheque to the mayor of Pickering. We are working with municipalities.

With the Building Faster Fund, we’re building infrastructure, putting that in place. We’re even helping on purpose-built rentals and getting the federal government to join us on rebating the HST for purpose-built rentals, Mr. Speaker. This government is focused on housing, housing and housing.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, this government has failed, and one of the reasons they have failed is because they were so focused on carving up the greenbelt instead of building the housing that people in this province so desperately needed. What a waste.

I had to read this a couple of times to make sure I was right because it’s so astonishing—Ontario is expected to have added just 1,100 affordable units since 2018. It’s an embarrassment: less than 6% of the province’s housing target under the National Housing Strategy. With only a few years left to deliver on the agreement, we are further and further behind.

My question is, what will this Premier do today to ensure Ontario doesn’t lose the \$357 million in federal funding due to his failures?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Mr. Speaker, as we know, we inherited a lack of infrastructure—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Opposition, come to order.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I think the members opposite agree. Thank you to the members opposite for agreeing on that.

Mr. Speaker, we are not only getting affordable housing built, but we’re also investing more in supportive housing. Again, through the leadership of the Minister of Health, we’re investing another \$150 million in supportive housing. But it doesn’t stop there: student housing, senior care housing, long-term-care housing. It’s this Minister of Long-Term Care who made a great announcement in the budget yesterday to support more building of long-term-care housing.

I’ll come back to it again, Mr. Speaker: It’s this government that’s getting things done. It’s getting shovels in the ground, working with our municipal partners, working as a team. I would ask the members opposite to join us in building all of Ontario and helping us get municipalities, the federal government and the province aligned so we can all build those 1.5 million homes.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Catherine Fife: This weak budget shows that the Conservative government is out of touch and out of ideas. For a government that prides itself on fiscal responsibility, they projected a \$200-million surplus and instead delivered a \$10-billion deficit.

In the health care sector, the government is planning to spend \$1 billion less when 2.3 million Ontarians do not have a doctor and there have been 203 emergency room closures.

In the justice sector, the words “tribunal,” “bail” and “backlog” are not mentioned in the budget at all. The court system is literally crumbling in this province. So much for that tough-on-crime bluster.

Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Finance. How is this government failing so miserably to address the needs of Ontarians?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Well, Mr. Speaker, take a look at this budget. We are in a global economic slowdown. We’re not immune from those forces. But let’s look at the numbers in the budget. Let’s look at the numbers, because I know the opposition can look at the numbers and understand the numbers. Our health care budget is up \$10 billion over the last two years. What does that \$10 billion get us? It gets us more primary care, more hospitals built, more HHR—health human resources—for those hospitals, more investments in home and community care, more money for mental health and addiction care.

This is a budget that decides to invest in Ontarians, invest in infrastructure, invest in the economy, invest in

the people—the health care workers, the teachers, the skilled trades—right across this province. Because through not spending money and not investing, this is the situation we have. We're investing.

These deficits will pass. You know the revenues are down because of the global economy. But those long-term investments will last a—

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

The supplementary question?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Speaker, this is not the people's budget. It is insulting to the people of this province. Half of Ontario universities are running deficits, yet this Conservative government has slashed funding by \$425 million. Child care centres are at risk of closing across Ontario, yet this government is doing nothing to support Ontario's \$10-a-day child care program and supporting the ECEs that are needed for that program.

In education, there is no mention of the word "teacher" in this budget. This budget fails to keep up with spending on the repair backlog—and investing nothing in student transportation. Parents care about student transportation in this province, and they've been begging for support, and they did so at pre-budget consultations.

1050

This budget is spending more and delivering less. This is the truth of the matter.

To the Minister of Finance: When will this Conservative government listen to the people of Ontario and ensure that funding goes where it is needed, to the people we're elected to serve?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Mr. Speaker, I heard a bunch of things in there. I heard "education." It's this Minister of Education who is building more child care spaces and making it more affordable for child care.

I think I heard "colleges and universities." It's this Minister of Colleges and Universities who is freezing tuition, making it more affordable for students and families.

I think I heard the word "transportation." It's these ministers making it more affordable to take One Fare, saving \$1,600 a year for the daily rider.

While we're at it, why don't we talk about the gas tax that we're cutting, continuing to put more money in the pockets of the hard-working people of Ontario?

And why doesn't that opposition and that Liberal Party over there march down the road in Ottawa and tell the federal government to cut or freeze the carbon tax next week and help the people of Ontario?

TAXATION

Mr. Trevor Jones: My question is to the Minister of Energy. The impact of the carbon tax is devastating to my riding of Chatham-Kent-Leamington, and throughout Ontario.

Last year, the carbon tax cost the average family around \$710, even after the rebates. That's why it's ironic to hear the Liberal and NDP members in this House talk about affordability and the rising cost of living when they continue to support this disastrous tax.

Unlike the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, our government has opposed the carbon tax from the very start, and we'll continue to oppose it until it's removed.

Speaker, the people of Ontario deserve far better from their elected representatives. It's clear the members opposite are more interested in playing politics instead of standing up against the federal government's unjust tax rules.

Can the minister please tell this House why it's necessary to eliminate the carbon tax altogether?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the great member from Chatham-Kent-Leamington, who's doing a fantastic job in southwestern Ontario.

There has been a lot of conversation this morning about the budget, Mr. Speaker. Do you know what's not in the budget that was delivered yesterday by Minister Bethlenfalvy? A carbon tax, or any kind of new tax, or any increased fee.

The number one issue that the people of Ontario are talking about when we go door to door—we've got a couple of by-elections coming, in Milton and in the area west of London, where Monte McNaughton used to serve. Do you know what the number one issue at the door is? Affordability—the carbon tax. It's the number one issue that's coming up for the people of Ontario.

Yet, Justin Trudeau, in four days' time, supported by Bonnie Crombie, the queen of the carbon tax, is going to increase the carbon tax by a staggering 23%. That's not what you should be doing in an affordability crisis.

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

Mr. Trevor Jones: Thank you to our minister for that response.

The carbon tax is the worst tax you can put on the people of Chatham-Kent-Leamington and anyone in Ontario. It's useless. It's a tax imposed by elites and activists who are hurting the hard-working people across our province. And, yet, the federal Liberals are still proceeding with a 23% tax hike next week.

Speaker, over the next year, the carbon tax will add over \$360 to an average household's annual natural gas bill. That's not right. The people of Ontario should never have to choose between eating and heating their homes.

Can the minister please explain why the federal government must scrap the carbon tax in order to give our hard-working families much-needed relief?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks again to the member from southwestern Ontario—and a big shout-out to the folks in Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, where that by-election is about to get under way. I know our candidate Steve has been going door to door with folks like the member who just asked the question and many others on our team here. And the number one issue that's coming up at the door is the federal carbon tax. They cannot believe, they cannot

understand why, in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis they're increasing the carbon tax by a whopping 23% on Parliament Hill, with Justin Trudeau.

This tax is supported by this Liberal caucus in the Legislature. They've stood up and time and time again and said that the people of Ontario are better off than they would be without a carbon tax. Who in their right mind thinks that? Certainly not the PC government, led by Premier Ford.

Our budget delivered yesterday indicates what's important for our party and our government. That's making life more affordable. That's building the infrastructure that we need. That's connecting people to primary care. It's all in the document delivered yesterday and the opposition party should support us.

UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE FUNDING

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday's budget showed that this government's completely inadequate funding for post-secondary education, coupled with a 50% decrease in international study permits, will mean a \$1.4-billion revenue loss for colleges in 2024-25 and an additional \$1.7-billion revenue loss in 2025-26.

Not only that, the government's inadequate funding ends after three years, which will mean even deeper losses for colleges and universities down the road. Why is this Premier choosing not to increase post-secondary operating grants and deliberately allowing colleges to fail?

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Mr. Speaker, through you to the member opposite: Thank you for that question. It's this Minister of Colleges and Universities who froze tuition to make it more affordable for students and families to get an education. With a blunt instrument, in the middle of the night, without consultation, the federal government capped those student enrolments. We're going to support colleges and universities with our three-year stability fund—\$1.3 billion.

What I can tell you is this: It's an economy that is firing on all cylinders in Ontario. We're investing in infrastructure, housing, hospitals, highways, transit, you name it. We're investing in schools. We need the people to build those schools, those highways, those roads and those public transit systems. That's why we need international students. That's why the federal government should step up and help us build Ontario.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Students need affordable tuition but it's not going to help if there's no campuses for them to attend. University budgets are not included in the government's books, but we know that universities are also bracing for huge revenue losses. Almost half are reporting deficits this year. This government chose to ignore urgent calls from its own expert panel for an additional \$2.5 billion in post-secondary base funding and is instead allowing university deficits to grow, programs

to be eliminated, campuses to be closed and student supports to be cut.

Why did this budget not include the permanent, significant increase in operating grants that would move Ontario out of last place in the country in per-student funding and that is desperately needed to keep the sector afloat?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I don't know which part of my answer the member opposite didn't hear. We're making tuition more affordable for students and families in this province. We are there to support colleges and universities. This budget has more money to build infrastructure—student housing—which has been long overdue. We inherited a terrible infrastructure deficit in this province.

We're not going to let the people of Ontario down. We're not going to let the students of Ontario down. We're not going to let families down. We're not going to let the great people who are building this province down. We're getting it done, and we're going to do it together.

TAXATION

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. This Monday is April Fool's Day. Lots of jokes are going to be told, but none from the federal Liberals. They're not joking about their 23% increase to the carbon tax on April 1. In fact, they're very serious. It's a cruel joke to Canadians.

1100

In fact, they're going to continue to hike the carbon tax each and every year, despite businesses and individuals calling on them to scrap it. It's yet another Liberal tax grab, and our government continues to stand up against it. Instead of doing the same, Bonnie Crombie, the queen of the carbon tax and the provincial Liberals, haven't said one single word to their federal colleagues.

We're going to continue to stand up against this tax. I have a private member's motion later today asking us to spike the hike. Minister, can you tell us how scrapping the carbon tax will affect the people that are powering our economy?

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

To reply, the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: No carbon tax equals more money in the pockets of the people who have earned it, and that includes the more than 120,000 auto workers who have solidified our position as a global leader and a manufacturing powerhouse. It includes the 70,000 life science workers who are driving unprecedented medical innovations. It includes the 420,000 tech workers, a 100,000 more last year alone—or since we took office; 25,000

firms—they put Ontario’s tech sector on the map. The 85,000 AI workers, 20,000 last year alone—they’re all saying the same thing: Enough with the high taxes. Scrap the carbon tax.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the minister: Bonnie Crombie has now flip-flopped and said that if she was Premier, she wouldn’t introduce a carbon tax. But she won’t even stand up and say one word to her federal colleagues in advance of their cruel joke they’re playing on Canadians on April 1.

The people of Ontario aren’t as gullible as she thinks. They also remember her close friends, her campaign team—what the Trudeau Liberals said in the 2019 election: that they had no intention of raising the carbon tax. I think we all know how that played out for Canadians.

The hard-working Ontarians, the hard-working businesses that are powering our economy have had enough of Justin Trudeau’s carbon tax. They want the tax scrapped.

Minister, can you explain how what we’re doing in Ontario by lowering costs and how that plays out for our economy?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I’ll remind the members to make their comments through the Chair.

The Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, we have said this day after day, week after week. We’ve shown the Liberals the way by lowering costs that allow businesses to succeed and create good-paying jobs. We have done the opposite. We’ve lowered the cost of doing business by \$8 billion annually, and now, as a result of that, 700,000 more men and women are working since when we took office.

Last year, 180,000 new jobs were created. We attracted \$11 billion in new investments by keeping taxes low. From 2018 to 2023, Ontario created more jobs from foreign direct investment than any province in Canada and any US state. That’s because we keep taxes low.

I say to Bonnie Crombie, the queen of the carbon tax: Call your federal counterparts. Scrap the tax.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, to the Premier: This week, the Toronto Star reported that thousands of Ontarians are going to be out of pocket for energy conservation renovations because Enbridge will not honour its commitments. Without notice, applications worth many thousands of dollars were thrown away. Will you stand up and tell Enbridge they can’t mistreat Ontarians this way?

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

Hon. Todd Smith: Mr. Speaker, let’s be clear: The member opposite would tomorrow eliminate natural gas from our province. Natural gas is currently providing home heating for over 70% of the homes in Ontario. And not only that, but natural gas is the insurance policy that we have to keep the lights on in the province of Ontario.

Now, we have many conservation programs that are available to the people of Ontario that are offered through different providers, like local distribution companies and, in particular, the Independent Electricity System Operator. We’ve put \$1 billion into that CDM program, that energy-efficiency program, one that’s making life more affordable.

Let’s be clear: That member in particular supports a carbon tax, and not just a small carbon tax; he wants a carbon tax that’s even bigger than the one that Justin Trudeau is imposing on the people of Ontario next Monday. When it comes to affordability, it’s just not believable from the NDP.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Again to the Premier: I’m not surprised the government dodged this question, but the reality is thousands of Ontarians have been cheated by Enbridge, and this government has to act. When people cut their energy use and their bills, they clean our air and they help fight climate change. With this move, Enbridge will make people sour on investing in their homes to make life better for all of us.

Will the government tell Enbridge that they have to correct this abuse of everyday people right now?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

The Minister of Energy.

Hon. Todd Smith: That member, from Toronto–Danforth, the long-time energy critic for the NDP, would wipe out natural gas tomorrow, so to all of those Enbridge customers who are out there, think about it for a second: He would be ripping your home heating out of your home. Not only is he against natural gas, that member opposite is against the investments that we have made in our nuclear facilities. Nuclear provides emissions-free, base-load power to our province 24 hours a day, seven days a week that’s affordable and employs 76,000 power workers, engineers and building trades in our province every single day.

As a matter of fact, the energy critic for the NDP was participating in a town hall saying that nuclear is dangerous to the health of people when it’s actually the reason that we’re off coal in Ontario, and they are a major producer of not just Canada’s but the world’s nuclear medicine through nuclear isotopes.

Anything the NDP says about energy is baloney.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I’m going to caution the minister on his choice of words.

The next question.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier. Never has an Ontario government spent so much, borrowed so much, incurred so much debt to accomplish so little.

Yesterday's budget did nothing to address affordability for Ontario families. No relief for renters crushed by massive increases, and the Premier's NIMBY—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock.

The member for Ottawa South is speaking audibly, but I can't hear him for some reason, and it could have something to do with the fact that the House is rather noisy at the moment. I would ask the House to come to order so that I can hear the member for Ottawa South.

Start the clock. Member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you, Speaker. I'm glad to have the members' attention.

This Premier's NIMBY—I'll take care of my friends first—approach is not making affordable housing a reality for any Ontario families, and, thanks to this Premier, every day, more and more Ontarians are having to pull out their credit card instead of their OHIP card to access basic primary care services.

My question is to the Premier: Why did he do nothing to address affordability in this budget for Ontario families?

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you for that question. When that member opposite and his party were in power for 15 years, deficit after deficit after deficit after—can I go on? Do we have time for 15 years of deficits?

What did we get? What did they build? Did they build hospitals?

Interjections: No.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Did they build highways?

Interjections: No.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Did they build public transit?

Interjections: No.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Did they build schools?

Interjections: No.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Did they build long-term care?

Interjections: No.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Did they build the Ontario for tomorrow? No.

They spent money, deficit after deficit, ramped up the debt, and we got squadoosh for that.

It's this government that has a vision, under this Premier, to build Ontario. Those deficits will pass. We have a path to balance. But do you know what will be left? The legacy of building the infrastructure and the economy.

1110

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

Mr. John Fraser: Yesterday's budget's meagre increase to health care in this province amounts to a cut. That has left the two million Ontarians without a family doctor without hope. They need access to primary care. Under this Premier, too many families are now having to face using their credit card instead of their OHIP card to access basic primary care services.

The Premier knows this is happening, and he's just watching. By all accounts, that's just fine with him. This Premier is really ready to point a finger but never able to lift one.

I'll ask the Premier again: The Premier had an opportunity to actually take some measures to address the affordability crisis, so why didn't he?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Mr. Speaker, the Premier and I and our colleagues, the other day, stood forward in front of the people of Ontario. You know what we did? We continued the cut in the gas tax, providing benefits for drivers right across this province. Yet their party, supported by their leader, want to have the carbon tax in Ottawa increase next week by 23%.

Mr. Speaker, do you want to stand with us, cutting taxes and cutting fees, or do you want to stand with them, increasing taxes and increasing fees?

Let's look at Ottawa. We're investing. Which party is getting the Ottawa Civic Hospital built? Which party is building more schools in Ottawa? Which party is building more for the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario? Which party is building more highways in Ottawa? It's this party. They didn't get it done. We're getting it done.

TAXATION IMPOSITION

Mr. Will Bouma: My question is for the Minister of Indigenous Affairs and Minister of Northern Development. The carbon tax is making everything more expensive for all Ontarians, but the people of northern Ontario are even more affected by the high cost of goods and travel because of this regressive tax.

Clearly, the federal Liberals do not care about the consequences the carbon tax has on northern communities as they plan to go ahead with their April 1 tax hike. The independent Liberals and their leader, the carbon tax queen, Bonnie Crombie, want to continue to burden the honest and hard-working people in our province with this disastrous tax. Unlike the opposition, our government is working for the people of Ontario.

Speaker, can the minister please tell the House how the carbon tax is hurting northern Ontario?

L'hon. Greg Rickford: Je remercie le député de Brantford—Brant pour cette question opportune. C'est clair que Justin Trudeau et Bonnie Crombie rendent la vie trop chère, et c'est un cas d'urgence. La taxe carbone va augmenter de 23 % le 1^{er} avril.

La taxe carbone n'est pas un plan environnemental. Par contre, c'est une taxe qui augmente le coût de tout pour les familles et les entreprises. En contraste frappant, sous la direction du premier ministre Ford, notre gouvernement

réduit les taxes et garde l'argent dans les poches des familles et des entreprises.

Nous essayons d'avancer l'une des plus importantes politiques écologiques, la stratégie pour les minéraux critiques, et de créer une chaîne d'approvisionnement entièrement intégrée aux batteries—that's tough. De plus, nous faisons des investissements verts dans des projets comme le four à arc électrique, et à chaque étape de ce processus, il y a une taxe carbone au-dessus. Ça ne fait aucun sens, monsieur le Président. Il est temps de supprimer la taxe carbone.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you to the minister. It is not right that the federal government continues to punish individuals and families in the north with this regressive tax.

To make matters worse, the NDP and Liberal members in this House continue to support carbon tax hikes. They actually agree with the federal Liberals' plan to increase the carbon tax on gasoline six more times by 2030. That is disgraceful.

The opposition may be fine with ignoring the impact that the carbon tax has on northern Ontario, but our government knows that it will only continue making life more difficult for residents. Enough is enough. It is time to scrap this tax.

Speaker, can the minister elaborate on the detrimental effects that the carbon tax is having on northern communities and businesses?

L'hon. Greg Rickford: Oui, monsieur le Président, il est clair que la taxe carbone n'a absolument rien fait pour lutter contre le changement climatique.

Le Canada se classe maintenant 62^e sur 67 pays, en baisse de quatre places par rapport à l'année précédente selon l'indice de performance du changement climatique. C'est parce que la taxe carbone n'est pas un plan environnemental; c'est un plan fiscal.

Le premier ministre Ford fait partie des sept premiers ministres provinciaux qui dénoncent la hausse de la taxe carbone. Les premiers ministres ne sont pas les seuls à s'opposer à cette taxe carbone : un récent sondage Léger commandé par la Fédération canadienne des contribuables a révélé que sept Canadiens sur 10 sont maintenant contre la taxe carbone. Alors, il est clair, monsieur le Président, que Justin Trudeau et Bonnie Crombie sont déconnectés de la réalité.

La population de l'Ontario a parlé. Il est temps de supprimer la taxe carbone.

CHILD CARE

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: If you're a parent looking for affordable child care in Ontario, yesterday's budget from this Conservative government isn't for you. At a time when child care operators are warning of closure, workers are leaving the sector in droves and parents are seeing

hundreds of dollars more in the cost of their child care because operators had to withdraw from the program, this government didn't even mention the words "child care," beyond a footnote.

My question to the Premier: Parents are waiting for affordable child care. Why did your budget ignore them?

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

To reply, the Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: What's also not in the budget is the carbon tax, which is something we are standing up against every single day because members opposite seem to trivialize affordability for working parents of this province. We will not increase the costs of groceries, of baby goods, of fuel, and punish people who go to work or drop off their kids at the local school or child care centre.

But talking about child care, it was a Progressive Conservative government, not ironically, that actually slashed child care fees by 50%, saving an average family in this province \$6,000 to \$10,000 a year. That is meaningful when it comes to delivering affordability for working people. We're building 19,000 spaces in Toronto, 86,000 across this province.

We know there's more work to do. We're working with an imperfect system from the federal government, but we stood up to this Liberal Prime Minister for a better deal for the people we represent. Join us. Fight for more affordable child care for Ontario families.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: The issues with this budget aren't limited just to child care. School boards across this province were reporting deficits before this budget, which doesn't even keep up with inflation. The minister knows what this will mean: more cuts to student programs and supports.

Why is this Conservative government failing our students and schools?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I am proud of a budget that increases investments in public education to the highest levels ever recorded in Ontario history. The numbers tell a story. In 2023, education spending was at \$36.6 billion. It is on track to hit \$40 billion in 2026. It's up \$2 billion in just two years. That is proof positive that we're investing.

We're hiring 3,000 more teachers, 7,500 more education workers. Part of this budget is an increase in funding to combat issues of insecurity in our schools, an additional investment to improve math, the hiring of 800 specialized literacy educators to boost the fundamental skills that we know matter to the course and success of a child.

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Speaker, this budget invests in our kids. It invests in better futures. It invests in better jobs and bigger paycheques. We'll always ensure our children have a better education that leads them to better jobs in this province.

TAXATION

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. When I spoke

with my constituents in the riding of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell last week, I kept hearing how the federal carbon tax is making life more unaffordable. With many people in Ontario already dealing with the rising cost of living and high interest rates, the last thing they need is another tax hike.

Speaker, this punitive tax is increasing the cost of everything in our province. After next month's increase, Ontarians will be paying 17.6 cents extra on every litre of gas, costing them hundreds of dollars every year. Of course, that's unacceptable. The federal Liberals need to scrap this tax now.

Can the minister tell this House how our government is keeping costs down for Ontarians?

Hon. Graydon Smith: Thanks to the great member for the question. I'd love to tell the House how we're keeping costs down for Ontarians, and our finance minister has done a great job of doing that today as well.

But we know that the carbon tax is everywhere. It's everywhere. It's in the bush. When people want to go hunting and they want to get on their ATV, they've had to pay carbon tax on the fuel for that ATV. They've had to pay carbon tax in the truck to get out and enjoy the great outdoors, carbon tax in the generator for the camp. Mr. Speaker, it is never-ending. It's impacting our traditional ways of life, just trying to go and enjoy hunting, enjoy fishing.

Well, there's someone being hunted, all right. It's the wallets of every Ontarian, by the Liberals and the NDP, by the carbon tax. And I'll tell you what, it's in the sights, and on April 1, the kill shot is going to happen and it's going to take all the money in all the wallets, because they won't rest. They won't rest. They want to take all that money for carbon tax and take away our traditions, our ways of life in the north that we respect. This government—

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

The supplementary question?

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: Thank you to the minister for his response. The carbon tax is punishing the hard-working people of this province, and it's only going to get worse. The Liberals and the NDP want to nearly triple this regressive tax by 2030—unacceptable. Everything from the price of groceries to fuel costs will increase because of the Liberal tax hikes.

Individuals and families in rural Ontario rely heavily on their vehicle for transportation. The carbon tax is negatively impacting residents of rural Ontario as they are hit hardest at the gas pumps. While the opposition members representing these communities support this ludicrous tax, our government will continue to advocate for all Ontarians.

Can the minister explain what our government is doing to make life more affordable for northern and Indigenous communities and rural communities?

Hon. Graydon Smith: Again, thanks to the great member for the question. Since becoming Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, of course I've had the opportunity to travel throughout so much of the province, especially in northern Ontario. Recently, I've been to

Timmins, I've been to Thunder Bay, I've been to Atikokan and communities in between, and do you know what I noticed? Something pretty obvious. In these communities, people rely on their vehicles. There isn't a subway service. There isn't a GO train. I know a few years ago, I wrote an April Fool's joke about Bracebridge having a subway service. That was just a joke.

There aren't other options for people in the north. They need their vehicles to take people to school every day. They need their vehicles to get to the grocery store. They need their vehicles to get to work. It's their only option. It's why our government cut the gas tax and has extended that cut. It's because we respect Ontarians. Our government is fighting back against the failed Liberal plan to make life unaffordable in northern Ontario. We need to scrap that tax. April 1 is almost here—

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

The next question.

POMPIERS

FIREFIGHTERS

M. Guy Bourgouin: To the Premier: Dans le budget que votre gouvernement a déposé hier, on remarque qu'alors que le budget pour lutter contre les feux de forêt était de 216 millions de dollars cette année, il va baisser à 135 millions de dollars en 2024-2025. C'est une diminution de 81 millions de dollars.

Monsieur le Premier Ministre, alors que nous faisons face à une crise de dotation de pompiers forestiers, comment justifiez-vous cette baisse de 37,5 % du budget pour combattre les feux de forêt?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. Graydon Smith: We are dedicated to fighting fires all throughout northern Ontario and all throughout Ontario, and we have made this point clear over and over again, with an increase in the budget to fight forest fires in Ontario. That was \$69.8 million when we took office, it's almost \$135 million today—almost a 90% increase, Mr. Speaker. That's our dedication to making sure that we keep communities, infrastructure and individuals safe.

We're supporting our forest firefighters and forest rangers by making sure that we are recruiting enough, having more crews, making sure that more people want to come into this profession. We've got great, skilled, knowledgeable people that are there today and more people on the way, again, all in an effort to keep communities safe in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, we are remorseless in our efforts to make sure that Ontarians remain safe. Whether it's in the north, in the east, in the south, we'll make sure that our forest rangers and everyone through AFFES has the equipment and opportunities they need to make sure we get the job done.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary: The member from Thunder Bay–Superior North?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: To the Premier, through you, Speaker: Your government announced a one-time bonus for wildland firefighters, a great PR stunt that completely ignores the need for a higher base salary for these workers. It continues to amaze me how disrespectful the government is towards wildland firefighters.

According to OPSEU, the bonus was a take-it-or-leave-it offer that did not come out of consultation with the workers. Yes or no: Will your government commit to permanently raising the wages of wildland firefighters?

Hon. Graydon Smith: It's absolutely astounding that the opposition stands up and takes what was a \$5,000 bonus in the hands of heroes, in the hands of the people who go out every day and do a tough job, and try to turn that into a negative.

It is an opportunity for more people to become forest fire rangers in Ontario. It is an opportunity to show those who are in the system that we respect the fact that they have knowledge that they want to share with others. It is an opportunity to make sure that everybody throughout AFFES is receiving compensation this year that recognizes the efforts that they go through all the time.

Mr. Speaker, the door is always open to speak with our great forest fire rangers, and we do that, and we listen. The opposition knows that. We will continue to do what is right for Ontarians, what is right for forest fire rangers in this province, which is to listen to them, work with them and make sure that Ontarians remain safe every single day.

TAXATION

Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy: My question is for the Associate Minister of Small Business. The federal government's punitive carbon tax is making it harder for Ontario's small businesses to survive and thrive. The job-killing tax increases the cost on everything from heating to electricity to transportation and raw materials.

Speaker, small businesses in our province are already struggling with high inflation, supply chain issues and labour shortages. The last thing we need right now is more financial burden from the federal Liberals. Our government stands squarely behind Ontario's hard-working small business owners. We will continue to be the voice for their interest and call for an end to this carbon tax.

Speaker, can the associate minister please tell the House how this harmful tax adversely impacts small businesses in our province?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you to the member from Newmarket–Aurora for raising such a critically important issue facing small businesses across our province. I have been hearing directly from entrepreneurs and job creators about the severe negative impacts the federal government's punitive carbon tax is having on their operations and their bottom line.

The message is loud and clear: The carbon tax is an unbearable cost that is crippling small businesses and making it harder for them to survive. Many small businesses are already stressed by high inflation and supply chain disruptions.

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And let's not forget, Speaker, that Ontario's small businesses employ well over two million people, so when they suffer, it's the hard-working people of Ontario who pay the price through job losses and fewer local services.

Speaker, will the opposition Liberals and NDP join us in calling on Ottawa to scrap the tax, or will they continue to ignore the small businesses in their ridings and across our province?

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

Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the associate minister for that response. It's clear the opposition and the federal government are ignoring the concerns of Ontario's job creators. The carbon tax continues to negatively impact small business owners in the construction sector who are helping the government build more homes.

Speaker, our government refuses to go down the path of unaffordability and inaction. From cutting provincial gas taxes to reducing housing development fees and red tape, we are providing substantive pocketbook relief to Ontarians.

But we know that more still needs to be done. That's why we will keep on calling on the federal government to scrap its disastrous carbon tax and its detrimental cost on small businesses—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. The member for Newmarket–Aurora has to take her seat for a moment.

The member for Hamilton Mountain and the government House leader, if they wish to have a conversation, could they please do it outside the chamber, not in the middle of question period?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We still have five minutes to go.

Start the clock. The member for Newmarket–Aurora has the floor.

Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Speaker, could the associate minister elaborate on what steps our government is taking to push back against this job-killing tax?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you again to the member for their very passionate advocacy on this crucial issue impacting local businesses and families in their community.

In addition to the overall costs and burdens created by the carbon tax, it's also specifically harming certain key sectors that are vital to our economy and the daily lives of Ontarians. That's why I will be sending another letter to my federal counterparts to ask Ottawa to pay back the thousands of dollars owed in carbon tax rebates to every small business in our province.

The facts speak for themselves. According to CFIB, a shocking 82% of small businesses across this country oppose the carbon tax because it's an unfair, economy-killing policy that compromises their competitiveness while delivering absolutely no tangible benefits.

And yet the Liberals need a reality check. The NDP continue to arrogantly dismiss these voices from the entrepreneurial backbone of our economy. Speaker, unlike—

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

The next question.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: My question is for the Premier. Speaker, the budget dropped, and once again, it's Groundhog Day for Ontario drivers, who still pay the highest auto insurance premiums in the country. Every year, the government promises action, and like clockwork, the rates go up higher than inflation. They even went up during the pandemic when cars were parked and accidents were way down.

Now, the minister's newest gimmick is to get drivers to slash their own coverage to save a penny, but in the media, he couldn't even promise this would actually reduce premiums. Man, the insurance companies are smiling. They're so proud of him. And if he pulls this off, he'll make it to the auto insurance company hall of fame. Good luck, Minister.

So will the minister finally come clean and admit that the insurance companies themselves are writing his own policies on auto insurance?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

The Minister of Finance to reply.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you to the member opposite for that question. You know, I don't know what the member opposite has against consumer choice and more consumer convenience. I don't know. But I'm sure the member opposite—because he's a very studious fellow and a learned fellow; he follows current events—knows that there's a lot of auto theft in this province. This government is the one combatting auto theft. In fact, he failed to mention that the budget includes four helicopters to be purchased by the OPP to be able to do their jobs. We're going to give more tools to our enforcement officers across this province so they can combat crime and go after the bad guys.

But listen, let's lock arms and let's go down to Ottawa and ask the federal government to help us at the ports, where those cars go in and get shipped off to other countries and other parts, which is driving the cost of insurance up.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: He's not going to admit it. It would just be too awkward on the golf course when he's out there with these insurance execs. But you know what? You've really, really got to admire his loyalty to these companies. He's always there to stand up for them and do PR in the House for them when I ask a question about auto insurance.

Let's talk about postal code discrimination in auto insurance. Right after the last election, the Premier himself said he'd fix it. But here we are, two years later, and they just can't get it done. In this budget—get this—they're going to buy more time and study it for another two years. You just can't make this stuff up. It's like they're driving in reverse.

Will the minister tell the drivers in Brampton, Scarborough, Vaughan and my community why they just can't get it done for them on auto insurance?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I would just say this, Mr. Speaker: I think the member opposite is actually better than that. If he thinks that insulting somebody is a way to make a point, this is certainly not the place for that. I know that he's better than that and I hope that, in future, the debate will be elevated beyond insults.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Ottawa South has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to their question given by the Minister of Finance regarding the budget. This matter will be debated today following private members' public business.

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Kiiwetinoong has informed me that he has a point of order he'd like to raise and I recognize him.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I just want to do a point of order. I just wanted to recognize my northern colleague MPP Bourgouin, the MPP from Mushkegowuk—James Bay. It's his birthday.

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

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

The House recessed from 1138 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

FAMILY CAREGIVER DAY ACT, 2024 LOI DE 2024 SUR LES AIDANTS NATURELS

Madame Gélinas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 181, An Act to proclaim Family Caregiver Day /
Projet de loi 181, Loi proclamant le Jour des aidants
naturels.

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 like to briefly explain her bill?

M^{me} France Gélinas: “Family caregiver” is a term used for a family member, friend or person of choice who gives care to someone who has care needs due to a disability, a physical, neurological or mental condition, chronic illness, frailty or age.

The bill would proclaim the first Tuesday in April of each year as Family Caregiver Day.

WATERPOWER DAY ACT, 2024
LOI DE 2024 SUR LA JOURNÉE
DE L'ÉNERGIE HYDRAULIQUE

Mr. Mantha moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 182, An Act to proclaim Waterpower Day / Projet de loi 182, Loi proclamant la Journée de l'énergie hydraulique.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll invite the member for Algoma–Manitoulin to briefly explain his bill, if he wishes to do so.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Today is Ontario Waterpower Association's lobby day, and I want to thank James Carter, John Wynsma, Jonathan Atkinson and Paul Norris, along with Ryley Gutoskie, who took the time to speak to several of the MPPs.

Ontario was established on Ontario power, and this country was initiated with the initial power of having water power. This bill proclaims June 20 in each year as Waterpower Day.

PETITIONS

LAND USE PLANNING

Ms. Catherine Fife: This petition is called “Protect Farmland and Sustainable Growth in Waterloo Region.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government is overriding and rewriting local official plans to move urban boundaries and violate the countryside line by opening up previously protected lands to development;

“Whereas Waterloo's regional official plan as passed in August 2022 was accommodating all anticipated future growth until 2051 without significant boundary expansion or significant loss of farmland;

“Whereas this process of expropriating prime farmland in Wilmot township has lacked transparency with no public consultation or information in response to concerns about how rezoning and development will affect our water resources;

“Whereas there is a concerning pattern of using ministers' zoning orders (MZOs) to fast-track developments that favour sprawl over sustainable growth; and

“Whereas the 770 acres of land being expropriated and rezoned in Wilmot is prime agricultural land;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately pause all plans to expropriate and rezone lands in Wilmot township, to respect the regional planning processes, and to prioritize environmentally conscious, sustainable development in Waterloo region.”

It is my pleasure to affix my signature to this petition and give it to page Tyler.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Dave Smith: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario was created in 1962 as an agency of the province of Ontario, accountable to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs; and

“Whereas the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act last received major amendments in the 1990s and these amendments focused on formalizing the operational structure of the agency; and

“Whereas in 1962 when the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario was created robotics used in agriculture was not a technology that was even envisioned; and

“Whereas advancements in robotics for dairy farms has resulted in dairy farmers in Ontario having a competitive advantage by producing more milk with a smaller herd of cattle; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would allow for more research to occur in this new technology; and

“Whereas in 1962 when the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario was created genomics was not a technology that was envisioned as something that could be used in the agriculture and food industry; and

“Whereas agricultural genomics is a rich field that contributes to advances in crop development to assist Ontario farmers in producing some of the highest-quality crops available in the entire world; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would allow for more advanced genomic studies to occur in Ontario to ensure that Ontario farmers have access to this technology; and

“Whereas in 1962 when the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario was created autonomous vehicle technology did not exist and therefore was not a focus of any research in Ontario; and

“Whereas autonomous vehicle technology has seen advancements in tractors, drones, seed planting, weeding and harvesting robots and are several of the technologies currently under development that will transform agriculture and help alleviate food shortages by improving the sustainability and productivity of agricultural activities; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act will help facilitate further research in autonomous vehicle technologies in Ontario so that Ontario can get that research out of the lab and into the field more quickly; and

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“Whereas in 1962 when the Agriculture Research Institute of Ontario was created, artificial intelligence was not a technology that existed; and

“Whereas by modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act, Ontario will be able to enhance this invaluable research into technologies that can help explore the soil health to collect insights, monitor weather conditions and recommend the appropriate application of fertilizers and pesticides to ensure maximum crop yields and reducing the amount of waste created by over-fertilizing or applying the inappropriate amount of pesticide to a crop; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act is a key component of the Grow Ontario Strategy that aims to strengthen Ontario’s agriculture and food supply chain; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act also aims to increase agri-food technology and adoption; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act also aims to attract and grow Ontario’s agri-food talent; and

“Whereas by modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act, Ontario would further its status as a world leader in agriculture; and

“Whereas by modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act, Ontario would help the development of the industry’s unique technologies; and

“Whereas by modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act, Ontario would increase its competitiveness and productivity in the agriculture and food industry; and

“Whereas by modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act, Ontario would help in the development and adoption of new technologies in the agriculture and food industry in support of the key goals set out in the Grow Ontario Strategy; and

“Whereas the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario owns 14 research stations across the province that provide industry with the latest in agricultural and food-specific research; and

“Whereas Ontario needs to” act “to strengthen the agriculture industry by proposing to amend the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act by expanding the current scope of research to be more relevant today and serve the future needs of the entire agricultural and food value chain; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would allow research in Ontario to move at the speed of business; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would allow for the results of the

research to be distributed to Ontario’s agricultural and food industries in a more accessible way; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide appropriate information directly to the fingertips of the farmers of Ontario; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on aquaculture being performed at the research institute location in Alma, Ontario; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on equine, poultry and swine being performed at the research institute located in Arkell, Ontario; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on vegetables being performed at the research institute located in Bradford, Ontario; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on horticulture crops being performed at the research institute located in Cedar Springs, Ontario; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on beef, dairy and swine being performed at the research institute located in Elora, Ontario; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on field crops being performed at the research institute located in Elora, Ontario; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on field crops being performed at the research institute located in Emo, Ontario; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on field crops being performed at the research institute located in Huron, Ontario; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on beef, field crops and horticulture crops being performed at the research institute located in New Liskeard, Ontario; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on general animal facilities and sheep being performed at the research institute located in Ponsonby, Ontario; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on field crops being performed at the research institute located in Ridgetown, Ontario; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on horticulture crops being performed at the research institute located in Simcoe, Ontario; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on horticulture crops being performed at the research institute located in Vineland, Ontario; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on field crops being performed at the research institute located in Winchester, Ontario; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on field crops being performed at the research institute located in Woodstock, Ontario; and

“Whereas through the Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians Act of 1993, the association can grant its members the right to the exclusive use of certain professional designations and membership requirements, including title protection, for over 4,500 registered veterinary technicians and registered veterinary technologists are currently addressed under a private statute in the act; and

“Whereas the Veterinarians Act in the current legislative framework that governs the licensing of veterinarians in Ontario, the practice of veterinary medicine, as well as the accreditation of the facilities used to practise veterinary medicine.

“The Veterinarians Act also establishes the governance framework for the regulator, the College of Veterinarians of Ontario. The college is the regulator that oversees the practice of veterinary medicine in Ontario, and oversees the licensing of over 5,000 veterinarians and is responsible for facility accreditation; and

“Whereas the Veterinarians Act has not been updated substantively since 1989. Since then, the practice of veterinary medicine has evolved significantly. Thus, modernization is needed to keep up with today’s practices and contemporary approaches to governance; and

“Whereas changes made by the government of Ontario would revise the 35-year-old legislative framework, appealing or amending a total of 12 bills to modernize legislation for veterinary professionals; and

“Whereas the Ontario government launched consultations to explore opportunities to modernize the Veterinarians Act in November 2022 and this was the government’s first substantive review in 30 years, explored amendments of the legislative framework, opening the door to a new standard of veterinary medicine in Ontario that is modern, flexible and continues access to safe and professional care for pet owners and farmers; and

“Whereas the veterinary community and the public have stated that the investigations, complaints and resolution processes need in order to be more efficient; and

“Whereas Ontario is working to ensure animals continue to receive good veterinary care as the provincial government recognizes the importance of access to professional care for animals in Ontario...; and

“Whereas updating the legislative framework would explicitly recognize the role of veterinary technicians as part of the broader animal care team in the delivery of veterinary medicine in addition to other non-veterinary animal care providers; and

“Whereas modernizing the legislative framework will recognize the important roles veterinary technicians play in providing care; and

“Whereas modernizing the legislative framework will move the scope of practice and delivery of care from an exclusive scope-of-practice model to a more risk-based activities approach; and

“Whereas modernizing the legislative framework will promote the recognition that veterinary care is delivered by a team and acknowledge the roles of both veterinarians and veterinary technicians; and

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“Whereas modernizing the legislative framework will enable the regulatory college and government to define a broad scope of practice for veterinary technicians that reflects their skills and training; and

“Whereas modernizing the legislative framework will include a list of authorized activities that describe the specific activities that make up the practice of veterinary medicine; and

“Whereas modernizing the legislative framework would enhance clarity and better enable non-veterinarians to provide care to animals using lower-risk forms of treatment without the legal uncertainty that now exists; and

“Whereas modernizing the legislative framework would not restrict low-risk animal services such as grooming, hoof trimming, physiotherapy and massage; and

“Whereas modernizing the legislative framework would remove the association’s power to grant its members the right to the exclusive use of certain professional designations, as this is granted through the Veterinary Professionals Act, 2024; and

“Whereas Ontario would continue, from the current Veterinarians Act, the exemptions for animal owners including those who care for their own animals; and

“Whereas there would be greater diversity on the governing council of the regulatory college, including a greater number of public appointees, new spaces for veterinary technicians and academic members, and ministerial oversight of the regulatory college’s governing council...; and

“Whereas the name of the regulatory college to the College of Veterinary Professionals of Ontario from the current College of Veterinarians of Ontario to reflect its new role in overseeing two categories of veterinary professionals within a single veterinary profession would be updated; and

“Whereas modernizing the legislative framework would mandate the regulatory college to develop a formal quality assurance program, which would include continuing education, to better ensure the competence of members of the profession and to further increase public trust. This aligns with the requirements for other regulated professions...; and

“Whereas modernizing the legislative framework would provide a streamlined complaints and resolutions process, which would enable disputes to be addressed more quickly, and new and updated procedures for investiga-

tions, addressing professional misconduct and a member's fitness to practise; and

"Whereas modernizing the legislative framework would provide new legal protections for members who report professional misconduct, concerns about a member's fitness to practise, suspected incompetence, and new requirements to report these items; and

"Whereas modernizing the legislative framework would enable a greater amount of information about a licence holder to be collected, and where appropriate, posted on the public-facing register to provide additional information to animal owners and the public; and

"Whereas modernizing the legislative framework would increase penalties to better reflect the seriousness of actions that harm animals and fines for taking actions that could foreseeably cause serious harm to an animal without being licensed by the college would be set in legislation. This would carry a fine of up to \$25,000 for an individual on first offence and \$50,000 for subsequent offences and \$50,000 for a corporation on first offence and \$200,000 for subsequent offences. There would be maximum fines for practising veterinary medicine without a licence that would increase to the same levels; and

"Whereas modernizing would provide a framework for members of the College of Chiropractors of Ontario whereby they would be able to carry out prescribed authorized activities on animals, subject to guidelines, processes, terms, conditions, limitations or prohibitions that would be set out in regulation. Chiropractors providing care to animals would remain members of the College of Chiropractors and would not have to be a member of two different regulated colleges; and

"Whereas modernizing the legislative framework would continue to allow farmers, farmer family members and employees to continue to treat and provide care for their own animals without veterinary oversight and continue to access necessary inputs without veterinary involvement; and

"Whereas modernizing the legislative framework would ensure Ontario farmers have access to modern and quality care for their livestock, a crucial component of the economic stability of Ontario's rural communities; and

"Whereas modernizing the legislative framework would promote the maintenance of a healthy, safe and sustainable agri-food system;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To urge all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fully support the ministry of agriculture and rural affairs initiatives to improve research in Ontario's agri-food industry and improve the people of Ontario's access to veterinary services by passing Bill 155, the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Amendment Act, and Bill 171, Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act, 2024."

I fully endorse this petition, will sign my name to it and give it to page Ahmad.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 27, 2024, on the motion regarding amendments to the standing orders.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I don't think I have a heck of a lot of time left, so I will continue on.

I want to thank the member for Peterborough for his very lengthy petition, and I thank him for this because it highlights the challenges with petitions and why we are proposing within this package of amendments to change how petitions are accomplished here in the House. If it is the goal of members on both sides of the House to have more opportunity to present petitions in this place so that they can better reflect the views of their constituents, both for and against policy initiatives of the government, then I think it would obviously be well supported by members that the rules, where there is interpretation, do not let it be ambiguous in any way, shape or form.

I also want to talk a bit about something else that was in the standing orders, and it's a small point, but it highlights some of the other work that we had done with respect to the estimates of the Premier's office and Cabinet Office and the Lieutenant Governor. As I said, those estimates, in particular, of the Premier's office and Cabinet Office will be considered jointly—and, obviously, clarifying that Her Honour would not be subject to a call before a legislative committee to defend her estimates; I think that goes without saying.

It also does highlight, I think, some additional work that we had done in this place with respect to committees and estimates, in another, frankly, unprecedented move by a majority government. We insisted that the estimates process be modified so that parliamentarians had the opportunity to review all of the estimates of government as opposed to just a small handful of them. As you would have known—again, because you're wise beyond your years, Madam Speaker, I just assume automatically that you have been here for so many years, but you will not have known.

In the previous Parliament, when the estimates came, it would come before a committee, and only a few of the estimates would ever be dealt with in this place. The vast majority of them were done on concurrence here in the House. The vast majority of the estimates were never reviewed by parliamentarians.

We didn't like that process. We thought that one of the most fundamental duties of members of Parliament is to review the spending of the government through the ministries, so we insisted on a change in that process. We broke down the estimates to their component parts. We changed the committees here. I talked about that earlier—how we changed committees; we dissolved some, created other ones. We ensured that members of the opposition had representation on all committees and leadership roles on committees.

At the same time we said, on the estimates process, that we have to ensure that we have a process whereby all of those estimates from the government can be scrutinized by members of provincial Parliament on both sides. And it has worked very well. I think in the last round of estimates—and I'm looking over towards my team, who can correct me if I'm wrong, but I think it was one of the first times that every ministry appeared before the estimates to defend the estimates. To my knowledge, that has never happened in this place before. It happened through the changes that we made. I'm actually quite proud of that change.

To summarize some of the changes that we're contemplating in this Parliament—as I said earlier today, we already, yesterday, I think, did a historic change with respect to the languages that we are recognizing here in this place. Again, I thank all members for that—just for the benefit of all those colleagues who weren't here this morning.

Interjections.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I see the intense debate that is occurring with respect to the standing order changes over there as—it's internal debate, because that's what we do, right? That's what we do.

1530

In accordance with what we did in the last Parliament, parliamentary assistants will be able to answer what we call the late show.

It is, again, an increasing of the role of the procedure and House affairs committee in this place that we're proposing. I thank the House leader for the opposition and the opposition whip in particular, both who made impassioned pleas with respect to how committees are created in this place. I listened to them very, very intently, and I had been thinking for weeks how is it that I can better respect the outreach of the members opposite who suggested that parliamentarians should have a better role in deciding who serves on committees. That is why the procedure and House affairs committee will be asked to undertake review of who serves on what committee, and to make those appointments.

As I say, that forms a double role. It allows parliamentarians, through one of its standing committees, to make decisions, for them to discuss and to make those appointments. Madam Speaker, as you know, that's a newer committee, from the last Parliament, chaired by an opposition member of the House. So they will have that opportunity at that committee to debate, make recommendations and bring that to the House to establish committees.

As you know, the process right now is that I, as the House leader, bring forward a motion. I, as the House leader, can decide who serves on what committee. I, as the House leader, can remove people from committee. Madam Speaker, as you know me, knowing me as well as you do you, Madam Speaker, you know the responsibility has weighed on me tremendously. And I thought, as part of a continued democratic renewal of this place, that we should allow members to have that say.

The member for—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Oshawa.

Hon. Paul Calandra: She knew it was coming. The member for Oshawa knew it was coming. The opposition member for Oshawa, who is the Chair of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, I will tell you, Madam Speaker, is a fiercely independent and very qualified Chair—

Interjections.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes—a very qualified Chair who has been fulfilling her dual role not only as a member of provincial Parliament, but now is not only entrusted in chairing a committee that will help us decide where it is that we decant to and where this place will undertake its roles once we are out of this place—and she and the rest of the colleagues on that committee have been doing, really, a spectacular job—but now will be entrusted with the awesome responsibility of helping design the committees and who serves on the committees in this place. And I know that the member for Oshawa will continue to represent all members in that non-partisan fashion that she has been doing.

Again, I know that colleagues sometimes get concerned with the bipartisan nature by which I handle this job. I thank the opposition whip for truly highlighting that bipartisan nature and the frustration that she had working with me sometimes because I was too good to the opposition, and I reached out too much—

Hon. Victor Fedeli: You're a benevolent guy, Paul.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes. But again, as I said this morning, it's just who I am. It's just who I am. It is in my nature to work with, to reach out, to be a bridge builder and to reach across the aisle as often as I possibly can, because I think this place needs to be a better place than it was when we came here in 2018.

Having said that, despite all of that, I am quite proud, and I've said this on a number of occasions, that we have created the best province and the best country in the world in which to live, work, invest. Regardless of who has been in office, I think we've always moved things forward, and I think we should actually be quite proud of that.

But at the same time, the standing orders, as I have said earlier today, are a living, breathing document. When they are stuck in the 20th century, when you have rules that don't allow you to use your iPad or your computer in a place, which we know is so fundamental to the work that is being done, those things have to be updated. We know that that didn't happen for a long period of time in this place.

Again, as I say, some of the members opposite—"Well, you know, standing orders just never change. They never change." That's not actually a good thing that the standing orders don't change. I think we always have to be reflecting on how we can make this place better. I think that is the job of a House leader. I think it's the job of all parliamentarians, frankly, and there are not many parliamentarians who don't come to me with suggestions on how we can make this place work better for them and

their constituents. We reflect on that and bring those changes forward, Madam Speaker.

Just in closing, again, I want to reiterate how important it has been—the massive steps that we have made in order to ensure that our independents have an opportunity to participate in this place. I think we have gone, as a Parliament—certainly not unilaterally, myself, but as a Parliament—we have gone over and above to ensure that all members have the opportunity.

You know, when I was in the federal place, Madam Speaker, I served with a couple of independents who you would've never even known were actually there because they didn't have the opportunity to speak in the House. They were certainly not on front benches of the House. They weren't able to petition to be on a committee at all. Through the democratic reforms of the Liberal government there, that hasn't changed. In a minority Parliament, that hasn't changed.

But we are doing what the federal Parliament led by a Liberal government is afraid to do. We are making sure that this place is more democratic, more representative, that members have the opportunity to participate in debate. They have the opportunity to judge and reflect on the policies that the government brings forward in a way that is frankly unmatched by any other parliamentary democracy anywhere in the world. I think we should all be very proud of that, Madam Speaker.

All that to say, I appreciate the opportunity. I hope members will reflect on these changes and, at the very least, if they're not supportive of some of these changes, will highlight not only the ones that they're not supportive of but what their suggested changes are and which of those standing order changes that they have voted against in previous versions they would be changing back to the original format. I think that is also a very, very important part of all of this, Madam Speaker.

And I'll just finish off by saying these aren't the last standing order changes that we'll bring forward. I'm sure there will be more in order to make this place even better than it is. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for your time and your ear this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to stand in this House and today to talk about standing order changes that the government has proposed.

Before I start talking about the individual changes, I'm just going to back up and talk about what Parliament is and what the standing orders are from our perspective and from my perspective.

One of the great things about this Parliament is that everyone—and I'm a good example of this: Anyone can be a parliamentarian. You don't need years of university poli sci. You don't need to be a lawyer. You don't need—right? I'm a farmer. I'm proud of it. That is the great thing about Parliament, that all voices can be heard.

It's not a perfect system, and we are all working so that even more voices can be heard. We did something

yesterday and I'll talk about that later, but it's really important to remember that.

The standing orders are basically the rule book. They are the rules on how Parliament works. I'm not a history major either, so I'm not going to go through when each change was made, but that's basically what the standing orders are. They're the rules. They're how we engage each other, the parameters of how the government makes legislation and how we, as the official opposition, point out either where we think the legislation isn't adequate or, if there's legislation we agree with, where we'll vote with the government. But it's really important that there are rules. On occasion, the rules are changed. The rules weren't changed very often in the past. I believe that this government certainly holds the record for changing the rules. I agree with the government House leader that it is a living, breathing document—but it's not a quarterly. If something bothers me today, on the government side—“Oh, we're not going to let that happen again.” And there have been occasions where, in our opinion, that has been the case—not all.

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This morning, I listened very intently to the government House leader. I disagree with him vehemently on many occasions, but I enjoy working with him, actually, and I respect him. We don't always agree. He sometimes makes me very angry, makes us very angry, but I respect him. Some of the changes that the government has proposed—and the government House leader, in his speech this morning, listed many of them off, and his perspective on why they were changed, how they were changed and how it improved debate in this Legislature, or, basically, how it improved how laws are made in the province of Ontario. And on some points, we agree.

In one of the standing order changes, the government changed—after a debate of a bill, you would debate for an hour or 20 minutes or 10 minutes, and there was a period that used to be called “questions and comments”; it was basically four little speeches of two minutes, and then the original debater got to put in his extra two minutes. The government changed that to questions and answers—so a minute a question. We think it was a beneficial change for everyone. It holds everyone more accountable for their remarks, because if you're paying attention—I love this place, and I pay attention to almost everything that's said here, except that last petition. When you pay attention to a speech, you look for places where either you want more information or you want to challenge the speaker, you want to challenge their position, because that's what debate is about. When the government added questions, it also put more pressure on the opposition. When the opposition criticizes the government on whatever issue of the day, the government members get a chance to question the opposition members who just made that speech, so the opposition is more accountable for what is said. I think that was a great change done by this government, done by the current House leader.

Another change they did is to members' statements right before question period, and the government House

leader said the reason they did that is because members' statements—a member's statement is a minute and 30 seconds. A percentage of members get to do a member's statement every day—I believe it's nine members who aren't ministers. You get a minute and 30 seconds to talk about whatever you want—usually, it's something great that's happening in your riding or something bad that's happening in your riding, or someone in your riding who has had a momentous event; sometimes they're a tribute to someone who has passed. They're very important. They used to be at 1 o'clock—sometimes 1 o'clock or sometimes 3 o'clock—in the afternoon. The House leader changed it, or the government changed it, to right before question period, so 10:15, because there are a lot more people in the House at question period and a lot more attention. That's one way of looking at it. I'm not disputing that that is a relevant point, but in actuality, the way it works, for many members' statements it's worse, because question period starts at 10:30. If your member's statement is at 10:15, for the first three or four members' statements often there's nobody paying attention. You can't even hear the people talk because everyone's filing in for question period. It's incredibly distracting. It sounds good on paper, but people aren't actually sitting for question period, they're all filing in.

Was that done in bad faith? I don't believe so. But it is a case of it not really working out as well as portrayed. Sometimes it does. Some speakers are more commanding than other speakers, so if you have the last member's statement and you're a really forceful speaker, sometimes you can quiet the crowd down. But a lot of people are almost—and I don't mean this in a non-parliamentary way, but they're almost cheated out of their member's statement, and not on purpose. Whereas if it's 1 o'clock in the afternoon and there aren't a lot of people in the House, you can project easier, right? It's not as good a change, sometimes, as how it's portrayed.

Another change the government House leader mentioned that isn't, in our humble opinion, as beneficial as you might think: It used to be that we could ask a minister a question, direct it to the minister, or direct it to the Premier and the Premier would have to direct it to the appropriate minister. They changed that, so now the House leader can put it wherever he wants in a cabinet. But we used to be able to direct a question to a minister and the minister would have to respond. So, as a result, you get a lot more questions to the Premier, because we can't decide where it goes anyway.

Before, if I wanted to ask a question to the Minister of Agriculture and I knew it was going to—I don't ask a lot of questions to the Minister of Agriculture. But occasionally, and I'm just using myself as an example, I ask a tough question and I want it to go to a certain minister, but the way the standing orders have been changed, there's no guarantee of that. Is that really—from the overall of making us all more accountable, is that an improvement? I don't think so. So there's always two ways of looking at things.

One thing I would like to—I don't know how I'm going to put this. I'm just going to backtrack for a second. Yesterday, we made a change to the standing orders. Yesterday was a historic, historic occasion because, up until yesterday, the only languages that could be spoken here were French or English. Yesterday, we made a change that, for people of Indigenous origin, First Nations, if they're elected, they can identify what their language is and it can be spoken here in the Legislature. That is incredible. It's a lot more complicated than it sounds too, because it will be translated simultaneously in the Legislature. It will be written in their language. It was an incredible change, and I commend—I give credit where credit is due: I commend the member from Kiiwetinoong. His first language is Oji-Cree, and he started the ball rolling. But I also really do try to give credit where credit is due. I credit the government House leader. He saw the need, and we worked together, along with the Minister of Indigenous Affairs, to make that happen. We consulted beforehand. We looked to make sure that the standing order change would work. We did that all beforehand, because we all realized the importance of it. And to the government House leader's credit, we did it separately from the standing orders today, because there might be things we disagree with on with the government in this, but there certainly was no disagreement; it was unanimous yesterday. It was amazing.

1550

The only thing that will be more amazing is the first time when Sol Mamakwa, the member from Kiiwetinoong, can stand in this place and ask a question or make a speech in Oji-Cree. That is the only thing that will eclipse what happened yesterday, and I give credit to the government House leader, the Minister of Northern Development and Indigenous Affairs, mostly to the member of Kiiwetinoong. We didn't do it only for the member of Kiiwetinoong but for the First Nations people, who need to be represented here for generations to come.

So I give credit where credit is due. That is the way it should be done, but it isn't always the way it's done, and sometimes standing orders are brought forward, changes are brought forward that don't always benefit the democratic process as much as the government claims—not always.

For those of who you were just here and just heard a petition of, I believe, 15 minutes—well, there's 15 minutes on the clock, our first petition was a minute, and it went well past the clock. That is the case. In his speech, the government House leader identified a problem, that there was a loophole where people could abuse the petition process and read long petitions to limit other members from using the time for petitions, and then one of the government's own members, for three days, I believe, did exactly that, to create the problem that the government House leader had identified.

The person who has done the most petitions in the House since I've been here: the member from Nickel Belt. We call her the petition queen. Her average petition? Under 60 seconds. The vast majority of people who do

petitions here are respectful and respect other people's time. When there's 15 minutes, there's often times when we run out of time for petitions. We get it; some petitions take a bit longer. A few petitions sound like *War and Peace*. That one sounded like the whole series. And the Speaker has the discretion to advise, if you have a really long petition or if it's been read before, to summarize it. I've been here for 13 years and change, 12 years? Anyway, quite a long time, and very rarely does the process get abused. Now we're going to change the petition process so petitions themselves can no longer be read in the Legislature. They can be summarized. It doesn't really lay out how long the summary is going to be or how short, but they can be summarized—must be, not can be. They must be summarized. So the two petitions that we heard today, the reasonably short one from the member from Waterloo—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Which is a great one.

Mr. John Vanthof: There's no such thing as a bad petition; there are ones that are way too long—and the incredibly long one from the member from Peterborough are going to be, if this motion passes today or tomorrow morning, the last two petitions heard in this House—a good example and a not-so-good example.

But the problem that they're trying to fix, the loophole that the government identified, is their own. They're creating their own problem. I don't understand what the purpose of that is. For the life of me, Speaker, I don't.

Another one: private members' bills. The government House leader raised points about private members' bills that I agree with in a way but also that I disagree with in a way. Private members' bills: So each member in this House who's not a minister has the ability—there is a draw, and during the session each member has the ability to bring one piece of private legislation forward in the House, one time per session. It's a pretty big deal, right? Once again, you pick issues that are relevant to the people you represent, relevant to your area, relevant to a cause that's really important. Sometimes that's something that is not really a government priority, but it's something that could be, should be made into legislation.

The latest one—I'm trying to think—is Orthodox Christian Week, presented by the member from Humber River–Black Creek. It had universal approval.

So now we have one private member's bill a day, except on Mondays, but Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays at 6 o'clock until 6:45. We've been battling each other all day, and from 6 to 6:45 sometimes we're not at our best. We're not at our friendliest sometimes, Speaker, and sometimes it slips through.

It used to be it was on Thursdays. The House leader has a point that not everyone got to vote on that bill because if the vote was deferred till Monday—or if it wasn't deferred, not everybody got to vote on it. That's a fair point. But when all the private members' bills were held in one session, the actual tone of the chamber was different.

I loved Thursday afternoons. I was here all the time because, often, it was less partisan. People spoke more

often like I'm speaking now, without notes, just from the heart. And although sometimes the issues weren't earth-shattering to the general population, we had some of the best debates—sometimes oppositional, but some of the best debates that we ever had in this Legislature. It wasn't just people in the backrooms writing notes; it was people actually sharing opinions and opposing opinions, and sometimes changing each other's minds. We lost that. We lost that when it was moved from Thursdays. That we disagree—is it something that is actually really going to change how the system works for the people of Ontario? No. We'll work with what we have, but it is an example of what is on paper sometimes doesn't work as well in reality.

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The government just made another change in this standing order. So there is something, ministerial statements—sometimes when a bill is introduced, a minister makes a statement, but more often on a special day like International Women's Day. The government has 20 minutes, recognized opposition parties have five and the independents had to ask for unanimous consent. It's important for people to realize that any rule here can be superseded by something called a unanimous consent motion. If someone asks for something and everyone agrees, it happens. A unanimous consent motion trumps everything. But for whatever reason, the government said no to International Women's Day for the independents to speak. In the end, they changed their mind, and I commend them for that.

Now they're going to change the standing orders so that the opposition and the independents share eight minutes, and the opposition speaks first. I don't think that's an improvement necessarily, but I just want to make it clear: When these standing orders pass—they're going to pass. The government has a huge majority, so they're going to pass.

Mr. Mike Harris: No, they won't.

Mr. John Vanthof: I understand how majorities work. They're going to pass.

I just want to put it for the record here that in a ministerial statement, we will maintain our five minutes and we will pass the three minutes along to the independents. We're not going to battle that every time. We believe that everyone in this House should have a right to speak. We also believe that this House is built on the party system and there are certain decisions that should be made by parties, not necessarily by independent members, but we do believe that people should be allowed to speak, so that's how we're going to handle that. Just to make it clear, we do not want to prevent people from speaking.

There's another change that the government is making with—this committee is so new that I don't even—the procedure and House affairs committee, correct?

Interjection: Yes.

Mr. John Vanthof: Jen's the sheriff?

So a few standing order changes ago—the government House leader says this was to improve the democratic process. We disagree. It used to be—and I'm not going to be very technical in this. I'm not a lawyer; I'm a farmer. It

used to be the parties advised or recommended who from their party should go on the various committees, and we picked that by who had interest in the committee and who we thought would be the best on the committee. We submitted the names and, in the vast majority of cases, that's who got on the committee. Then the committee decided who was Chair and Vice-Chair, but that was also in consultation with the House leaders of the various parties. Now there are two House leaders, two parties, but that's how it used to be done.

Then it was changed—and the government House leader said that; he was very plain about that—that the government House leader decided who was on the committees. That's kind of the same as if I, as opposition House leader, decided who was the minister of certain ministries. It doesn't make practical sense. And it's not needed, either, because they have a majority in the House and they have a majority on all the committees, so nothing is actually going to happen at committee if the government doesn't want it to happen.

With the new standing order changes, the government has moved the decision of who goes on what committee from the government House leader to the committee of procedure and House affairs. But that committee is constructed exactly the same way as all the other committees, so whoever the government wants to put on the committee from the opposition—that is what's going to happen, because they have a majority. So it takes it one step away from the House leader—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It appears to.

Mr. John Vanthof: That's a good point. It appears to take it one step away from the House leader, but it actually doesn't change the power structure at all.

I said this the last time we talked about standing order changes: We have a good working relationship, and I hope that we can continue to build on that by actually taking suggestions from the opposition seriously, about who we feel would be the best on committees.

At the end of the day, the government has the control of the procedure and House affairs committee. I agree that the member from Oshawa is a fierce, independent Chair, but as the Chair, she shouldn't—and I don't think the other Chairs should, either—influence how the committee votes. She's the referee. The committee members should do that. But the majority of the committee members are of the government side. So, at the end of the day, as long as the process continues that the government picks all the committee members, it doesn't really matter if it's done at procedure and House affairs or if it's done by the House leader as a motion here. In fact, it's a bit less transparent when it's done at the committee of procedure and House affairs. It sounds better, but it actually isn't any better, and it won't work any better, either.

The standing orders shouldn't make things work better for one party or another party; they should make the system work better for everyone.

I'll give you an example. We're about to change petitions. Years ago, there was no time limit on petitions at all. One of the few tools that the opposition has to

change the government's mind on an issue is to slow things down. When a bill is widely consulted and it's non-contentious and we all agree, it should sail through the House—first, second, third reading and committee. And when they are like that, they do. The Veterinarians Act, the ARIO Act—which that long petition was read about—we all agree with that bill. There is nothing holding that bill back. It's going to sail through the House.

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But on bills that are highly contentious, like the greenbelt bill that had to be rescinded—years ago, with the standing orders, we could have read petitions for days. We could have done all kinds of things and hopefully protected the government from itself. Because the fact that this government has had to rescind legislation—not change it but rescind it—on several occasions, it means, well, it's bad governance, but it's also that the government hasn't allowed the House to do its job to slow down legislation that has obviously got a lot of public opposition.

These standing order changes they've made today aren't going to improve that. Are they going to damage it beyond repair? No. There are several standing order changes here that are housekeeping. It is a living document. There are things that are going to go smoother, as the government House leader said, when they made a standing order change that we could use computers. We all used computers. We were all breaking the rules, so they changed the rules. Great.

But these aren't the kind of standing order changes that actually strengthen our democratic system and make the legislation that comes out of this place stronger. We could make changes in the standing orders that would improve the legislation coming out of this place. The government has a right to put forward and to pass their agenda. They won the election. We're not arguing that. But if they made some changes that actually would give the opposition the time, give the public the time to actually make their views known before the legislation was passed, it might have saved them massive embarrassment, massive amounts of money—and it would have served the people so much better.

I'll give you an example, Speaker. We just had the budget yesterday. In the budget, they're talking about what we all know: There's a housing crisis in this province. We all know this. In the budget is, "Oh, yeah, we've listened to municipalities, and they need infrastructure. They need water, sewer, roads." And you know what? They do. But last year, they weren't talking about water, sewer and infrastructure. They were talking about, "We need land for houses. We need the greenbelt." So they wasted a whole year talking about land when, instead of taking development fees away from municipalities, they could have been going a year ago already on what municipalities needed. They wasted a whole year. That's an example of bad consultation and of having rules in this place that actually sometimes don't benefit Ontarians.

With that, Speaker, I would like to share my time with the member from Nickel Belt and the member from Niagara Falls.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the member from Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I will be speaking against the changes to petitions. I want to give you an example as to why it is important to read, word for word, a petition. Do I agree with a petition that lasts for 15 minutes? No. Would I agree to a change that says, “You have no more than 90 seconds. You have no more than 60 seconds to present a petition”? Absolutely. But that you cannot read word for word, I don’t agree with that.

I want to give an example that happened in this House on February 20, so the day that we were coming back. That day, a hip hop artist called Bishop Brigante was at Queen’s Park. He had come to Queen’s Park because he is a 45-year-old man that was diagnosed with colorectal cancer in stage 4 and is going through therapy. He had decided that what happened to him should not happen to anybody else. It took him two years before he was able to gain access to the colonoscopy, and he wants rules for access to colonoscopies to change.

There are bodies of evidence that show that it should start earlier than 50 years old, which is the benchmark in Ontario for where you get the colonoscopy. So he took from his experience, and he wrote a petition himself. Is he an expert in health care? Absolutely not, but he is someone with lived experience who now knows full well that, had he had access to a colonoscopy when his symptoms first started and he started to go to the doctor, he would not have waited until stage 4 to start his treatment. His prognosis would be different, and things should change. So he wrote this petition.

The petition is quite simple. It asks for the age limit to be dropped from 50 to 30 if you have symptoms that you have problems with your colon. That’s all that the petition said. It was a normal petition.

But I want to read to you what he said about coming in here. I introduced him, Bishop Brigante. I introduced his wife, Melanie McVey; his dad, Oscar Parra; his friend Atiba Roach, who all came because they wanted to be there when I read his petition. And here’s what he had to say:

“We had been put into this balcony and I had seen this room on the news before, never paid” any attention to it “because I was never into politics, but I remember seeing it and I remember being in there. I was like, oh my goodness, what, where are we? This is like some secret stuff or something, it’s the government, you know what I mean? You just don’t know.

“If you don’t know, it’s very surreal. But again, eye on the prize: What is going to happen here? Let’s wait” and see.

And then I introduced his family.

He says, “People stood up” and clapped and then “France ... read the petition”—and this is where it becomes really meaningful, Speaker. At that moment, “I literally left my body. And I started thinking about the nightmare again, the moment that I was diagnosed with cancer, the fear, the terror, the sadness, the disbelief, the grip that I had on my girl’s hand, holding on for dear life.

“As France was reading the petition, I thought of millions of other people after me that are going to experience that nightmare and I said, ‘Change has to come.’ And every word that France said in that petition reading was so powerful that I started seeing in my mind, the millions dropped down to hundreds of thousands, dropped down to thousands.” It “just kept decreasing, victims of this horrible disease. I envisioned it, it happened in my mind, and then I came back into my body and I sat there, just like, I looked at France and, you know, she thanked me and everything and I was just like, God bless you. And I so believe ... that out-of-body experience of seeing all of those casualties become people who just got to live their lives and the number just dropped so drastically.

“It was the most powerful thing that I’ve ever experienced in my body and it just gave me more purpose.”

I wanted to share that because this is what happens when you read the words of somebody who has really put in a lot of time, effort and energy. When I read his petition, he and his wife had collected over 17,000 signatures on that petition. That petition now stands at over 35,000 signatures.

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You have to realize that this man is still going through cancer treatment. He is on his 10th round of chemotherapy—chemotherapy that is just brutally hard when you’re diagnosed with stage 4 colorectal cancer, chemotherapy that lasts for three days in a row, 24 hours. You come out of there with no strength, no ability to do anything, but you keep fighting because your life depends on it. And even in that state of—he could have taken off. He doesn’t. He wanted to fight for other people so that what happened to him does not happen to other people.

They came here to listen to the words that he had written. He could not read it for himself because it’s only MPPs. I read it for him, and it was really powerful for him, for his family. And I can tell you, the minute that it got read in the House, it went from 17,000 to 35,000 signatures. It had meaning. But it also had meaning that I did not have to summarize what he had said. Those were his words—the words of a person who has gone through really tough times because he did not get access to diagnostic tests, a colonoscopy, in time.

Let’s be frank: Nobody gets in line for a colonoscopy. It’s not something—on a scale of zero to 10, how much fun is it to get a colonoscopy? It rates a zero. It’s no fun at all. People don’t volunteer. Ontarians are not going to throw down the doors: “I want a colonoscopy.” No, no, no—none of that. He knows that. He also knows that a lot of people, and I would say a lot of BIPOC—Black, Indigenous, people of colour—are seeing a high rate of colorectal cancer diagnosed at stage 4 because they do not have access.

What this man is trying to do is change this. And what I read into record is basically his words. That I was able to read the words that he had put on a petition, word for word for him, onto the record, in a place that he had never come before—he had never been here before. He did not even

know what the “NDP” stood for. He’s not a political activist or anything like this, but somebody who believed that having his words read in the Legislative Assembly had meaning, and now, we are about to take that away.

Had he come to me tomorrow, I would not be able to read his words into the record; I would have to summarize his words into the record. This is wrong. People are allowed to be heard. If some of the petitions are too long, put a time limit on it. We put a time limit on members’ statements, and everybody respects that more or less—90, 92, 93 seconds, and then end of story. Your microphone goes off and it’s finished. If petitions are too long, do the same thing, but don’t change it so that the people who take the time to write down a petition that is meaningful to them, that we would not be able to read their words into the record.

There are not very many chances for people to speak in this House. We have to speak for them. Let us read words that they want us to speak for them. I give the example of Bishop Brigante, a 45-year-old man diagnosed with stage 4 cancer, but I could go through most of the petitions that I read and the same.

I want to talk about Helena Shepherd-Snider. She is the woman who picked up the phone while her husband was having a heart attack and discovered that 911 was not available. She lives in my riding. In a big part of my riding 911 is not available. She is one who wrote the petition that I read into the record many times to make 911 available everywhere. It is meaningful to her that I read her words into the record. She goes out and gets—this petition, same thing—thousands and thousands of names of people who live mainly in northern Ontario where we don’t have access to 911.

Another petition, “Make Highway 144 Safe at Marina Road.” That came from Chantal—I’m not sure I’m allowed to say her last name. That came from Chantal. Same thing—she lives in Onaping Falls. She has seen many accidents. We have had multiple deaths every single year on Highway 144 at Marina Road, where there’s two great big S turns followed by a train track going across. When I read that petition, “Make Highway 144 Safe at Marina Road,” I read the words of the constituents who want to make things better.

To take away that little opportunity for people to have their voices heard at Queen’s Park is wrong. To limit the time, I fully agree. Put a limit of 60 seconds, put a limit of 45 seconds, if you want, on petitions. Put a limit of 90 seconds. Like, I don’t care. But what the member from Peterborough–Kawartha has been doing to read petitions signed by one person that last 17 minutes is disrespectful to all of the people who have written their own petitions, have gone out and gathered signatures from people they know, from their families, their friends, their co-workers and then want to hear their words read at Queen’s Park. Don’t take that away from the people of Ontario. They deserve to be heard.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I don’t have a lot of time, so I’m going to try and get out as much as I can.

I want to talk about the government’s record on accountability and on their record of limiting dissent and muzzling the voices of the opposition and the people of Ontario. These latest changes to the standing orders represent the latest in a long line of undemocratic changes this government, under this Premier, has made to our system.

First, I want to talk about the government’s changes to our committees. I’ve had the opportunity for the last 10 years, over the course of four terms, to sit on committees. I was also a Vice-Chair. Unfortunately, the current minister decided to take me off that, and then when I got on other committees, he did the same thing. It just happened in the last standing order changes. Then when I sat on committee as an appointee, because one of our members couldn’t go on government agencies, I enjoyed my time researching, making sure I asked very good questions, not embarrassing myself, because it’s part of my role quite frankly. I believe every single MPP should sit on committees and it shouldn’t be up to one individual to take people off. But do you know what happened at that committee? That afternoon, we had another one of these changes to the standing orders, and you know what they did? They took three women off the committees—three women off the committees. It didn’t make any sense to me.

I just want to say to them, I think that all people should have the opportunity to sit on committee and it shouldn’t be up to one person. I listened to him for his hour this morning and he talked about our member who’s going to be the Chair of the new committee once these standing orders are done, and our House leader even mentioned it. The reality is, when you go to committee, it doesn’t matter if you include the independents and a Liberal or the NDP; they have the majority. So every single vote you go to, they are going to win. That’s the way it is. It doesn’t matter whether it’s a bill that you talk about on the greenbelt—as we all know what happened with the greenbelt. It doesn’t matter if it’s Bill 124 or Bill 23, when it comes down to the vote, they always have more than what the Liberals have, the NDP and the independents.

I can relate to it kind of like a hockey game, right. I’m a big sports guy. I love baseball, I love hockey, and I can relate to that. So you to go the hockey game and say, “Oh, the Leafs lost a tough one last night, 1-0.” You go, “Yeah, a good game,” blah, blah. The reality is, they lost.

So it doesn’t matter if you’ve got eight Conservative MPPs on a committee and you decide to have three from the NDP, one from the Liberals and one from the independents; you’re going to lose eight to five. But the moral of that story is what? You still lose, no matter what you do. So changing that isn’t going to change anything.

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But what should change is that we should make sure that the way it was before—and I don’t support the Liberals on a lot of things, but the one thing the Liberals never did was take the opposition, meaning the NDP, off committees. They never did it—because I was on governance; I was on estimates. The Liberals never took us off. They said, “What does the NDP want? Who do they

want to sit on this committee?" And the reason why you would do that is, some people—I'll use our financial critic. She's very good at it. She does a great job. I watched her on TV last night; I was very, very impressed. I'm very proud that she's part of my caucus. She's got some talent around that. And there are other people who have different talents. So you try to line the talent up to the committees—who are going to go to the committee, present themselves well, make sure we're asking fair and just questions.

But no, do you know what they did? The minister decided who sits on committees—it wasn't the NDP, it wasn't our leader; it was a Conservative. I want people at home to understand this, because I think it's very, very important to understand this.

When they say that they're trying to make sure it's democratic—it isn't, when our leader says we want the member from St. Catharines or the member from Niagara Falls on the committee, and then the minister says, "Oh, no, we don't want them on that committee. They might do the job. They might ask tough questions. They might not agree with the government. So what we'll do is, we'll take them off."

Well, I hate to break it to this party over here, the Conservatives, but in the last election—they talk about a majority government, which they got. We can't deny that. But the reality is—do you know what they got? They got 18% of the votes that were cast.

Well, this little guy over here from Niagara Falls, who's five foot nothing—I got 50% of the vote. Do you know why I got that? Because I do my job, and I do it well. And the people who vote for me want me to sit on committees. They want me to come to Queen's Park and talk about things that are important to us, whether that be the greenbelt—because we saw the fiasco with the greenbelt, where they're telling us they want to build 1.5 million homes on the greenbelt. We all knew that wasn't what it was about. The RCMP is going to prove it at some point in time. Or how about Bill 124, where you took away wages and benefits? They want me to go to that committee and talk about the bill and say, "Why are you attacking nurses? Why are you attacking health care workers?" They want me to come here.

That doesn't mean that I'm going to stand up, when I go to committee, and say, "Hey, thanks for doing Bill 124" or "Thanks for doing Bill 23 and hurting our municipalities right across the province of Ontario." I'm not going to do that. My job, as opposition, is to question exactly what this government is doing, whether it's on the budget that was presented yesterday or whether it's on bills.

And what we have here is a majority government that is not doing that. So what they're doing is extremely undemocratic. It's certainly not right for any MPP be taken off of committee.

What really got me going on this, the reason why I wanted to speak today was, the last committee I went to was government agencies—and I think the finance critic was there as well, and I think another member was there as well. That very day, after we did that committee, we had

question period, then we all went for lunch; we were having a good time with our colleagues, having a sandwich or whatever. We come with new standing orders by that minister—and what did he do? The person that I replaced for that committee—because the individual was sick that day—was taken off the committee. But he didn't stop there. It wasn't good enough. He attacked two more women and took them off their committees. That's wrong.

That same minister, over and over and over again, stood up in the last Parliament and said, "Do you know that member over there from the NDP? They don't want to sit on committees. They don't want to do their job. They don't care about you." That was the same thing they said—

Mr. Trevor Jones: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): One second. Point of order: I recognize the member for Chatham-Kent-Leamington.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I want to bring to the member opposite's attention—maybe it was unintentional. I was just trying to sit and digest it and listen to it, but I couldn't help but think I heard the member opposite suggest that the government House leader of the government of Ontario has personally attacked women. In what regard? It's unparliamentary, it's unwarranted and I'll have the Speaker rule on the matter.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member has heard the point of order. In the rest of the speech—

Mr. Wayne Gates: I know, and I actually appreciate his comment because I would certainly never do that in the House, even though that same minister wouldn't allow them to talk on International Women's Day. But that was not my intention. My intention was to show that three people were taken off the committee. They just happened to be women, I suppose. At the end of the day, that's a problem.

Or you want to talk about other bills? And I've had the privilege of doing this when I sat on the committees before they decided they didn't want me as a Vice-Chair. They didn't want me as a Chair. They didn't want me to sit on committees. And I understand why. I actually take it as a compliment, because I'm doing my job—maybe something that we all should do, quite frankly. You don't have to agree with how I do it. You don't have to like how I do it, but that's the way it is.

But I've had the privilege of standing and talking about Working for Workers. I've gone to those committees. And in fairness, I listened to it, because there are some things in some of the Working for Workers bills the NDP has supported.

Matter of fact, we've supported some of those bills. I supported my colleague Jeff Burch from Niagara Centre when he brought in a bill to make sure that firefighters were covered for cancer, when a captain died in Welland with the firefighters. I supported that. There are other things in the bill that I think they could do a better job on in Working for Workers. And in fairness, guess what I did? I raised those issues.

And some of you say, “Well, what issues did you raise that you got the government so upset?” I talked about deeming. “Well, what’s deeming?” That’s where an injured worker gets deemed as if he could do a job even though the job’s not there, and then they take that money—say he was making \$20 an hour; he can now, they say, be a parking attendant for \$17 and now his benefit is \$3 an hour and it forces him to live in poverty.

Now, I think it’s fair and reasonable for somebody with a labour background to raise that issue during that bill. But if I’m not at committee, because the government doesn’t want me there, I can’t raise that on behalf of injured workers in the province of Ontario who basically have lost everything in some cases. They’ve lost their marriage. They’ve lost their home. They’ve lost their family. It’s one of the biggest injustices that I’ve seen here since I’ve been here for 10 years—and continues to be. Working for Workers would be one way to correct that, I believe.

I talked about when I went there to workers for workers. I talked about Bill 124. Think about that. Bill 23—I talk about all those bills, standing up for workers.

Those poor guys that are delivering our food there that work for Uber Eats. You know they’re working some hours in this province of Ontario for nothing? They’re not getting paid while they’re sitting there waiting for the next call. I’ve been here for only an hour, hour and a half. There’s only been one or two people speak, but we’re all getting paid. Is that right, that somebody’s doing that, when they’re using their own car, they have to pay insurance or risk their lives when they’re driving their bicycles?

I know I have to sit down, so thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I look forward to this opportunity to join and, like the member opposite, I am going to talk a little bit about some of the committees and some of the things that they are talking about, some of the things they could take up.

And it’s really interesting to listen to the member opposite because—maybe he has not read the bill, because the very point that he was talking about is the fact that he was allegedly removed from committees. I don’t know; I haven’t followed his career. But I understand that the whole idea of this would be to allow the procedure and House affairs committee to actually appoint and revise members of the committee.

So, when you listen to that member, it sounds like one thing is happening, but in reality, this is exactly what the NDP have asked in the past. They asked to take committee appointments out of the hands of the government, and this absolutely fulfills that request. That’s exactly what’s happening. It’s very hard to have the member not take yes for an answer. I think that the whole idea is that this would be a process that’s no longer led by the government, the appointment of committees, and this would accomplish that by having committee membership be formed in a collaborative process at the committee.

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And so I listened intently as he was speaking and tried to figure out what the heck is he talking about when what we’re actually doing, had he read this, is exactly what he was railing against. I’ve always been at a loss when he speaks, so let me, at least, talk a little bit about some of those very committees that he was referring to and the things that happen in those committees.

I like getting called to committees. I don’t get called very often, but when I do go, I like the committee work. I don’t care whether it’s our members, opposition members, independent members who are asking the questions. I love that. I love the opportunity because we’ve got such a stellar record in the province of Ontario to talk about that I can’t wait for any format to get out there and talk about it. I could talk about it at any of the committees that I get called to with my economic development portfolio. I can talk all day—and it’s going to be tough to contain it in 20 minutes, but I could talk all day at the committees about the 700,000 jobs that were created.

I love going to committee. I’ve been to estimates, where I talk about how we got there and I talk about the fact—and I’ve stood in this Legislature and shared this not only in committee, but here in the Legislature day after day, week after week, month after month, and, as it’s turned out to be, year after year, with these growing numbers of jobs that have been created, and we share how it happened. That’s why I like going to these committees. It doesn’t really matter how they’re formed or who’s sitting there. We just like the opportunity to be able to share this great news about the province of Ontario and the turnaround that we’ve seen.

Now, we can never forget that, under the previous government—I sat on that side for six and a half years and shook my head almost every day. I couldn’t understand why they were so anti-business, we lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs. I could not understand how this could happen. I mean, I could see how it happened. I would go to committee and I would talk and I would ask the questions. I remember talking to the Minister of Finance and asking, “How can you let this happen? How can, under your watch, all of these things happen?” I remember sitting with the then Minister of Economic Development from the then government and saying, “You’ve lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs.” I can’t remember how they could answer, but I just remember it was not a very solid answer trying to tell how you lost 300,000.

I could stand here all day and tell you how we gained 700,000 jobs, and that was all, as I said in the last committee that I attended, because we cut the cost of doing business by \$8 billion every year. At committee, I stood there and was able to be asked by members and tell them what the answer was.

We reduced the cost of WSIB in Ontario by 50%. They asked, “How did you do that? How did you come up with the number? How were you able to form that?” And we told them: Because there was so much cash in the WSIB—workplace safety insurance. There was so much cash there, it was beyond any financial requirement, any legal

requirement. In fact, it was way beyond any moral requirement to have that much cash stashed there. So we reduced the premiums.

We didn't touch the benefits; they're still as strong as they've always been. But the premiums were reduced by 50%. That's \$2.5 billion in savings to business every single year and a big reason why companies like Ford and GM are doing so strong in their turnover to electric vehicles here in Ontario. We reduced the cost of WSIB for everybody, but it's a major number to these large employers. They employ 100,000 people in the province of Ontario and that's a significant savings for those kinds of companies.

At committee, I stood up, and I was able—at the last committee I was at, actually, I was asked by an NDP member about this very topic, and I went on to be able to say to that member that the second thing we did was we reduced the accelerated capital cost allowance. It meant businesses could write off the cost of their new equipment because they're buying and expanding. They write that off in-year, saving them \$1 billion a year. The member did press on these numbers, and I was able to talk about how we got to those numbers and how we reduced the cost of industrial and commercial hydro by 15%—\$1.3 billion in savings. I went on and on at the committee and talked about how we got to the \$8 billion.

To me, it's a really valuable opportunity to be able to go to these committees that are formed by, again, all the parties. How they're going to be formed now is going to be having the procedure and House affairs committee—they will appoint and they will revise the membership of all the other committees. Again, to the member who was talking about how he kept getting removed from committees, the NDP have asked to take committee appointments out of the hands of the government. This fulfills that request.

I will talk a little bit more about the last time I went to committee. I think it was estimates I went to. At estimates, I was asked a question about our trade offices. I was asked that very question the last time I went to estimates. I was able to talk about the fact that we have trade offices all around the world and that our trade offices have attracted almost \$11 billion in new investments. Going to that committee was a really good opportunity for the opposition members to learn the fact that 10,000 really good, brand-new, good-paying jobs were created just through the Ontario trade and investment offices that we have around the world. I was able, in fact, to discuss that our Dallas office alone has created close to 120 jobs.

There are four companies I would talk about. Thryv is a new company that opened a regional headquarters in Toronto. This is out of Dallas and our Dallas trade and investment office; a TIO, we call it. ePac Flexible Packaging invested in a new line of equipment in their Mississauga facility. Search Wizards announced a new office in Ontario. And a 3-D company announced a \$2.5-million investment to acquire a company in Markham and increase the staff of their engineering in Waterloo. I'm able, at committee, to be able to talk about those kinds of things.

I think it's really important that the opposition get that opportunity to ask us. This is how it gives us a chance for them to be able to see some of the things that are happening in other offices and, quite frankly, around the world. And it's a really good opportunity for them to see what's going on in some of their own communities with some of the major announcements.

We have a regional development program that I discussed at committee. We launched it in 2019. It was a really neat launch in November of 2019. It was in around Oxford county. We had a lot of the regional mayors who came that particular night, and they learned that we were putting \$140 million in this regional development program and that part of it will be able to help municipalities build industrial parks, that we're going to use that money not just for businesses but for the municipalities to build industrial parks. It was a really good opportunity for the opposition to learn about that. I think that's what you see in these committees—a good two-way discussion that can happen.

Incidentally, out of that \$140-million RDP—regional development program—we've attracted \$1.4 billion in investments; 2,600 jobs have been created in all the ridings. Everybody in this room basically has been touched by one of these four programs that we have.

In fact, if you're in eastern Ontario, we have the Eastern Ontario Development Fund. There's the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund. In the north, we have the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund. And in all Ontario, pan-Ontario, including the GTA, we have AMIC, the advanced manufacturing innovation competitiveness stream.

1650

We're able to talk to these individual members at committee when they say, "What's happening with this program? How did that money get spent? Where did you get that money? Where did you spend that money?" We're able to tell them about their own ridings. I have a book here that lists every single dollar that has been issued to all of their ridings, as well. It's a good opportunity for them to be able to ask me a question about, "How did you come up with the tens of millions of dollars that you invested?", or in this particular case, \$140 million.

I can tell you that in eastern Ontario and southern Ontario, we invested \$105 million into 93 companies. That's almost everybody's riding of those two funds that have got businesses that were able to grow from it. In fact, that \$104 million that we put in leveraged \$1 billion in private investment. It created 2,100 jobs, so it was a really exciting day to be able to sit in committee and talk about these things, because we don't get a good chance to talk about these kinds of things.

The AMIC program that I mentioned is \$40 million. We've issued about \$25 million of it so far in 12 different companies—\$290 million, it generated in revenue, and 580 jobs came out of it. That's the kind of thing that should be understood by the opposition and the independents, and that, you learn in committee when you ask these kinds of questions. So this is important, that we have this opportunity to discuss this, even today.

NOHFC, the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp.: \$726 million in 6,000 projects since we were elected—6,000 projects. We looked at every one of those, one by one by one by one. It leveraged \$2.3 billion in northern Ontario. It's important to the northern members here to understand what's happening. We want them to know, so that they can come to us and say, "How can I access some of that in my riding of Thunder Bay or Timiskaming–Cochrane?" They want to be able to know how to do that.

Timiskaming–Cochrane, by the way, has done particularly well under the NOHFC. They've got a lot of applications that they do; 9,500 jobs have been created by that. Having this chance today to speak about it is important, but also having the chance at committee is a really, really important opportunity as well.

I can think about some of the stats that we haven't talked about yet. Ontario is leading the nation in job creation. I think that's one of those facts that we need to continue to talk about—not only in job creation, where we've seen last year 180,000 jobs created last year alone, but we carried it over into January where 24,000 jobs were created in the month of January. So obviously we're leading the nation. I think that was 93% or 95% of all jobs in Canada were created in Ontario in that particular month, and it happens month after month after month. That included 9,700 construction jobs, so it's really fascinating to see what's happening.

You've heard me talk about how many more manufacturing jobs were created in Ontario alone last year than every US state combined. That's really something to be able to talk about, Speaker. And not only that, but there was a stat that I used, I think just today, in the Legislature—I can't wait to go to committee and talk about this particular number—the foreign direct investment. Again, we have these offices all around the world that we work with. We have created more jobs in Ontario from foreign direct investment—that means companies like Volkswagen investing, or NextStar in Windsor investing—from 2018 to 2023, any year in there, than any Canadian province or any US state. That's the strength of what's happening, and I can't wait to go to committee to be able to be asked about that at estimates. "How did you get there?"—that's what I want one of them to be able to ask me. That's why I want them on the committee. I want them to ask me those questions, so I have a chance to be able to say, "Here's what we did in Ontario. Here's the strength that we bring to all of the functions that we go to, all of the meetings around the world that we go to."

I want them to also understand the feeling out there about Ontario, because I think that's reflected, whether you see it here in the Legislature or you see it in a committee. I went to 15 countries over the course of last year when we had this unprecedented year. Don't forget, Speaker: We've seen \$28 billion of new investment in the EV sector alone come to Ontario in the last three years. These are the kinds of things that we want to be able to tell them. I want them to ask, "How did that happen? What did you do? What was said? What did you hear? What are people saying about Ontario?"

It's fascinating that, last year, all of those countries, no matter where we went, all said two things—really, unprompted, they would say two things. They would say to us, number one, when we see all of the turmoil that's going on around the world, whether it was post-COVID, we're out of COVID, we're not quite out of COVID—all of the turmoil that that has created. And then we look at Russia's illegal war in Ukraine—this was before the Israel war right now. This was all before that, because I didn't travel in November or December after that outbreak. But they would say to us, in all of this turmoil, the supply chain interruptions, questions about China interrupting the supply chain, all of the turmoil, all of this trouble—they look across the ocean and they see this sea of calm in Ontario. And they all offer this: It's stable. It's reliable. It's dependable. It's almost boring, in a good way, which is good. When you're in this business, that's a good thing to have, that there's no surprises, that you can count on everything in Ontario. The second thing they said is that it was safe. Ontario is safe. We heard that universally.

So I'm eager to go to the next committee, to have the opposition ask us those kinds of questions and say, "Tell us." On the next deal that we land, I want them to have that opportunity to ask us about the deal, and the next deal and the deal after that—because there are going to be more deals.

I remember going to France early in 2019 and meeting with Sanofi—brand new in this role, meeting with them, talking about all of the good things about Ontario. A year or so later, we landed a billion and a half dollars. It was our first big deal that we did as the government. I want to go to committee and share that excitement. And they should be proud, too, that we, collectively, the people of Ontario, landed these remarkable companies like Sanofi—a billion and a half investment. It turned out to be \$3 billion in investment in the life sciences sector in three years; tens of billions in tech investments in the last three years; and, as I've said, \$28 billion in the auto sector alone in the last three years.

I can't wait for this year to unfold. We've already been to a few countries this year. We've already got some good deals packaged that we're hoping we'll be able to roll out. That's the kind of thing. I want to stand in front of any committee they want and be able to say, "Look at what we've done. Look at what we've been able to achieve by working together." That's the beauty of our system that we have.

I thank you for this opportunity to be able to share my thoughts for 20 minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm pleased to stand in this House and add what I hope are some thoughtful comments to this debate about the standing orders. For the folks playing along at home, the standing orders are the rules of this space and place. They're the rules of the game. As we heard the government House leader this morning talk about, the fact that they have been mostly unchanged for a very long time—that this government, this government

House leader made a lot of changes in a short period of time, as he put it, to modernize or whatnot, maybe to make it in the image of the government in this space; sometimes to frustrate the opposition.

1700

But here we stand with a series of changes. Some of them are kind of housekeeping and not super relevant, and others are more consequential. I would say that some of them are highly problematic, and others, I'm not exactly what they will mean for this place, but we'll talk a little bit about that.

The standing orders feel a little bit dry if people are tuning in to debate. It's not an issue like health care, it isn't something going on in our communities, but it is how we conduct ourselves in this room. It's the rules that we play by. How many minutes for this, or how we're allowed to table a bill, and all of that kind of stuff.

But it does still matter to the outside world in a few different aspects. One of them I'm going to talk about because this is in the sights of the government today. The government is making changes to petitions and how we're allowed to share petitions in this space. I fundamentally have a problem with this, and I'll tell you why.

There are only a handful of ways that the public can have their voice heard in this room—their actual voice. We represent their issues, we tell stories, and Lord knows I get lots of letters and I do well to share those letters in this space. But people come to committee and they present, and another way that they have their voices and their issues raised in this space is through petitions.

Petitions have a format. The government is taking away that we don't have to get them certified. Okay, fine, whatever, but we still want them to be in order in the House. And it is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario—not to the government, but to the whole Legislative Assembly of Ontario. That's how it starts. It is to all of us, because regardless of what colour tie you have or what your politics are, we're all represented to serve the members of our community.

In fact, when a member from your community comes to you and says, "I have a petition I want you to take to the Legislature," sometimes, individually, we don't love that petition. I'm sure the government members don't love a lot of them, because they can be quite critical, or they raise ideas for solutions that may or may not be what the government wants to do or is planning to do.

And sometimes, they come to me as an opposition member and maybe, ideologically, I don't love it, but we still are obligated and have the responsibility to bring them to this place and table it so that it gets before the government. Some of them, we do agree with as members, and we get up in this room and we read it into the Legislature.

And in that moment, the people who have written a petition in their words—"Whereas this is a problem," and "Whereas this is happening," and "Whereas this is a challenge that we're seeing in our agency, in our community, in our family," and "Whereas all these things are true, this is what we're asking for."

Speaker, to not be allowed to share the reasons for a petition, to not be allowed to share the "whereas-es," as

they're called, but the rationale for the ask in this room, on the record, is really problematic.

I will admit, I have sat here, and I've listened to petitions that I know make the government members squirm. I remember the minister—hold on. The minister that just spoke: the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, the member from Nipissing. I know that he was here as an opposition member for a while, and I'm willing to bet, if I checked Hansard, that there would be petitions that that member read petitioning the then government on specific issues.

It's interesting, because there are government members in here, and some of them were in this space, kind of standing in this area. I see another member in the underpress who probably remembers taking up space on this side. There are those who served in opposition and are now government and know darn well that those petitions can come from their communities and that they matter to individuals. Then there's a whole whack of shiny new government members who have never had the pleasure of serving in opposition—and I look forward for you to when you get to, by the way.

But I think, fundamentally, that saying we cannot share the voices of our communities is a problem. The member from Nickel Belt, who reads petitions all the time, collects them from her community, is amazing about that—even she was saying, "Fine, go ahead and shorten it, but don't make me have to change the words of real people."

Now, there's a member who has been here three days and reading a petition that looks like a Santa list. As he read it, he said, "I want to thank Sally in my office for the work on this." We're not supposed to have our staff or ourselves write those petitions. It happens that we help people, we guide them. We might offer thoughtful suggestions. Let's be real, there are issues that we all want to bring up in this House. But to take up that kind of time and block people from participating—if I'm only allowed to summarize petitions, then careful what you wish for, because I may get up and say, "Here's a petition brought forward by this group and it's called this," and my summary may be, "And they think that what you're doing is garbage and problematic and harmful." That may be what you get because it didn't explicitly say that I can't.

My point is that silencing people in the province of Ontario is wrong.

Interjection: It's kind of undemocratic.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It is kind of undemocratic. It is more than "kind of."

So I would say that we should retain the voices of Ontarians in this Legislature, no matter how uncomfortable it makes individual government members. When I get up and I read the 413 petition, I know you're mad at me and it gives you something to work with, but still, it has come to me as the critic for transportation from folks who have opinions. Why are they not allowed to share it?

If the government House leader and the government wants to modernize the petitions process—Ottawa. Some of them have heard of Ottawa. Some of them have been to Ottawa. Some of them think that they do things well there.

In Ottawa, they have an online petition submission route as well, and here, we don't. And I have no problem with having an in-paper, original-signature petition, but we're not modern, kids.

There are opportunities, and we can talk about that, but this one, it just seems kind of that autocratic "this is how it will be," and there's no discussion, which is a problem.

Speaker, I also want to take the opportunity and raise that in these standing order changes, there are a lot of changes being put before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. I have personal interest in that because I have the privilege of serving in that role as the committee Chair. And so I guess I have a lot of questions that—when this comes before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, all of those changes, I'm wondering, logistically, what that will mean in terms of workload, in terms of responsibility, in terms of process. Because now we've got things like deciding a fee structure for private bills, whether \$150, which I think it is currently, is too much, too little—I have no idea. I'm looking at this and I have no idea where this has come from. Has someone said it's too much money, too little money?

So I don't know where these changes are coming from, because certainly this is the first time I've seen it. The committee will have to figure out that sort of thing, and I would say that that's a little bit in the weeds. That's not necessarily a contentious thing; it's just new.

But the committee deciding the membership of other committees, with the exception of its own committee—I think it's interesting. The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane raised that it appears to move the responsibility for that to the committee. But, Speaker, as Chair—it's a weird thing. It's this non-partisan, kind of nebulous role that you're maybe a referee sometimes. You're not a member of the committee. You're counted as a member of the committee, though. If there are seven government members and two NDP members, and one of them is the committee Chair, like in public accounts, that member is not allowed to vote, that member is not allowed to have a dissenting opinion, but they count as a member. There's lots of stuff I'd like to talk about with committee structure, but I don't believe for a second that, in reality, our committee is going to necessarily be able to make those decisions.

So I'm interested in the process, to know how people can be assured that the committee is able to work separate and apart from the Premier's office. The PA to the Minister of Legislative Affairs sits on our committee. He's a nice guy, and everything's working well and we're all getting along, but personally—and since the government House leader pointed out that I am "fiercely independent"—my mother used to say that I was so fierce. I think she was mocking me. Then the government House leader calls me fiercely independent. I don't know if he's mocking me or it's just his assessment of me.

1710

But I'm not convinced that I'm fiercely independent as a committee Chair. I'm pretty sure that I serve at the

pleasure of the committee, and the committee serves at the pleasure of the government House leader, or the Premier or whoever else is making the decisions that get passed into any committee—not just this committee, all of them. The decisions that come in on a Post-it Note—all government members just nod and then vote that way, and turn back to their cellphones; that's what it looks like. Not so much in our committee, so I'm hopeful. I'm hopeful that maybe there will be a process that can better reflect the skills and expertise of folks in this room in terms of the committee makeup.

Speaker, I will leave it there. I think it will be some interesting work to talk about what else in this building might require improvement. But I don't think for a second that I actually get to be fiercely independent—though I'll try. I'll try.

With that, thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to say I'm pleased to rise today and speak to motion 24. I do have to say that this morning, when I first saw it, it got me quite exercised—and maybe I needed an exorcism. I'm not quite as exercised right now, but I'm still, I think, angry about it. But I'm going to get into that later, because I took a look at this, and I'm going to start with the stuff that I think is okay, because not everything can be all bad.

Ministerial statements: That change to eight minutes is reasonable. I think we can work with our colleagues, like we work with the independent colleagues here. That's a reasonable thing. That will avoid all those unanimous consents and the unfortunate misunderstandings that come from some unanimous consents. I think that one of those misunderstandings is what brought us here today—a misunderstanding over unanimous consent—so I think that's good.

I also want to say, Speaker, that I'll be sharing my time with the member from Kingston and the Islands.

Now, late shows: It's kind of meh. For late shows, anybody can answer a question. Well, the reality is that anybody can read the speech that they've been handed. To be fair, that's what happens right now. It's not a significant change. I'm not going to lose sleep over it.

I did have the pleasure of having the Attorney General here for a late show. I really do appreciate it when ministers show up, when they actually answer the question and we have a debate, but the reality is that the changes to late shows—it's meh. It's not going to make any difference. The reality is, they're reading a speech; maybe it came from their office or maybe it came from the minister's office. It probably came from the corner office, so what's the difference?

Now, petitions: Petitions are 15 minutes a day—15 minutes a day—that the people get to have their say. They petition us. It's their opportunity—15 minutes. There are challenges with petitions. I've seen some long petitions, and everybody is guilty of it. But there should be an opportunity for us to come together here and say, "Maybe

we can figure this out,” so no one is actually taking too much time and not giving other people time.

What has been happening here this week with petitions—I know they’re trying to make a point. It’s silly. Do it once. It’s silly to do it the rest of the time. It’s overkill. It had to be embarrassing for the member. I would not make a member of our caucus do that. Maybe other people think that’s okay. It’s actually not our time. It’s not our time, and maybe that’s a thing we have to underscore: It’s the people’s time—15 minutes. How come we can’t just find a way to agree on 15 minutes?

Now, the part that’s got me exorcised, the part that’s got me really angry—and there are a few people here who were here this morning and know how angry I was. They also know how hard it is to make me angry. I’ve calmed down, but I’m still angry. I’m just not as angry as I was this morning. Ask my office staff. In the 42nd Parliament, we found a way to work together. We had four questions over here. Do you know what? I think that would be a reasonable thing for us to get back to. There are 16 independents; there are almost as many as at the end of the last Legislature. And I’m sure the Premier is going to give us more members, because he’s pretty good at doing that on a regular basis. The simple right for us to be on committee is important; the ability for us to sub in is important. That’s where the business of government is. That’s where we try to make things better. And to take that away from us, to take that away from all the independents—the Greens, the Conservative independents and the independent independents—is wrong. It’s just simply wrong.

We’re all supposed to be excited because there’s a change, bringing it to the committee of the interior—the committee of the interior is going to decide. I know the Chair is not very happy about it.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Procedure and House affairs.

Mr. John Fraser: Procedure and House affairs. I’m sorry; I got it wrong.

The reality is—who controls the committee? It’s the government House leader and the corner office. Shocking.

I appreciate it. It’s like putting lipstick on a pig.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Am I the pig?

Mr. John Fraser: No. Nobody is here. But doing that is like putting lipstick on a pig. That’s what it is. We all know what it is. It’s a pig. It’s not the right thing to do.

At the end of the day, is it going to make a big difference? No, because the government House leader already controls that. He might argue that he’s planning for a minority government, and if that was the case—that he was thinking about a minority government and making sure that it would work in a minority government—then that would be a good thing. But as far as when there’s a majority government, it’s just the same stuff again, more of the same.

I’d like to put forward an amendment. Speaker, I move that the motion be amended as follows:

By deleting everything from “Standing order 115(b)” to “Standing order 115(f) is deleted” inclusive; and

By inserting the following: “Standing order 35(g) is amended by adding, ‘In addition to the Speaker’s allotment of questions to independent members under this standing order, the Speaker may also allot to independent members the slots that would otherwise be the third and fifth questions allotted to government members.’”

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Mr. Fraser has moved the amendment as follows:

By deleting everything from “Standing order 115(b)” to “Standing order 115(f) is deleted” inclusive; and

By inserting the following: “Standing order 35(g) is amended by adding, ‘In addition to the Speaker’s allotment of questions to independent members under this standing order, the Speaker may also allot to independent members the slots that would otherwise be the third and fifth questions allotted to government members.’”

I recognize the member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: What this amendment does is actually return us back to where we were in the 42nd Parliament, and I think that would make question period much better. It would relieve the burden on government members to ask another carbon tax question.

Mr. Will Bouma: What?

Mr. John Fraser: Yes. Go back and count ’em, folks. You don’t want to count ’em. You don’t want to count ’em. If you count ’em, you’ll be embarrassed. It’s embarrassing, folks. Counting them will be embarrassing and I’ll give you a count later today, but I think it would be a good idea to do that.

I know I’m sharing my time with the member for Kingston and the Islands, but, Speaker, I would just like to move adjournment of debate.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Mr. Fraser has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

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

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This is a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1721 to 1751.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): All members take their seats. Thank you.

Mr. Vanthof has moved adjournment of—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): You spoke so eloquently, John. I’m so sorry.

Mr. Fraser has moved adjournment of the debate.

All those in favour of the motion please rise and remain standing to be counted by the Clerk.

All those opposed to the motion please rise and remain standing to be counted by the Clerk.

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Valerie Quioc Lim): The ayes are 4; the nays are 58.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I declare the motion lost.

I recognize the member from Ottawa South to continue the debate on the amendment.

Mr. John Fraser: Well if I knew this is what I had to do to get a bigger audience, I would have done it earlier.

Anyway, I'm going to cede the floor to my colleague—yes, you can all leave. That was the signal, folks. Do you want to go? Go. I'm not that exciting—

Interjection: Down goes Fraser.

Mr. John Fraser: Down goes Fraser.

Okay, come on. Keep it going.

So I think I've said enough about what's good and really not so good about these changes. I'd like to give some time to my colleague from Kingston and the Islands to say a few words. You all have a good night.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the member from Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Ted Hsu: It's a pleasure to speak today, and in particular to speak opposite to and debate my former colleague in the House of Commons, who is currently the government House leader.

One funny thing about this morning is was he was making a big deal about how the voters spoke and knocked the Liberals into the third party here in the Legislature. He is conveniently forgetting that the only reason why he's here in the provincial Legislature is that his party got the boot in 2015.

The government House leader also spoke about needing to have more debate and having that back-and-forth. It's a good way of keeping the government to account. And I challenge the government House leader to amend the standing orders of this House to have more questions and answers. Actually, we don't even have questions and answers in this debate. But why not have questions with supplementals when we debate bills? Why not disallow reading speeches so that we really have to internalize what we want to say and respond to each other with the knowledge that we have about the bill and about what we really believe rather than what some staffer in the minister's office has told us to say? That's my challenge to the government House leader.

There are many ways that we could improve the function of this Legislature, which is to hold the government of the day to account. Another thing that's been suggested by scholars is to remove the speaking lists that

the Speaker uses to decide who gets recognized in the House.

Finally, the government House leader will remember that, in the federal House of Commons, there are actually very, very few slots—only two slots for the government side to have softball questions which don't actually hold the government to account but simply give the government a way to get its message across in the chamber.

I think that the amendment we're talking about right now is very important. I'd like to do something a little bit extra. I would like to move that that amendment be amended as follows:

By deleting everything after the word “following” and inserting: “In exercising his discretion under standing order 35(g), the Speaker shall recognize independent members for four questions per day, each followed by one supplementary.”

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Mr. Hsu has moved a subamendment, and the amendment is as follows:

By deleting everything after the word “following” and inserting: “In exercising his discretion under standing order 35(g), the Speaker shall recognize independent members for four questions per day, each followed by one supplementary.”

I recognize the member from Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Ted Hsu: In the few seconds that I have left, I will say that, being somebody who filled in the big shoes of a Speaker, the longest-serving Speaker of the House of Commons, Peter Milliken, and being a friend of Ned Franks, the scholar of Parliament, I would be willing to debate the government House leader any time about how the rules of this House can be set to improve its function. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you to the member.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): We'll move on to private members' public business.

Report continues in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Edith Dumont, OOnt
Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative: Hon. / L'hon. Ted Arnott
Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day
Deputy Clerk / Sous-Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Julia Douglas, Meghan Stenson,
Christopher Tyrell, Wai Lam (William) Wong
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Tim McGough

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Anand, Deepak (PC)	Mississauga—Malton	
Andrew, Jill (NDP)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London—Fanshawe	
Arnott, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Babikian, Aris (PC)	Scarborough—Agincourt	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia—Lambton	
Barnes, Patrice (PC)	Ajax	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Begum, Doly (NDP)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Bell, Jessica (NDP)	University—Rosedale	
Bethlenfalvy, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (PC)	Pickering—Uxbridge	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Bowman, Stephanie (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Brady, Bobbi Ann (IND)	Haldimand—Norfolk	
Bresee, Ric (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
Byers, Rick (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	
Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)	Markham—Stouffville	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement Minister of Legislative Affairs / Ministre des Affaires législatives
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough North / Scarborough- Nord	Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)	Willowdale	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Clancy, Aislinn (GRN)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds— Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby	
Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Crawford, Stephen (PC)	Oakville	
Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC)	Mississauga—Lakeshore	
Dixon, Jess (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Dowie, Andrew (PC)	Windsor—Tecumseh	
Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flack, Hon. / L'hon. Rob (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Associate Minister of Housing / Ministre associé du Logement
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
		Premier / Premier ministre
		Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Michael D. (PC)	York South—Weston / York-Sud—Weston	Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiques et du Multiculturalisme
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hazell, Andrea (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Holland, Kevin (PC)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Hsu, Ted (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Jama, Sarah (IND)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
		Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre
Jones, Trevor (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Jordan, John (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Ke, Vincent (IND)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC)	York Centre / York-Centre	Solicitor General / Solliciteur général
Khanjin, Hon. / L'hon. Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	
Leardi, Anthony (PC)	Essex	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean	
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Mantha, Michael (IND)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
McCarthy, Hon. / L'hon. Todd J. (PC)	Durham	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises
McCrimmon, Karen (LIB)	Kanata—Carleton	
McGregor, Graham (PC)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York	
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
		Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Mines / Ministre des Mines
Quinn, Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Kaleed (IND)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Northern Development / Ministre du Développement du Nord Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Deputy Speaker / Vice-Présidente Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
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	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario
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 / Ministre associée déléguée aux Petites Entreprises
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	Associate Minister of Transportation / Ministre associé des Transports
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	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Vaugois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Vacant	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
Vacant	Milton	