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Jeudi
18 avril 2024

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 18 April 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 18 avril 2024

The House met at 0900.

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

Prières / Prayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Orders of the day? I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you, Speaker. No business.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): With no business at this time, this House stands in recess until 10:15.

The House recessed from 0901 to 1015.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

FILM AND TELEVISION INDUSTRY

Mr. Deepak Anand: Film, television and digital media are powerful tools for entertainment, education and reflection. Ontario's film and TV industry provide opportunities for artists to showcase their talent by fostering creativity, providing economic benefits for residents through job creation and encouraging community engagement. Through storytelling, we can capture diverse perspectives, provoke thought, spark dialogue and reflect on the human experience.

Right here in Ontario, the film and television industry contributes to over \$3 billion in production. Our enticing tax incentives are attracting filmmakers around the world, while its vibrant pool of talent lures development houses.

Mississauga takes pride in its significant year-round filming activity, with more than 314,000 square feet of studio space across 12 sound stages.

Our government is helping to make sure the industry thrives. That's why we are investing more than \$900 million to support Ontario's cultural media tax credits.

To filmmakers and production houses alike, Ontario extends a warm invitation to continue crafting content for a global audience.

To all my fellow MPPs, I urge you to advocate for the growth of the film and TV industry in your community so we can continue empowering artists and supporting our growing economy. Let's increase the revenue for Ontario and Ontarians. Let's continue to build a prosperous Ontario.

PASSOVER

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I rise today to extend my warmest wishes to the Jewish community in Toronto Centre and across Ontario as they prepare for Passover.

Passover commemorates the liberation of the ancient Hebrews from slavery in Egypt and their journey to freedom. The story of Passover reminds us all of the importance of standing up against oppression and the power of hope in the face of adversity.

Across Toronto, the Jewish community has made invaluable contributions to our rich, vibrant cultural tapestry. From the bustling streets of Kensington Market to the historic synagogues dotting neighbourhoods, Jewish heritage is woven into the very fabric of our province.

Over the years, I have attended many Passover celebrations where families and friends gather around the Seder plate and table to retell the story of the Exodus, enjoy traditional meals, and strengthen the bonds of love and kinship.

This year is special, as we will be hosting a Seder at our home for our friends and chosen family. We've taken the time to appreciate the blessings, where we will reflect upon freedom and reaffirm our commitment to building a world rooted in compassion, justice, equality and peace for all, including Israel and Palestine.

May the message of Passover inspire all of us to work toward a future where every single person can live safely in dignity, peace and freedom.

To the Jewish community in Toronto Centre and beyond, I wish you a happy and meaningful Passover. Chag Pesach Sameach.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Aris Babikian: I was delighted to visit the Tendercare Living long-term-care home in my riding to inform them of the historic investments our government is making into long-term care and what this funding means for the residents of the home. These investments into care will ensure that residents can connect to the right care immediately, instead of having to go to hospitals or outside health care providers. This funding will also help reduce and avoid unnecessary emergency department visits and hospital stays.

This is part of a broader investment, including a new \$46 million in budget 2024 in the long-term-care sector to help seniors with complex needs like dementia and bariatric care to get the care they need at their convenience, quickly and close to home.

Our government is keeping its promise to our seniors and families to fix the long-term-care sector, which was ignored and neglected by the previous Liberal government.

In addition, our government invested \$4.9 billion over four years to hire and retain 27,000 long-term-care staff to provide the care residents need.

1020

Furthermore, we are investing a historic \$6.4 billion to build 58,000 new and upgraded beds.

Our government also hired 193 new long-term-care inspection staff, including 156 new inspectors.

We owe it to our seniors to provide them a dignified, healthy and active life during their retirement days.

EDUCATION FUNDING

MPP Jill Andrew: The Toronto District School Board is calling for a new provincial funding structure to help address their near \$27-million deficit, and I'm calling on this Conservative government to support their demands, for the sake of our children, youth, families and the caring adults who teach and support them. Our schools are at the heart of our community, and we need them properly funded in order for them to function.

The Minister of Education says he expects school boards to put student achievement first. Well, guess what? In order to do that, we need funding that keeps up with inflation, instead of the chronic cuts we've seen throughout this government's tenure. We need this government to fix our schools, not tinker with them. Fixing our schools requires billions of dollars, which this government has and can invest in education.

Schools are losing invaluable staff because they can't keep up with salaries and benefits. TDSB programs supporting the most vulnerable are being cut. We only need to look at special education to see where your government's cuts are impacting the most vulnerable students.

This government continues to toss money at the rich while having austerity measures for those who need the most help.

Stop blaming and shaming our TDSB and other school boards across Ontario and start helping them put student achievement first.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I recently joined my colleagues for a groundbreaking at the site of the soon-to-be patient care tower for the Queensway Health Centre. Once completed, this \$1.3-billion centre, operated by Trillium Health Partners, will serve the growing needs of families in Etobicoke and Mississauga. This is exciting news. Because of investments like this, our government is improving health care services in Mississauga and meeting the needs of future growth. This is part of our goal to ensure every Ontarian has access to convenient and connected care when they need it.

Right now, our province is expanding all six medical schools and supporting new medical schools at York University and TMU.

Over the next three years, the government is spending an additional \$546 million to connect approximately 600,000 people to team-based primary care.

And I was happy to see that our investments to support nursing are being sustained, allowing 2,000 more registered nurse spaces at colleges and universities, and 1,000 more registered practical nurse seats.

Speaker, as our city continues to grow and the population continues to age, we will need these health services more than ever. I am excited to see those investments pay off, bringing convenient and connected care to everyone.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I hear from families regularly that the Ontario Autism Program is not working. Despite recent funding announcements, families are still calling, begging for help for their children.

Jessica reached out to my office for support for her beautiful daughter. Jessica wants to share this message with the government:

"The OAP program has failed many families who are now without essential services and supports during their most vulnerable moments.

"I know my daughter is capable of accomplishing a lot in her life, but we need help to get her there.

"And there are so many other families who are in the same boat, and so many other families who are at their breaking point because they have nowhere to turn.

"True success should be defined as celebrating differences and fostering an environment where everyone belongs, regardless of their abilities.

"Let's work together to build a society that values inclusion and empowers individuals with diverse talents to flourish.

"Let's also build systems that support those who need help; and provide a way for that to happen before it's too late."

Families like Jessica's are making sacrifices every day to provide the best care that they can for their children. Our government needs to match their efforts. Receiving consistent, robust core services is essential for autistic children to thrive.

We need a concrete plan attached to the funding announcements to make sure this money helps the kids it's intended to so every child in Ontario receives the supports that they need. Jessica's family and her daughter deserve that.

JOHN LYONS

Mr. Dave Smith: Today, I'd like to celebrate the 38-year career of Inspector John Lyons, because last Friday, John retired. He started his career way back in 1986, before I even had my driver's licence. Back then, as part of his contract with the Peterborough police, he had to agree to live in the city limits in order to be a police officer.

He started with Peterborough police. There was a merger with Lakefield, and the service became the Peterborough Lakefield police. And then, eventually, it became the Peterborough Police Service again.

He joined the force after moving from Gananoque to attend Sir Sandford Fleming College in their security and administration program. He moved up through the ranks throughout his career and ended his career as an inspector.

When I was first elected, John was the officer who took me along for my very first ride-along. It was an interesting day, to say the least. Those who know John know he has a lot of stories to tell. I think I heard almost all of those stories that day in the cruiser.

John epitomizes what a community police officer should be. He loves his community. He loved his job. And everyone around him loved to be with him.

John, we'll miss you on the beat, but I know that this really just frees up your time to give back to your community. Congratulations on your retirement.

LANDLORD AND TENANT BOARD

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Tenants and landlords in my riding of Don Valley West are concerned about the unreasonable delays at the Landlord and Tenant Board caused by this government's bad decision to fire qualified, experienced adjudicators and appoint their friends. Just like with the \$8.3-billion greenbelt giveaway and the gravy train in the Premier's office, this government takes care of their friends at the expense of Ontarians. According to Tribunal Watch Ontario, the backlog of cases is over 53,000—almost four times worse than when they took office. The average wait for a landlord needing an arrears eviction hearing has risen to 342 days—10 times worse.

Speaker, the delay for tenants is even worse. Their average wait is 427 days, versus 70 days in 2018. Tenants are waiting over a year for their day in court about a problematic above-guideline rent increase or unlawful eviction—just one more way that life is worse for tenants under this Conservative government.

Today, my colleague from Kingston and the Islands will be debating his Bill 179, the Fewer Backlogs and Less Partisan Tribunals Act. The government has a chance to fix the LTB mess of their own making by voting for this bill. Voting against it is one more sign that this Premier is happy to be the conductor of his very own gravy train.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Last week in my riding of Mississauga–Lakeshore, I attended a public meeting on safety and security issues hosted by my friends at the Lorne Park Watercolours Residents' Association. Over 250 residents joined us at St. Luke Catholic Elementary School to share their concerns about auto theft in Peel. We have an average of 20 cars stolen every single day—the most per capita in Ontario.

I'd like to thank the Peel police for joining us and listening to the concerns of our community. Particularly, I'd like to thank Deputy Chief Nick Milinovich, who spoke about Project Vector, in which almost 600 vehicles were recovered from shipping containers at the port of Montreal. Superintendent Joshua Colley spoke about

crime in Mississauga–Lakeshore, and Detective Gregory O'Connor gave us some tips on how to protect ourselves.

I was proud to speak about the great work our Solicitor General is doing on this issue—\$49 million over three years to give our police services the tools they need to fight back against auto theft, and \$46 million over three years to purchase four new police helicopters, to help improve response times to major incidents and serious crimes in Mississauga and across the GTA.

1030

Again, I'd like to thank the Peel police as well as our first responders for all the work that they do to keep our communities safe all across Mississauga and the province of Ontario.

VOLUNTEERS

Mr. Lorne Coe: Recently, the Ontario government honoured 14 exceptional individuals and two volunteer organizations with the June Callwood Outstanding Achievement Award for Voluntarism.

Grace Shaw from Whitby was one of those recipients. Grace has volunteered at the VON Durham hospice service centre for over 10 years, providing care and empathetic support to individuals dealing with grief after the death of a loved one.

Named in memory of the late author and journalist June Callwood, the award recognizes the leadership, innovation and contributions of individual volunteers, volunteer administrators and volunteer organizations who have stepped up to help others, support communities, and build a stronger Ontario.

Speaker, I am grateful for the tireless work of remarkable volunteers like Grace who continue to give back and drive change in the town of Whitby. May their kindness, dedication and selflessness serve as an inspiration for others to learn from.

Congratulations, Grace.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It gives me great pleasure to recognize today's page captain Nate Rochweg. Nate is from Hamilton. Joining him today are members of his family. We have his parents, Bram and Rachel Rochweg; we have his grandparents, Ken and Shelley Rochweg and Bonnie and Dave Loewith; and Nate's three younger brothers, Leo, Henry and Jake, who I am sure, after today's experience, will want to be page captains when they grow up as well.

Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Jess Dixon: It is my pleasure to introduce to the House the Albanian community association from Waterloo region.

Lejdi Ago, Vlorat Vitia, Drita Berisha, Ariana Elezi, Halime Tropusha, Gjylzade Kelmendi, Bujar Kelmendi, Arber Morina, Shkelzen Islami, Sefedin Gashi, Muje Gashi, Adem Sulemani, Fitim Muharremi, Arben Sadiku, Ekrem Sadiku, Driton Qirici, Orges Zejna, Kevin Tervoli,

Admir Sadiki, Dajtina Aliu, Antony Lena and Arben Faikovski, welcome to your House. Thank you so much for coming.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'd like everyone to join me in wishing my executive assistant, Ben Donato-Woodger, a very happy birthday.

Mr. Ted Hsu: I'd like to welcome members of my youth council in Kingston and the Islands. I'm not sure if the bus has arrived or not, but they will be here for question period.

Hon. Graydon Smith: I just want to introduce my talented, lovely and beautiful wife and the love of my life, Melissa, who is in the Speaker's gallery here today.

Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I'm delighted to introduce Zihan Erwin Wang, a bright and enthusiastic student from Silver Stream Public School in my Richmond Hill riding, who serves as our page. Observing while the House is in action promises to be a remarkable experience and a significant highlight of his educational journey.

Mr. Speaker, it is also my pleasure to extend a warm welcome to Xiaoping Yuan, who is here with us today as the proud mother of page Erwin Wang.

Welcome to your House.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'm pleased to welcome climate action advocates Sharon Sommerville, Franca DeAngelis and LeeAnn McKenna to Queen's Park today. Welcome to your House.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I would like to welcome to the chamber today three special guests from the beautiful riding of the government House leader and MPP for Markham—Stouffville: Mr. and Mrs. Yogarajah—Sundareswary Yogarajah is celebrating her 75th birthday; she is also president of Box Grove Seniors' Community Wellness Club and a well-known volunteer across Markham—and their granddaughter Suwetha Sivanewaran. Welcome to the House.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It gives me great pleasure to welcome the family of today's page captain Jerome Bow Pearce: Jerome's mother, Jennifer Bow; brothers Vincent Bow Pearce and Dominic Bow Pearce; as well as family friend Jennifer DeSilva. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Rick Byers: It's my pleasure to welcome long-time friend Chris Breen to the House, from Walker Aggregates, and no doubt others.

Colleagues, welcome to your House. It's great to see you, as always.

WEARING OF KAFFIYEHS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I wish to take a moment to address the House on a matter of some importance.

On April 12, I received a letter from the leader of His Majesty's loyal opposition. Since her letter to me has apparently been released to the media, I will not read it now, but I will instead summarize the request that she made of me. She asked that I permit the wearing of the kaffiyeh in the assembly.

I replied in writing to the Leader of the Opposition on April 16, and I hope she has seen my reply, but I have placed a copy on her desk in the event that she has not.

I will take a moment now to reiterate one of the points in my letter.

As always, any member may seek the unanimous consent of the House to wear clothing, buttons, ribbons etc. which may fall outside the established rules or customs of the House. If a member sought unanimous consent to wear a kaffiyeh, and if the House were to grant such consent, I would obviously accept the decision of the House.

Since I sent that reply, the leader of the Green Party has made a similar request to me in writing—that I permit the wearing of the kaffiyeh in the assembly. And last night, the Premier and the leader of the Liberal Party both made the same public request via social media, addressed to me.

As Speaker, I am the servant of this House. While I made my decision in this regard after considerable research and reflection, if the House believes that the wearing of the kaffiyeh in this House at the present time is not a political statement, I would certainly and unequivocally accept the express will of the House, with no ifs, ands or buts. Again, I would be willing to entertain such a point of order at any time and put the question to the House forthwith.

The Leader of the Opposition on a point of order.

Ms. Marit Stiles: With that, I seek unanimous consent that this House acknowledge that the kaffiyeh is a culturally significant clothing item to many in Ontario's Palestinian, Muslim and Arab communities, and should neither be considered an expression of a political message nor an accessory likely to cause disorder and should therefore be permitted to be worn in the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Stiles is seeking the unanimous consent of the House that the House acknowledge that the kaffiyeh is a culturally significant clothing item to many in Ontario's Palestinian, Muslim and Arab communities, and should neither be considered an expression of a political message nor an accessory likely to cause disorder and should therefore be permitted to be worn in the House. Agreed? I heard some noes.

QUESTION PERIOD

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Premier.

In December, the Ontario Energy Board ruled that consumers should no longer have to subsidize Enbridge's gas expansion. But instead of listening to the experts, the government decided to keep forcing consumers to pay the subsidy.

Yesterday, the Narwhal revealed that the Premier's top officials weren't just communicating with Enbridge on this; they were actively coordinating their response together.

Again, this is to the Premier. Did the government give preferential treatment to Enbridge when it intervened preemptively to undermine the regulator and drive up costs for consumers?

1040

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

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the member opposite for the question this morning.

Since day one, on receiving the OEB ruling that they would be—which, I should point out, by the way, was a split decision, which is rare at the Ontario Energy Board—that this decision was going to make the price of home ownership soar, we have been ready and ensuring that we were going to protect future homeowners so that they could afford to buy homes in our province.

The other thing that we're very focused on here since I've become the Minister of Energy, and prior to that—basically, since we became the government in 2018—was ensuring that we kept the price of energy low in our province, and as a result, we have seen the results. We have seen massive investment in our province. We are building over a million homes in our province.

What we're doing on the energy file is working, ensuring that our growing province is going to have the electricity and the energy that it needs, that we will have a reliable, affordable and safe electricity system. That's what we've been focused on at the Ministry of Energy since day one, and the proof is there: billions of dollars of investment in our province.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Maybe the minister doesn't really understand what's going on here. This is passing on an additional cost to consumers in this province, on their gas bills.

On the morning of the OEB ruling, the chief of staff to the Minister of Energy reached out to the Premier's staff and called an urgent meeting to prepare a response in case the OEB ruled against Enbridge in favour of consumers. It just happens that the minister's chief of staff is—guess what?—a former lobbyist for Enbridge.

So my question to the Premier again is, was this chief of staff in a conflict of interest when he decided to put the interests of his former employer ahead of the interests of Ontario gas consumers?

Hon. Todd Smith: Once again, the NDP have their facts wrong.

I can assure the NDP that our government and the Ministry of Energy are focused on ensuring that we have the energy we need for our growing province, and that includes natural gas, something that the members of the NDP are opposed to. They say that natural gas is not healthy. They say that nuclear isn't healthy. They would get rid of nuclear energy. They would get rid of gas, which is the insurance policy that keeps our lights on and keeps over 70% of our homes heated during the winter months.

We're ensuring that we have a reliable, affordable energy sector in Ontario that is going to support our

growing economy, support our growing population in this province.

The last time the Liberals and the NDP were in charge of our energy sector, we saw electricity bills triple. We won't stand for that.

We're going to make sure that home ownership is also affordable for new home buyers. That's why we stepped in.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I think Ontarians are wondering right now who this government is working for. Is it Enbridge or is it Ontarians?

Government lawyers warned the Premier's staff and the former Enbridge lobbyist, who now, I will remind everybody, is working as the minister's chief of staff, that intervening in the OEB decision carried legal risks. They did it anyway. They announced a plan to overrule the OEB only 15 hours after the decision was published. I have never seen a government so determined to overrule an independent regulator and drive up gas bills for Ontarians.

Why is the government risking legal action in order to give preferential treatment to this gas monopoly over the interests of hard-working Ontarians?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Energy.

Hon. Todd Smith: I'll try to explain this to the member opposite.

First of all, it's unbelievable for the people of Ontario to think that the NDP are for lower gas bills. The NDP are for a carbon tax. The NDP have members in their caucus who were calling for the highest carbon tax not just in North America, but in the world. The Liberals are fully on board with that as well.

There's one party in this Legislature that actually gives a darn about the affordability for people in this province, and that is Premier Ford and our team here on the PC side. We have been fighting since day one for more affordable electricity bills, not the tripling of electricity bills that we saw under the Liberal-NDP coalition or what we're currently seeing with the Liberal-NDP coalition up on Parliament Hill that has us driving to the pumps today, where it's a buck eighty a litre—that's because of the punitive carbon tax that the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, Jagmeet and Justin have slapped onto the people of Ontario.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I feel like we're on track for another flip-flop on this one, Speaker.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Marit Stiles: This next question is for the Premier again.

As millions of Ontarians struggle to find a family doctor, private companies are seeing an opportunity to make a profit.

Instead of making sure everyone has access to primary care, the government is letting so-called executive health

clinics continue to charge patients thousands and thousands of dollars to see a doctor.

Does the Premier believe people who can afford it should be able to use their credit card to skip to the front of the line?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: We will not tolerate clinics taking advantage of a loophole created by federal legislation, as we've stated in this House many times. That is why Minister Jones wrote to our federal counterparts to ensure that they prevent non-physicians from charging for publicly funded health services.

While Ontario leads the country, with close to 90% of people connected to a regular health care provider, we know there's more to do.

As announced in the budget, our primary health expansion has expanded a total investment of \$546 million over three years to connect 600,000 people to primary care.

Our government is taking bold action through our Your Health plan. We are taking innovative steps to grow our workforce to better serve the people of Ontario now and for years to come.

Speaker, we will continue to work with our health partners across Ontario to ensure that Ontario has the best publicly funded health care when and where they need it.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: A letter? That's bold action?

I want to make sure that the government truly understands this. These concierge clinics are promising patients 24/7 care and access to a dedicated team, but there's just one catch: Patients are expected to pay a whopping \$12,000 a year. In the middle of a severe primary care shortage across this entire province, this is clearly creating a two-tiered health care system where those who can afford it are going to move to the front of the line at the expense of everybody else.

So my question, again, to the Premier of this province: Why is this government allowing for-profit clinics to compromise the integrity of the public health care system?

Interjections.

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

The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: No matter where you get your OHIP-covered service, you do not get charged—at no nurse practitioner-led clinic.

We started the year with a record investment of \$110 million to create 78 new and expanded interprofessional primary care teams and add over 400 new primary care providers to help close the gap in accessing primary care. In this budget, we went even further. Our primary care expansion has expanded to a total investment of \$546 million over three years to connect 600,000 Ontarians to primary care.

While Ontario leads the country, with almost 90% of people connecting to a regular health care provider, we know that more can be done. As I mentioned, we will

continue working with our health care partners across the province to ensure that we have the best publicly funded health care system when and where the people of Ontario need it.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, I think the member didn't get the question, or the notes weren't really anticipating what I actually asked. I'm talking about these concierge clinics that are charging people \$12,000 a year to bump to the head of the line. It's outrageous. Applications, meanwhile, for integrated primary health care teams are collecting dust somewhere; they're being totally ignored. Community health centres, Indigenous primary care organizations, nurse practitioner-led clinics—since he mentioned them—have been underfunded for over a decade. And right now, 2.4 million people in this province do not have a family doctor. People are very vulnerable to this.

Public health care providers out there are calling this government's strategy for funding primary care the "Wild West." The government isn't just allowing these companies to take advantage of patients; they are, in fact, encouraging it.

I want to ask the Premier, why are you allowing these for-profit clinics to get away with this while ignoring the model that we know works here in the province of Ontario?

1050

Interjections.

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

The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Our government is currently investing \$85 billion into our publicly funded health care system, which is a 30% increase since 2018, when we took government.

While the Liberals, propped up by the NDP, cut the residency school spots and limited the number of physicians practising in interdisciplinary teams, our government has added 12,500 new physicians since 2018, 10% of those being family physicians.

We have a plan to rebuild the health care in Ontario, and we will not stop until everyone gets more convenient access to care when and where they need it. Our government is taking bold action through our Your Health plan. And we are taking innovative steps to grow our workforce to better serve the people of Ontario for years to come.

HIGHWAY TOLLS

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the Premier.

The government's only plan to alleviate traffic will take at least a decade. Meanwhile, it refuses to look at the 407. The NDP has put forward a cost-effective, smart solution to make better use of the 407. It is simple: Take the tolls off for trucks; get things moving. It's good for business and gives commuters room to breathe.

So my question is, will this government recognize a good idea and remove 407 tolls for truckers?

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

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Our government is investing over \$28 billion in the next 10 years to build highways.

We know what the NDP is trying to do with this. They don't want the 413 to be built.

We know that our highways are going to be at capacity in the next five to 10 years.

For 15 years, the Liberals did absolutely nothing to build infrastructure in this province.

It's under this government, this Premier and this Minister of Infrastructure that we've launched over \$190-billion worth of—whether it's hospitals, schools, roads, highways, we're going to get that built, because this government is about building.

We know that people are stuck in gridlock. Over 30 minutes will be saved each way when we build Highway 413. We will continue to move forward with this plan because that is what the people of this province elected to us do.

I urge those members to go to communities like Brampton—in fact, they actually lost all three members of their team because of their position on Highway 413.

I urge the Leader of the Opposition to please go to Brampton, Mississauga, Milton and communities across—

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: A 10-year plan doesn't help us today.

Any Ontarian can tell you that Highway 407 is terribly underused. If the government would get out of the Queen's Park bubble, they'd find the 407 sitting half empty while the 401 stays bumper to bumper. It makes no sense.

We have infrastructure we aren't being smart about. We need to better use existing highways.

This government needs to do something about the 407. Specifically, will this government recognize a smart idea and remove 407 tolls for trucks?

Interjections.

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

The Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Mr. Speaker, this government believes in building highways like the 413, the Bradford Bypass, Highways 11, 17, 69, Highway 3. We're building all across this province, because we want to improve the way our goods are moved and how people are moving.

In fact, the members opposite are so out of touch. Just look back at June 2, 2022. What happened? Where are those three members who were a part of that team before that? They're not here anymore—because the members from Brampton North, Brampton East and Brampton Centre supported the building of the 413.

Let's look at their record when it comes to drivers. They voted against removing tolls off the 412, the 418; they voted against those two measures that we took for drivers.

They voted against removing \$120 off your licence plate sticker for trucks or cars. Every step of the way, whether it's removing 10 cents off a litre for gasoline—they voted against that as well.

We asked them to join this government in our fight to scrap the carbon tax. What do they do? Absolutely nothing.

This government will put drivers first, people first, and will do whatever we can—

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

TAXATION

Mr. Matthew Rae: My question is to the Minister of Energy.

People in my riding of Perth–Wellington tell me they want an end to the Liberal carbon tax. Ontarians are not fooled by the Liberals' renaming tactics. A tax is a tax is a tax, plain and simple. They feel the impact of this disastrous tax every time they are at the pumps, at the grocery store and paying their heating bills. They have had enough.

Our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, has spoken out against this tax since day one, because we know that a carbon tax makes life more difficult. That's why we fought this carbon tax all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada, and we won't give up until this tax is abolished.

Can the minister explain how the carbon tax unfairly impacts the people of Ontario?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the great member from Perth–Wellington, who no doubt feels the pinch as he drives in to Queen's Park every day. People across the province are feeling it as they take their kids to hockey playoff games and—of course, soccer and baseball games are getting started. Construction workers are making their way in to work on our brand new subway systems we're building here in Toronto—and the refurbishments that we're doing at our nuclear facilities at Bruce Power.

It's costing a lot of money, is the bottom line, and it's having an impact on people as they plan for their summer getaways. Maybe they're planning on taking a tour across Ontario and visiting one of the most beautiful provinces in the entire country and some of the great places that we have, like Prince Edward county, Tobermory and all those great tourist attractions.

I was down in Niagara Falls; you might have heard of it. It's a pretty significant tourist attraction in our province and in the world.

The bottom line is, Bonnie Crombie, the queen of the carbon tax, the Liberal leader, is supportive of federal Liberal leader Justin Trudeau's carbon tax, which went up a whopping 23% a week ago—it's resulting in \$1.80 at the pumps today. It's completely unacceptable.

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to the minister for that response.

The carbon tax does nothing—I say again, nothing—to reduce emissions. It only punishes the hard-working people of this province. But shockingly, at a time when families are struggling to put food on the table, the Liberals decided to hike the carbon tax even further. They want to increase this carbon tax until it reaches \$170 per tonne. That is unacceptable.

Speaker, during these challenging times, all governments should be working together to make life more affordable for everyone.

While the provincial Liberals support their federal counterparts, our government will continue to have Ontario's back and end this punitive tax.

Can the minister please explain how the provincial Liberal carbon tax is creating financial hardship for everyone?

Hon. Todd Smith: The queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, the Liberal leader, is in full support.

As a matter of fact, the federal environment minister says she's happy to have the federal carbon tax in place.

We are opposed to that. We believe there should not be a carbon tax in the province.

The member, in his question, said it's not having an impact; it's not driving down emissions in our province.

The federal environment commissioner said the federal government is missing out on all of its climate goals. So all they're doing is punishing people across our province and across our country.

We're seeing the results at the grocery store. We're seeing the results on our natural gas bills—massive increases to our natural gas bills. And we're certainly seeing it at the gasoline pumps—\$1.80 a litre today in parts of Ontario.

Prime Minister Trudeau and the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, need to do a 180 and do away with the federal carbon tax now.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Sandy Shaw: In the middle of our housing crisis, rents continue to climb at alarming rates. In Hamilton, rents increased by 20% in just the last year.

Data from Ontario's rental housing tribunal shows that corporate landlords are abusing the above-guideline-increase process to raise high rental rates even higher than provincial guidelines.

So my question is very simple: What is this government doing to protect tenants from the unfair rent increases, and what are you doing to make sure tenants stay housed?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: I thank the member for the question.

The cost of everything is a concern for this government. You've heard the Minister of Energy address some of those issues.

Mr. Speaker, what we're doing is making sure we have an independent tribunal with a fair and independent process to look at those requests to raise above guidelines. That's how the system is built, so that it's not a political

decision, so that we have professionals making independent decisions. That is what we're doing in terms of letting those people have their say.

I'll say more in the supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

1100

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question. The member for University–Rosedale.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Back to the Attorney General: At 1440 Lawrence Avenue West and 1442 Lawrence Avenue West, owned by Barney River apartments, tenants have received three above-guideline rent increases in the last seven years, despite the buildings being in such horrible condition that Canada Post deemed them unsafe to deliver mail to.

At 33 King, owned by Dream Unlimited, tenants have received the highest number of AGIs in the whole city, making their rents go up three times higher than rent control.

These are some of the most profitable landlords in the country. They can afford to maintain their buildings with the rent they collect without resorting to AGIs.

This government needs to clamp down on AGI abuse. Can you do that? Yes or no?

Hon. Doug Downey: Coming to question period, sometimes, is just like reading the Toronto Star—because I read that story this morning.

The NDP want us to interfere in the independent tribunal when it suits their purpose. They want us to interfere in an independent tribunal and independent hearings. They would have us meddle in that independence. When they want a different outcome somewhere else, they say, "You shouldn't be meddling." So I just don't know which way it goes with the NDP, except the end justifies the means for them.

We will not meddle with the independent tribunal. We set up a fair, transparent process. And we'll let them do their work.

EDUCATION

Ms. Laura Smith: My question is for the Minister of Education.

As Ontario's population grows, the need to maintain and expand our public education system has become increasingly important.

Our government must continue to build the education infrastructure we need to ensure that future generations have access to state-of-the-art schools in their communities.

Under the leadership of Premier Ford, we're making critical investments that will provide children in this province with the resources and the support they need to thrive and succeed in an ever-changing world.

Can the minister please tell the House what our government is doing to help more children attend school close to home?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to thank the member from Thornhill for her leadership in advocating for us to go back to basics in Ontario schools.

After we landed deals with every teacher union in Ontario, a historic achievement that's providing stability for children, we announced a commitment to more than double the funding to build modern schools, after the former Liberals closed 600 in this province—a commitment to more than double the funding, a 136% increase in funding as we approved, this year alone, over 27,000 student spaces, 1,700 additional child care spaces in schools. When you put it all together, under our government's leadership, 100,000 spaces are being built as we speak.

We're building. We are investing and delivering a more highly qualified education system that goes back to the basics in Ontario.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you to the minister for his answer and his commitment to the students and the parents of Ontario. Families in my riding of Thornhill will be thrilled to hear that our government is committing to expanding Ontario's world-class public education system so that children can thrive and prosper in a school closer to their homes.

It's crucial that more learning spaces be built so our education infrastructure can keep pace with Ontario's growing communities. Ontario families cannot wait, like they did under the Liberals, to have a new school built in their communities. Students deserve convenient access to in-class learning that comes with extracurricular activities, sports and clubs. That's why our government must continue to support the construction of modern educational facilities where students can receive the important lifelong skills, such as reading, writing and math, they need.

Now that our government has more than doubled the fund to build schools—Speaker, through you—can the minister please outline our government's plan to build schools faster?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We announced a plan to build schools faster and smarter—on time, on budget—to cut the time it takes to build. Under the former Liberals, the average was eight years to build a standardized school in this province. We are challenging the status quo by developing and implementing a plan to cut construction timelines by half.

Speaker, I'm proud to report that in this round, because of the changes we implemented in the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, 81% of new builds in this province are using standardized designs as a consequence of our mission, which is to speed up construction, to approve shovel-ready projects in our smallest towns and our biggest cities, as we build schools and highways and homes and the infrastructure necessary to ensure we build this province.

TRUCKING SAFETY

MPP Lise Vaugeois: According to a recent Insurance Bureau of Canada report, new commercial truck drivers with inadequate training are putting the safety of Canada's

roads and highways in jeopardy, validating what we have been saying all along.

Premier, this is the reality: Immigrants are being charged up to \$40,000 for training they never receive. Many are simply given a licence and sent on the road, with red tape and green tape on the pedals to indicate stop and go.

Licence testing must be done by the MTO.

When will this government finally do something to protect these workers and all other road users from preventable accidents?

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

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: We take highway truck training and safety on our highways very seriously. That is why we continue to rank, in Ontario, as some of the safest roads in all of North America.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario leads North America in our truck training, and we will continue to work with the industry to do whatever we can to strengthen that and have no room for any of those who abuse the system or who act outside of the rules and regulations.

We will continue to ensure that safety is the topmost priority on our streets and on our highways. There's nothing more important than that. We will come down hard on anyone who contravenes any of those rules or regulations. We will continue to speak with the industry, speak with those on the roads and ensure we do everything we can to continue improving those measures.

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

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Some companies are misclassifying drivers as independent contractors, leaving them without WSIB coverage. These drivers can't refuse to take an unsafe vehicle, or they won't be paid. They are pushed to take risks on the highways to beat the clock, or they won't be paid. And because wage theft is rampant, they have to fight their employers to receive any pay at all.

When will you institute company inspections with harsher consequences for employers breaking the law?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Mr. Speaker, we will not allow anyone to break the law in this province. This government is all about law and order and ensuring that those who do contravene the law are held to account.

We have worked with the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development to ensure that truckers continue to be trained. In fact, the minister has done various measures to help improve safety and training, along with truck drivers across the province.

Truck drivers are some of the most important people in our economy. They move goods across this province. Their safety is of utmost priority to this government and to all members of this House, and we will do whatever we can. That is why we have always constantly supported measures for the trucking industry, whether it's building new highways, whether it's building the infrastructure that they need, to continue to support the safety of their transportation industry. We will continue to do so and continue to work with the industry to ensure that all measures are taken into consideration.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

MPP Andrea Hazell: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier.

It seems like each day, this government gives Ontarians another reason not to believe them. They say one thing and then do another. They make a promise just to break it. In my community of Scarborough, we know this all too well. Scarborough's transit has been left to decay by this government, while commuters, families and students are left out in the cold. When do they show up? When it benefits them.

The former Conservative MPP for Milton jumped ship from the caucus after years of scandals, and now that there's a by-election, the Premier and his minister finally found Milton on a map. They showed up to make a transit announcement about the UP Express that, only days later, they would—you guessed it—reverse.

My question to the Premier: How is anyone supposed to believe you will get anything done when you can't even finish what you've started?

1110

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, Speaker, I say this: I know the member's riding very well. I used to live in the community, and I used to have to take the Scarborough 86 bus from my home to Kennedy station, and then Kennedy station—for my first job, which was as an intern at the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Now, after 15 years of Liberals, do you know what people are still doing in that neck of the woods? They're still taking the Scarborough 86 bus to Kennedy station, to get on a subway to get to work downtown. But do you know what's going to stop for them? They're going to have a subway now in Scarborough. Do you know why? Because we're building that subway. Now, if they choose not to go to University of Toronto downtown, they can go to the expanded University of Toronto—where? In Scarborough. If they want to be a doctor, do you know where they can go get that education? In Scarborough. Do you know what they couldn't do under 15 years of Liberals and Liberals in that riding? Anything, Mr. Speaker—because that's what the Liberals did; they held Scarborough back.

We're unleashing opportunity, and it's good for Scarborough.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The supplementary question.

MPP Andrea Hazell: Ontarians are tired of broken promises and flip-flops. It seems like the government doesn't think before they act. The Premier promised a London GO line and then cancelled it—reversing course on the UP Express only two days after announcing it; six years working on the Eglinton Crosstown, while the CEO gets six-figure raises, and they still refuse to provide timelines for its completion.

Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? It seems like this government has a real problem with trains. But do you

know which one is working just fine? The \$6.9-million gravy train that is running right through the Premier's office, where the Premier has raised the budget by \$4 million in just six years and 48 staffers are making more than the average Ontario family.

So again, why should anyone in Milton or across Ontario believe this government when all they have done is break their promises?

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

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam: For 15 years, Ontario Liberals did nothing for Scarborough. They did not build subways. They did not build new hospitals. They did not build a new medical school.

There is no government that has done more for Scarborough than this government, under the leadership of Premier Ford. We are building the Scarborough subway after 15 years of Liberal inaction.

The Ontario Liberals voted no for the Scarborough subway. The Ontario Liberals voted no for the first-ever medical school in Scarborough.

Guess what? The people of Scarborough deserve new hospitals. Premier Doug Ford is building a brand new hospital, and Ontario Liberals voted no for the brand new hospital—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The next question.

TAXATION

Mr. John Jordan: My question is for the Minister of Energy.

During a period of rising cost of living and high interest rates, it's important for all governments to find ways to make life more affordable for people in Ontario. But the Liberal carbon tax keeps making life more difficult for the hard-working men and women in our province. I've heard from my constituents' families and farmers in my riding of Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston about how much costs for gas and groceries have increased as a result of this tax. Everyone in Ontario is experiencing this.

Speaker, I understand small businesses across the province still haven't seen any of the rebate money they were promised three years ago. That's not right.

Ontarians are looking to our government for support. That's why we need to keep calling on the federal Liberals to cut the carbon tax.

Can the minister please explain how the Liberal carbon tax is creating financial hardship for everyone in our province?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the great member from just north of Kingston. He's an outstanding new member in our caucus. He's standing up for residents in his riding who have great concerns about the carbon tax, whether they're farmers, or that mom and dad who is heading to take their kids to hockey—as I mentioned earlier—or to school, or the construction workers who are working so hard.

The member talked about those small business people who haven't received their carbon tax rebate. We can solve this by not having the carbon tax in the first place, which is what we've been pushing for since 2018 here, with Premier Ford and our team in Ontario. I had a meeting with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business just last week, where they told me about the fact that this \$1.3 billion had been stuck there in Ottawa and business owners hadn't received it. Obviously, again, the solution to the problem—scrap the carbon tax. Eliminate it entirely, so you don't have to worry about it.

Bonnie Crombie, the queen of the carbon tax, and the Ontario Liberal caucus believe that the people of Ontario are better off with this carbon tax than without it.

I know the people just north of Kingston, up in Smiths Falls, Perth and all of those great communities in eastern Ontario, don't support the carbon tax.

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

Mr. John Jordan: Thanks to the minister for that response.

As I said, life is already expensive for the hard-working people of our province. But the Liberals in this Legislature, much like their federal counterparts, are only focused on raising taxes for Ontario families and businesses. People in our province need urgent relief.

Unlike the carbon tax queen, Bonnie Crombie, and her caucus, our government is focused on making life more affordable for Ontarians.

It's time for the federal government to listen to what we have been saying for years and get rid of the carbon tax once and for all.

Can the minister explain what our government is doing to protect the people of this province from the costly carbon tax?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the member for the question.

Let's be clear again: The queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, loves hiking taxes. That's all she did when she was the mayor of Mississauga for all those years, and now she has brought those same practices to her partisan role as the Liberal leader here in Ontario. She's happy to have the federal carbon tax in place. And she would be way too expensive for the people of Ontario if she was ever elected into this wonderful chamber that we have here in Ontario.

Again, we're standing up for the people of Ontario by cutting gasoline taxes, while Liberals are driving gasoline taxes up higher and higher every year—on April 1. We're cutting those gasoline taxes. We're ensuring that we have affordable energy right across the province, like that big investment in hydroelectric power—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Next question.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Chris Glover: The Carmelite daycare that serves my riding is shutting its doors for good in July. Once the

doors are shut, Jennifer, a single mother in my riding, will no longer have child care for her daughter. She is one of 175 families impacted by this closure.

What is this government doing to make sure that there is child care for all of the families in Ontario who require it?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: After the Liberals increased child care costs 500%, pricing so many families out of the job market, and mothers often had to stay home instead of going to work because of the economic disincentives of unaffordable child care, we delivered a plan, in partnership with all levels of government, that has reduced fees by 50%, saving \$8,000 to \$12,000 per child.

The member speaks about access for constituents who would seek child care, and yet the member's party and the Liberals recommended to the government that we remove 30% of the market by denying for-profit child care. We're talking about tens of thousands of spaces for families in Toronto that would have been reduced and cut and eliminated if we did it the way the NDP and Liberals recommended.

We are standing up for choice, we're respecting parents, and we're ensuring all families benefit from affordability in this province.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: The government's actions don't support the answer that you just gave.

Tina, another parent who is impacted, is on multiple wait-lists for child care, and her child may have to change schools if the Carmelite centre closes.

This government has fought against \$10-a-day child care from the get-go. They were the last province to sign the agreement with the federal government. TD Bank estimated that we would need 315,000 spaces for \$10-a-day child care; this government made a plan for one third of that number. This government downloaded administration to municipalities for implementing the \$10-a-day child care, then cut \$85.5 million from those administration fees.

Will this government stop its crusade against \$10-a-day child care, or will you leave Jennifer, Tina and hundreds of thousands of families across this province without the child care that they need?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We didn't sign any deal with the federal government; we signed a better deal for the people of this province, with billions of dollars of additional support.

The record must be clear: Liberals and New Democrats stood in this House encouraging—in fact, demanding—that the government sign a deal that would have left 70,000 spaces and families behind because of your ideological conviction to oppose small business women who own for-profit child care. That's the choice. That's what those three parents you mentioned should know—that you would have made it worse, increased wait-lists, decreased access, increased costs.

We stood up to this Prime Minister for a better deal. We will always stand up for all families, all children, in all regions of this province.

1120

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Vincent Ke: My question is to the Solicitor General.

Speaker, with more than a 100% increase in occurrences this year compared to the same period in 2023, I need to talk about the carjackings again. This is clearly not the first time that you have heard me speak on this issue, but when my constituents tell me that they feel unsafe in their cars, on the streets, and even in their own homes, I must speak up for them.

Can the Solicitor General please tell this House about the progress that the Provincial Carjacking Joint Task Force has been making?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to thank my colleague opposite.

It's undeniable that the crisis that we have in auto theft is completely unacceptable—people's doors are being knocked in at 5 in the morning and people are being demanded to hand over the keys. That's why we've never had a government—we've never had a stronger government, our government, led by Premier Ford, that takes this so seriously.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say that the OPP and Toronto police have teamed up to lead a province-wide task force to fight auto theft, and in January, this past year—the proof is in the pudding, because of what they have accomplished: 89 people arrested, 554 charges laid, and hundreds of vehicles returned.

Our investment of over \$100 million is working. Supporting over 21 police services with auto theft grants is working. We're treating this with high priority.

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

Mr. Vincent Ke: Thank you to the Solicitor General for his response.

Speaker, more than 12,000 vehicles were stolen in Toronto last year, with a combined value of \$790 million.

The impact of car theft extends to all Ontarians, due to increasing insurance premiums. With the rise in inflation and the costs of living, the last thing that we need now is another added expense.

My follow-up question to the Solicitor General is, how are stolen vehicles being shipped overseas? And can he explain how this government is putting pressure on the federal government to take this issue seriously and to act immediately?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Mr. Speaker, the member is right; our cars are going overseas. That's why, when I attended the auto theft summit in Ottawa, I had two requests for the federal government: Change the protocols at the port of Montreal so that containers are being inspected the same on outbound cargo as they are on inbound cargo, and the second thing, which Premier Ford

has said loudly, is that there must be consequences for people stealing our cars; there must be minimum sentencing.

Mr. Speaker, we know, on this side, where we sit, but the opposition does not stand for public safety. And do you know why we know it? Because when police board budgets went before their councils for approval, the proxies for the Liberals and the NDP voted no in Ottawa, in London, in Hamilton, and in other cities. It's completely unacceptable.

TAXATION

Mr. Brian Saunderson: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Pork farmers contribute to making Ontario a world-class exporter for growing international markets. In 2023, Ontario's pork sector contributed over \$3 billion in GDP to the provincial economy and supported over 19,000 jobs across the value chain from the farm to processing.

Despite its instrumental contribution to our province's economy, the overall competitiveness of this sector is compromised by the federal carbon tax. This regressive and punitive carbon tax leads to increased costs of production and transportation of food, placing a heavy financial burden on farmers and compromising the competitiveness of our agricultural sector on a global scale.

Can the minister please explain how the federal carbon tax is negatively impacting Ontario's farmers?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and the member for Essex.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I'd like to thank the member from Simcoe–Grey for that important question.

Ontario farmers are ready to grow food for a growing Ontario, and they're ready to do it 365 days out of the year. But by taxing farmers, you're actually taxing growing Ontario.

Let me give you a quote from John de Bruyn, the former chair of Ontario Pork: The carbon tax “has amounted to an unfair burden to farmers, adding costs and lowering incomes, without reducing emissions.”

Mr. Speaker, farmers need to heat their barns; they need to dry grain; they need to power the greenhouses—there's no option here; it has to be done.

If we eliminate this useless tax on farmers, we could unleash the full potential of farming and agriculture in the province of Ontario.

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

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you to the parliamentary assistant for that response.

The carbon tax only serves to harm farmers in my riding of Simcoe–Grey and across this great province, and it impacts their potential to grow Ontario's agriculture and food industry.

Speaker, Ontario's agriculture and food industry contributes over \$48 billion to our province's GDP and economy, representing more than 800,000 jobs. That is why it is so vital that this sector continues to grow and

produce more food for our growing population and expand its export market.

However, production costs for our farmers, greenhouse growers and food processors have risen considerably since the implementation of this disastrous carbon tax. That is why we on this side of the House are continuing to urge the federal government to scrap the carbon tax now.

Can the parliamentary assistant outline what measures our government has taken to support our farmers and fight this carbon tax?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: We will always say yes to growing Ontario, and we will never say no and punish farmers for producing quality food in our safe, quality food system.

That's why the Minister of Agriculture signed a letter, together with 25 farm and agricultural organizations, calling on the federal government to pause the destructive carbon tax increase on April 1.

I urge the Liberals in this House: Please, take that letter to your federal colleagues in Ottawa. Hop in your minivan and hand-deliver it to Justin Trudeau in Ottawa and remove the carbon tax.

Farmers cannot afford Liberals. They can't afford the Liberal leader.

Our government will do everything it can to make farming and food production in Ontario more affordable.

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Aamjiwnaang First Nation is asking Sarnia's Ineos chemical plant to be shut down after community members reported headaches, nausea and dizziness on Tuesday. The First Nations' air quality monitoring station near the band office continues to report high benzene levels.

Why is Ontario allowing this company to continue with business as usual while people are getting sick from their emissions?

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

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I am concerned about what's happening, and I spoke to Aamjiwnaang's Chief Plain yesterday to discuss the situation and the impacts on the people of his community. I also spoke to representatives from Ineos and made it clear that we expect them to quickly work to identify the source of these emissions and implement a solution.

Make no mistake: When it comes to protecting health and safety, we will not hesitate to use our strong regulatory tools and enforce actions to hold emitters to account.

As of now, our mobile air-monitoring truck has already been deployed for several days and remains on site in Sarnia indefinitely.

I will continue to ensure that compliance with all past orders made to Ineos, including requirements to install emission-control equipment, are done and air quality is monitored.

1130

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Again, Aamjiwnaang First Nation has called upon the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks to immediately impose a shutdown of the Ineos facility to reduce the ongoing benzene emissions and to protect community members. This is a major health and safety issue. Wellness in the First Nation is at an all-time low.

The ministry continues to ignore the concerns. How many more people have to get sick before Ontario shuts it down and takes action?

Interjections.

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

Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: I remain deeply concerned, and I do have an additional call with Aamjiwnaang's Chief Plain this afternoon. We currently already have environmental compliance officers who have been conducting site visits at Ineos. But we will not hesitate to take additional actions to protect the people of Sarnia and Aamjiwnaang First Nation.

TAXATION

Mr. Dave Smith: My question is for the Solicitor General.

Since the introduction of the Liberal carbon tax in 2019, life has become more and more unaffordable for Ontarians. With the support of the Liberal members in this House, the federal government continues to punish Ontario families who are already struggling to put food on the table and heat their homes. It's forcing Ontarians to pay more at the gas pump—a 14-cent increase just yesterday. This is not what the hard-working people of the province of Ontario deserve.

The carbon tax is costing everyone, including our front-line heroes.

Ontario deserves better, and our government must do all we can to fight this regressive tax.

Can the Solicitor General please explain the consequences of the federal carbon tax on our province's public safety system?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to thank my friend from Peterborough-Kawartha for his commitment to public safety in his community. And I want to give a shout-out to his police chief, Stu Betts, who does a great job to keep Peterborough safe.

Mr. Speaker, I've said this many times, and it's absolutely obvious: The carbon tax has a direct impact on the cost of public safety. As an example, the OPP spend over \$4 million a year just in carbon tax. And by the numbers—as of April 1, Ontarians are now paying 18 cents a litre for gas and 21 cents a litre for diesel; that means on every vehicle that is being used for public safety, there's carbon tax.

We know where we stand. We know where they stand. Bonnie Crombie has to come clean and say this is regressive and it's affecting our community—

Interjections.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you to the Solicitor General for that response.

It is truly disappointing to see the federal government ignore the significant financial burden the carbon tax places on all of our front-line heroes.

Unfortunately, both the NDP and the Liberal members in this Legislature continue to support the federal Liberals and their unjust carbon tax. They just have to make a phone call to Jagmeet and Justin and ask them to change it.

Speaker, since our government was elected in 2018, affordability has been one of our top priorities. Unlike the carbon tax queen, Bonnie Crombie, our government is fighting the carbon tax. We've frozen the gas tax, and we're saving Ontarians' hard-earned money.

We're keeping the pressure on and calling for the carbon tax to be scrapped so that the first responders who keep our communities safe won't be impacted by this regressive tax.

Can the Solicitor General please explain how the Liberal carbon tax is negatively impacting law enforcement and public safety agencies all across Ontario?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Again to my friend opposite, thank you for the question.

Let's just talk about Peterborough. As of April 1, 3.3 cents a litre was added to the carbon tax; that means the vehicles for Peterborough Police Service have to pay this—in every vehicle, at every fill-up. This means they're paying, on average, \$800 a year just for the increase in the carbon tax. And do you know what, Mr. Speaker? Bonnie Crombie knows this. She sat on the board of Peel police services for many years. She knew how to read a budget. She knew that the carbon tax is embedded in the cost of fuel.

She should come clean with Ontarians and say, "This is wrong. I will call Justin Trudeau and Jagmeet in Ottawa and tell them it's affecting our community safety."

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Chandra Pasma: The Minister of Health has repeatedly claimed that no one needs to pay for health care with their credit card. Yet my constituent Khalid was charged \$3,590 to get his cataracts fixed. Khalid's doctor said the surgery was medically necessary.

Can the minister of Minister of Health please explain to Khalid why he had to pay for the surgery and the tests on his credit card?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Our government knows the status quo is not working and more needs to be done. That is why we launched the Your Health plan. We are taking bold action to eliminate surgical backlogs and reduce wait times for publicly funded surgeries and procedures. Our plan is investing in infrastructure, boosting health human resources and adding educational supports for the future. Our

plan is adding thousands of hours of MRI and CT scans and more procedures, including hip and knee replacements, closer to home—all accessible with your OHIP card, not your credit card. Our plan has already reduced the surgical backlog to below pre-pandemic levels.

We will continue to work with our health care partners across Ontario to ensure that we have the best publicly funded health care when and where people need it.

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Your health plan and the government's bold initiatives are costing my constituents like Khalid thousands of dollars that they are having to pay on their credit cards.

One of the things Khalid was charged for was the lenses used for his surgeries. The doctor told him he needed to have this lens because he has astigmatism. These lenses cost him \$1,590.

And Khalid is not alone. We know from the Ontario Health Coalition report yesterday that thousands of people across our province are being charged fees like this every single day for procedures they don't need.

Why is the Minister of Health allowing private clinics to upsell patients on services by telling them that they are necessary when they are not?

Mr. Nolan Quinn: First and foremost, we do have protectpublichealthcare@ontario.ca that that constituent can call, or 1-888-662-6613.

It took Ontario years of neglect by the previous governments, propped up by the NDP—but our government has taken action and delivered results for Ontarians. Our government is proud to have one of the largest publicly funded health care systems across the whole world—a system we're investing \$85 billion in this year. There are countless stories of life-changing impacts across the province and evidence that expanding our capacity in our health care system is creating access for more surgeries and procedures than ever before.

Our government will continue to find innovative ways to make it faster and easier for Ontarians to access the care they need, when they need it, closer to home.

TAXATION

Mr. Will Bouma: My question is for the Associate Minister of Small Business.

Canada's inflation rate just rose to 2.9% this past month thanks to higher gas prices. Data from Statistics Canada indicates that if it wasn't for gasoline prices, inflation would have actually gone down month over month.

We know that many small businesses rely on transportation to deliver goods and services. The carbon tax is making it more expensive to run their operations. The federal government must fix their broken tax measures, scrap the carbon tax and deliver real affordability for small businesses across Ontario.

Can the associate minister please tell this House how the carbon tax and high gasoline prices hurt our small businesses in Ontario?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you to the great member from Brantford–Brant for his strong advocacy for his small businesses.

So many of our small businesses rely heavily on transportation and energy-intensive operations to deliver their goods and services. Ontario's agricultural and agri-food businesses, from family farms to processing facilities, have seen their transportation and operating costs skyrocket. But the opposition Liberals and NDP have ignored the basic economics of why the carbon tax is bad for business. In fact, they think business owners and customers are better off.

So if you're a lover of farmers' markets, you can thank a Liberal the next time you see the price of Ontario produce go up. And when you pick up the necessary groceries for your family, you can thank a Liberal when you have to make those tough decisions on what to pick up and what to put back.

Join us and tell the Trudeau Liberals that this expensive, unaffordable tax has to be axed.

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

The member for Kingston and the Islands has a point of order.

Mr. Ted Hsu: I rise to seek unanimous consent for the following:

That, in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls on the Ontario government to protect Ontario's water supply and not repeat the tragedy that happened in Walkerton 24 years ago by ensuring the current safety regulations, including Ontario's free and public water testing, remain unchanged.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I believe the member is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion. Agreed?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Point of order.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: On the same point of order, Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, obviously, we're not going to entertain a substantive motion like that. If the Liberal Party would like to bring something on the floor, they have many opportunities to do that—as opposed to playing games, perhaps they would take their work seriously and bring something to the floor of this House. But I can assure the member that we will be voting against a motion that we have neither seen nor have been advised about what the contents of it are.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Agreed? No.

WASTE TO RESOURCE ONTARIO

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

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: I just want to give a point of order in case folks are looking to go outside to the south lawn for their lunch. We're going to have Waste to Resource that are there, that are going to be highlighting

high alternative fuel usage in their waste collection system. It's a really interesting truck, so I encourage everyone to go visit it.

And welcome to the board from Waste to Resource.

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

There being no further business this morning and no deferred votes, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1142 to 1300.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated April 18, 2024, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 110(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Introduction of bills? I recognize the member from Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce my private members' bill for the first time.

I want to thank Karissa Singh, who's the legislative assistant from my office here at Queen's Park as well as OLIP's Steffi Burgi for their dedication to crafting this legislation.

LYDIA'S LAW (ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE HANDLING OF SEXUAL ASSAULT CASES), 2024

LOI LYDIA DE 2024 (RESPONSABILITÉ ET TRANSPARENCE DANS LE TRAITEMENT DES CAS D'AGRESSION SEXUELLE)

Ms. Fife moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 189, An Act to enact Lydia's Law (Accountability and Transparency in the Handling of Sexual Assault Cases), 2024 / Projet de loi 189, Loi édictant la Loi Lydia de 2024 (responsabilité et transparence dans le traitement des cas d'agression sexuelle).

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member from Waterloo like to briefly explain her bill?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I would. Thank you very much. Lydia's Law (Accountability and Transparency in the

Handling of Sexual Assault Cases) Act: This bill enacts Lydia's Law, 2024.

Section 2 of the act provides that the Attorney General shall prepare and publish a progress report describing the extent to which the Ministry of the Attorney General has implemented certain recommendations set out in the Auditor General's report and shall lay the progress report before the assembly.

Section 3 of the act requires the Standing Committee on Justice Policy to establish a working group to review the progress report and report on their review to the assembly.

Section 4 of the act provides that the Attorney General shall review the efficiency of the Victim Quick Response Program and report the results of the review to the assembly.

Section 5 of the act requires police services that receive a sexual assault complaint from persons who are 16 years of age or older to make the person aware of the independent legal advice program.

It is my pleasure to table this bill and I look forward to the debate on May 15.

PETITIONS

HERITAGE CONSERVATION

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It gives me pleasure to present the following petition on behalf of Paul King in my riding of London North Centre. It is also a petition that has been put together by Architectural Conservancy Ontario.

Now, given the changes to the standing orders, we are not able to read the entirety of the petition text, so I will do my best summarize the key elements within this petition.

It talks about the changes that this government made to the Ontario Heritage Act—all of the changes that were made in 2022—and it talks about the heritage properties that are currently listed which are at risk. There are 36,000 heritage properties at risk, and the meagre protections for them will end January 1, 2025, unless this government acts.

What this petition does is it calls upon this government to correct that mistake that they have made—to backpedal upon yet another mistake that they have made—and amend the Ontario Heritage Act to give municipalities an additional five years, giving them until January 1, 2030, before heritage property listings expire.

I completely support this petition, will affix my signature and deliver it with page Armaan to the Clerks.

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

Mr. Ted Hsu: I have three related petitions today that I will summarize together. These are related to the subject of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, signed by many people in my riding but put together by my youth council in Kingston and the Islands, and I'm very proud of what they've done. There are Jews and Muslims on the council. They are worried for each other about the effects of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

So, the three petitions today—I'll just summarize each one very briefly.

The first one is to invest in a dedicated OPP hate crime unit. The second one is to provide mandatory, standardized training for all employers about anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and to do it at the same time as they get training about accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities. And the third one is to make some changes to the Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act, the Ontario Provincial Police government advisory council and how the Ontario Provincial Police operates in order to help combat anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

I'm very happy to present these petitions today, Speaker.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Ms. Catherine Fife: For the first time, I'll be presenting this petition. It deals with Lydia's Law, the piece of legislation that I just tabled, and it deals with the prevalence of sexual assault cases that are being dismissed or stayed or thrown out of our court system.

This petition honours a young woman named Lydia who waited two years for justice. In those two years, Speaker, the pain and the stress and the tension that she and her family experienced is inexcusable in a province like Ontario, for people to have to wait that long for justice.

This petition specifically speaks to two recommendations from the Auditor General, and that is to ensure that the Attorney General of Ontario is reporting back to this House what's actually going on in our justice system with regard to the cases specifically around sexual assault that have been thrown out.

So we have gathered some signatures and are asking the government to support this legislation to address a constant and prevalent and systemic level of injustice that is happening to women who come forward and report sexual assault in Ontario.

It's my pleasure to affix my signature and give it to page Brayden.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It's my honour to present a petition entitled, "Support the Gender Affirming Health Care Act."

Within this petition, it talks about the difficulties that two-spirit, transgender, non-binary, gender-diverse and intersex communities face when it comes to accessing the vital health care upon which we all rely.

It's important for us to recognize that, unless we make sure that the government understands that this is a necessity, people within medical circles are not going to be taught in a way that respects people's identities. So what this calls upon the government to do is to create an advisory committee to make sure that we address those gaps within the education system of medicine, and make

sure that there's greater access and coverage for gender-affirming care in Ontario.

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

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Catherine Fife: Given that I can't read the text of the Till Death Do Us Part petition in the House anymore, I just will give you a quick summary.

This is a petition calling on the Minister of Long-Term Care, the member for Willowdale, to call Bill 21 to committee. It has been at committee now for almost 400 days. It is time for the committee to address the issue of spouses being separated in long-term care.

This is a petition that honours Jim McLeod from Waterloo region. He and his wife, Joan, have been married for 65 years, now separated in two different facilities for six and a half years.

1310

The research is very clear. When spouses and family members are able to stay together, their health improves. We knew through the pandemic that when you do have a spouse with you in a long-term-care facility or a care campus, they do a lot of assistance with the caretaking and caring for that individual. It's a win-win-win to keep people together. It is cruel to separate spouses who are in long-term care, especially after these seniors contributed to the health and well-being and financial success of this province.

I'm calling on the Minister of Long-Term Care to call Bill 21 to the social policy committee. Let's fix this together. It's the least we can do for seniors in Ontario. Thank you very much.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition with a number of signatures that were collected by Dr. Sally Palmer, who is a professor at McMaster University and is passionate about the urgency of raising social assistance rates. We're proud to support her efforts because the petition points out how far below the poverty line individuals on Ontario Works and ODSP receive from this government: \$733 for individuals on Ontario Works, \$1,308 for those on ODSP. As the Speaker knows, that won't even rent you an apartment, much less provide resources for food and electricity and other essentials.

The petition also talks about the fact that this government's decision to tie ODSP to the cost of living does nothing to lift people on ODSP out of poverty and, in fact, just condemns them to legislated poverty for as long as they are collecting social assistance.

The petition also reminds us that the federal government had a CERB program during the pandemic that provided a basic income of \$2,000 per month, which the government had determined was about what people needed in this country to be able to live during the COVID pandemic. So the petition calls for a doubling of social assistance rates for Ontario Works and ODSP, which is

something I fully, fully support and am happy to affix my signature.

ORGAN DONATION

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to table a petition regarding organ donation. Many people in the province of Ontario don't understand how this program is in crisis. Our health critic has been gathering signatures from all over Ontario, but there are currently 1,600 people waiting for a life-saving organ transplant in Ontario. It's a shocking number, Speaker. Every three days, someone in Ontario actually dies because they can't get a transplant in time. We know that we need to be more proactive around organ donation, so our health critic, the member from Nickel Belt, has a petition that would allow a donor system based on presumed consent, which means that you would have to opt out instead of ensuring that organs are available for donation.

It's a worthwhile program, built on many years of advocacy across the province. This is something we can do together. It should not be a partisan issue. With that, I will table this petition on behalf of the member from Nickel Belt. Thank you very much.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to rise to present this petition on behalf of many residents of London West who signed their name to this petition to keep classrooms safe for students and staff, because, certainly, Speaker, we are hearing more and more about issues in our classrooms.

We have EAs who are feeling unsafe, who are often on long-term disability because of the violence that they experience in our schools. Teachers are reporting more violent incidents. Students and parents are reporting more violent incidents in our classrooms. Much of that is connected to the fact that our schools are terribly understaffed. The mental health supports available for students are terribly under-resourced. All of this contributes to that crisis that we're seeing in our classrooms.

So the petition calls on the Legislative Assembly to take effective action to address the violence in our schools. It calls on the Legislative Assembly to invest in more mental health resources and to properly fund our schools so that we can have smaller classrooms and more caring adults in our school buildings.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PREVENTING UNETHICAL PUPPY SALES ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 SUR LA PRÉVENTION DE LA VENTE DE CHIOTS CONTRAIRE À L'ÉTHIQUE

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 17, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 159, An Act to amend the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act, 2019 / Projet de loi 159, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2019 sur les services provinciaux visant le bien-être des animaux.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Speaker. *Remarks in Anishiniimowin.* It's a good day.

It's always an honour to be able to speak on behalf of the people of Kiiwetinoong and, at this time, to be able to address some of the issues with Bill 159. There is so much for me to advocate for regarding animal welfare and animal wellness in the riding of Kiiwetinoong. I talk about that because it is so important that we make sure that we are not passing legislation that we know people in Kiiwetinoong communities and people in the north will be in contradiction of because they cannot access veterinary services.

But I want to do a shout-out also. I want to thank Matawa First Nations as well on supporting me and speaking to this bill by passing along very important information about animal welfare in First Nation communities, but also to be able to talk about their own pilot project. When my office was talking to them, their work was based on full-some consultation with Indigenous people.

Ontario's animal welfare models and services take almost no consideration, if any, for on-reserve communities in the province of Ontario.

I want to reiterate as well that governments have come a long way when it comes to dogs. As members of the Legislature, I think more people should know about the history of how sled dogs have been treated in this country. I spoke about this last month, but I want to take a minute again to remind you that for all First Nations—not just First Nations, but also Inuit communities—sled dogs were not historically pets but rather work animals that were necessary for our ways of life when we were on the land. They helped us transport hunting supplies, moving camp to camp.

1320

Speaker, one of the things that happened is that the colonial governments used violence to aim at taking away First Nations and Inuit ways of life. For decades in the 20th century—the 1950s specifically, the 1960s—government officials, RCMP officers, shot and killed our people's dogs. The reason they did that: Because they wanted to disempower and take away our ways of life, the independence, by taking away our ability to hunt for food. That's why I keep saying governments have come a long way on how we treat animals and our pets and our work dogs. When I talk about that, this is one of the many ways, one of the many violent tactics used by the government to try to force us to assimilate and one example of the many ways that the government has interfered in our ways of life, changing our relationship to animals and the land.

Before I continue, I want to say that I will be sharing my time with the member for London North Centre.

Also I want everyone to consider today what it looks like for the community in the north, what it looks like in Kiiwetinoong, where there are no veterinary services,

because it's very clear; I see it. We end up with overpopulation and suffering by both the animals and also people. This spring, as an example, in Nibinamik First Nation, also known as Summer Beaver, over 20 dogs were lost because of an outbreak of parvovirus, a very contagious and often deadly disease. The death of these dogs and the heartbreak it entailed for families could have been prevented if vaccines were regularly available and if there were veterinary professional models of service delivery, but there was none.

This should be a reminder of the very real consequences that the lack of animal care imposes, which is also felt across the border in Manitoba where a state of emergency was declared last month because of animal overpopulation crisis. Speaker, without proactive measures to control dog populations, because of the lack of veterinary services, some communities are forced to resort to dog culls, which is traumatic for everyone involved. If spay and neuter clinics were available so that overpopulation could be prevented proactively, there is no doubt the community would choose this option.

Much like the situation in Nibinamik First Nation, dogs suffer unnecessarily from diseases that could have been prevented by delivery of consistent vaccines and veterinary services. Zoonotic diseases like rabies, giardia, leptospirosis are of particular concern and pose risks to people as well.

Speaker, I'm sure almost everyone here has felt a bond with an animal at some point. Imagine how the mental health of community members is impacted by the absence of veterinary services, with traumatic outcomes that cause people to feel distress without witnessing the needless suffering of animals in their communities.

Turning to the substance of Bill 159, I ask everyone to consider how the people in far northern Ontario will feel if they hear about these laws that they will be accidentally in contravention of, just of where they are located. If a situation is considered to be a puppy mill because female dogs are having litters three times a year, then with an unintentional breeding caused by the non-existence of veterinary services, people in communities without veterinary services will be seen to have puppy mills. It should go without saying that this is unequitable to people in these communities in far northern Ontario, as well as animal welfare partners and the dogs themselves.

Speaker, there's a simple solution: to provide more veterinary services. But why is Ontario not finding a way to do this? Why is Ontario hiding behind jurisdictional disputes to avoid taking any accountability or responsibility for the animals in on-reserve communities and on-reserve lands?

We need First Nations voices to be heard at the transition council when regulations are being crafted to ensure that there are not barriers for First Nations Indigenous communities and that systemic racism does not occur. We also need answers. Will dog owners who have no access to spay services for female dogs in their communities get charged under Bill 159?

I mentioned Matawa at the beginning of my remarks, who provided so much helpful insight. Everyone should

go check out their Facebook page called Matawa Pets and People, where pet owners in the Matawa communities, Matawa First Nations share their experiences.

Speaker, I want to share a project. I want to tell you about a pilot project that they are in the midst of implementing until March 31, 2025, which establishes an animal services community-of-practice. This important project was a result of the Matawa Chiefs resolution that was passed in 2023 during the Matawa Chiefs Council's regular business meetings and should serve as an example of how we can find innovative solutions to help bring more animal services to northern communities.

1330

Speaker, Matawa's pilot project recognizes the changes that have occurred in our relationship with our animals, especially dogs, which have been especially affected by colonization. We have new animals that we did not have traditionally, and the practice of dog sledding has almost disappeared—something I spoke about a few weeks ago as well during the debate for the vet care bill, Bill 171. The poor animal health and dog overpopulation that is often a result of these changes negatively impacts our communities. We see instances of dog bites, pack aggression, dog mauling deaths and potential for zoonotic disease transmission.

I wanted to share as well that Matawa's pilot project also recognizes and embraces the many responsible pet owners in our communities and, in some communities, the wonderful volunteers who are helping.

The pilot project in Matawa I spoke about will do the following:

It will work with part-time animal guardians in each Matawa community to learn, to be trained and supported by an animal services lead coordinator.

They will improve education on animal wellness in Matawa First Nations.

They will improve animal wellness, reduce fertility rates and safer, healthier communities using an animal-human "one health model."

They will provide animal wellness and spay/neuter clinics in seven of the nine First Nations in Matawa. That started in March 2024.

They will also work on getting feedback from the people in the community and leadership on how they will want to see the animal situation, complete with an animal population survey and sustainability plan for when the project is completed.

They will work with online veterinarians to learn to do rudimentary first aid, give basic vaccines and medications, as required.

They will contribute to the Matawa Pets and People site on Facebook to better educate the public on what other communities are doing.

They will advocate with governments on animal issues in the First Nations in Matawa.

And finally, they will complete a final report on a community of practices which can be used as a model for other First Nations in Canada who are both road-access and fly-in First Nations.

Speaker, First Nations in Ontario have experienced time and time again the harms of jurisdictional finger-pointing between colonial governments of this country. I know that, once again, on the issue of animal services, First Nations are in between federal and provincial jurisdictions. It's not only that this is unacceptable, but because it results in no animal services being provided, it leads to the system for services for animals—pets, dogs—to become unjust.

I just want to call on the government to acknowledge this problem and to respond to this instead of continuing to leave our communities on the sidelines when we want to better the system for the pets that we have in the north as well. You cannot use jurisdiction as an excuse not to do anything. When you continue to use jurisdiction as an excuse not to do anything, it is very colonial, and when we talk about services for dogs, we have to acknowledge that.

As I spoke to earlier, the adverse effects of leaving First Nations out not only neglect the First Nations and neglects the communities, but put us in a position where we contravene the legislation because of the lack of veterinary services that we have on-reserve. The question is what is going to happen to the people that live in these communities when you implement this legislation.

Speaker, thank you for listening and thank you to the members for listening and also sharing my thoughts. Again, as I said before, I will be sharing my time with the member of London North Centre. Meegwetch.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): The member for London North Centre.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Kiiwetinoong for an excellent lead-off to the opposition debate on Bill 159.

As I begin my remarks, I think of the Humane Society of London and Middlesex, who are engaged in a wonderful campaign. It's called New Home, New Hope. They've been at their current location at 624 Clarke Road for 120 years, and they're currently moving to 1414 Dundas Street. Unfortunately, it's just outside of my riding, but it's very close to the border. But within this brilliant plan, they're going to have outdoor spaces, play areas. Right now, the cages that are in their current space don't meet industry standards. It's an old building; there's old plumbing, there's an old HVAC system. The capacity is 175 to 200, and the new location will have about 400.

What's also really brilliant and revolutionary about this plan is that it really looks after the skills pipeline. It is in partnership with post-secondary institutions such as Fanshawe, so allowing training of vet techs, experiential learning, local leadership capacity.

I wanted to start off with this because the Humane Society of London and Middlesex has asked this province for \$1.5 million, and it's fallen upon deaf ears with this government, despite all of the spending that we saw in budget 2024. As it turns out, the city of London has contributed twice the amount that was asked of the province. They've contributed \$3 million. The federal government has stepped up, but unfortunately, the province is really a laggard when it comes to funding these amazing initiatives.

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What's brilliant about it is that it will also include pet training classes, adoptions and an education centre where children will be able to take school visits. As I said, it will really look after that skills pipeline of people entering veterinary medicine. They will have seasonal camps, but also there will be a companion animal hospital that will support shelter animals as well as provide affordable vet services. It will be building the spaces that people need, whether it's saying goodbye to a pet, which will be accessible from a certain door as opposed to the people who are entering to adopt a new family member, which will be from a separate door—because can you imagine those two people crossing paths? It doesn't make much sense, Speaker. But unfortunately, this government has not yet chosen to acknowledge that funding request, and it really is such a pity because I believe it's a very worthy cause, a very worthy organization. I hope this government will reconsider that.

As we look at Bill 159, there are some good measures that do come forward within Bill 159, including making certain practices illegal, such as breeding a female dog more than three times in a two-year period or breeding more than two litters from a female dog's consecutive heat cycles; breeding a female dog that is less than a year old or failing to keep a dog with a contagious disease away from other dogs or animals; failure to keep a dog's environment sanitary and free from the accumulation of waste; and also separating a puppy from its mother before the age of eight weeks. These measures do make a great deal of sense, Speaker. We see a few guidelines here having a minimum penalty of \$10,000. However, if any infractions result in the death of a dog, it could be a fine of up to \$25,000.

Now, what I will say is that these are good places to start, but many animal care advocates are asking for a great deal more from this government. They don't believe that this goes far enough. In fact, this legislation has been called toothless. It has been said that these baseline fines are simply not enough to tackle and address the issue that this legislation in Bill 159 purports to try to solve or to try to combat.

Animal Justice has written, "One of the biggest failures of the PUPS Act is that it does not require dog breeders to be licensed." So Bill 159 is to prevent these unethical puppy sales, but the government is not making sure that these people will even have to be licensed. So how is this going to be enforced? How will these be overseen? How will this be regulated if there is no licensing?

"Without a licensing regime," the quote goes on, "there is no way to keep track of who is breeding dogs and where they are operating, which makes animal cruelty law enforcement nearly impossible. Without the ability to cancel a licence, authorities have little ability to shut down a problematic breeder."

But what's also important for us to recognize within this debate of the Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act is that these activities and these puppy mills, it's not as though this is happening in broad daylight. This is not something that people are doing obviously. These puppy

mills are being kept behind closed doors. They're in places like barns; they're in places like basements. They're away from the public view, otherwise people would report them. It's very rare for puppy mills to be caught and charged under current law as it stands, and I don't know that Bill 159 will actually solve that.

Animal Justice goes on to state that these puppy mills, despite these fines, will continue to force dogs to produce litter after litter of puppies in deplorable conditions. They won't have access to regular exercise, socialization and veterinary care. It doesn't solve the problem that it sets out to do.

I'd also like to quote from Humane Initiative co-founder and president, Donna Power, who said this legislation is "pretty weak." Donna goes on to state, "They're selling it to the public like it's the second coming, but they acknowledge to us, they know it's not where it should be by any means." That the legislation could bring about an end to the puppy mills is "simply not true," she said.

Now, Camille Labchuk, who is the Animal Justice executive director, stated, "This bill will do little to nothing to stop the abuse of puppy mills in Ontario...."

"Stating otherwise could provide a 'false sense of security' for people perusing online marketplaces for new four-legged family members...."

So, Speaker, here are experts in the field who want to be involved in the consultation on this bill, and they're saying it doesn't go far enough. Will Bill 159 provide licensing for people who would breed dogs? It doesn't seem so. Labchuk and Power are both making that call. They're asking for this to be included in Bill 159. Include a licensing regime with enforceable care standards.

Puppies are big business in Ontario, and they're big business for breeds which are often popularized through either social media or contemporary media. I remember back when I was in high school; I think there was a re-release of 101 Dalmatians. Well, suddenly and immediately, every little person wanted to have a Dalmatian. However, not everyone knew about what that breed's requirements were, what its character was like or what was necessary to make sure it was a happy, healthy animal. Dalmatians require a great deal of exercise. They're very energetic animals. People had viewed that movie and thought that they were cute and they were spotted—which, yes, both of those things are true—however, they also do require a great deal of physical exercise, and when that is not provided, we see behaviours within that breed which are often deeply problematic, which is no fault of the animal itself, it's a fault of the lack of knowledge of the owner and the purchaser.

Now, I will also point out that both Labchuk and Power talk about an inquiry that was made to the province about data on investigations. The province has simply ignored that request for investigations of this activity, and I find that curious. Should the province identify that this is a problem they want to solve, they should be able to also provide the backup to that.

Now, from my area, the London area, Laurie Ristmae, who is the founder of ARF Ontario and is also the executive director of the East London Animal Hospital, has

stated—repeating what I’ve just said—“The breeds that are showcased in movies and on TV and that become popular, become very overbred and have physical issues and physical deformities that are just wrong, that can’t be fixed” because the market unfortunately responds to the demand. Breeders will see that breeds such as Dalmatians become very popular, and they want to be the ones who are able to sell them—able to make that profit. Unfortunately, they may choose to do so in a way that is cruel, that is unfair, that is unethical to those beautiful little animals.

The government has said that it’s going to bring on more provincial animal welfare services inspectors to enforce these rules, but I will also point out that in the CBC’s coverage, CBC News found PAWS inspections were leading to significantly fewer orders and provincial and criminal charges when compared with animal abuse and neglect calls, which had been dealt with by the OSPCA, the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. So that’s interesting, that the government is changing its tune and is now saying, “Yes, we’re going to hire more inspectors” because it has been discovered that there have not been enough inspections and there has not been enough enforcement. And yet, we see through Bill 159—is there going to be more enforcement? I’m not certain, if there’s not a licensing regime in place.

Labchuk is also quoted in this article. Camille Labchuk has stated, “How can inspectors ever go in and inspect a puppy mill to see if they’re complying with the laws if we have no idea where they are?”

The city of London has been very proactive on this issue. Back in 2018, they enacted an updated business and licensing bylaw. It banned pet shops from actually using animals that were obtained from some unethical places. They banned pet stores “from selling cats and dogs that weren’t obtained from a municipal animal shelter, a registered humane society or shelter, or a prescribed rescue group.” That way they made sure that the animals that were in those places being adopted, with all those young people with their fingers and noses pressed to the glass wanting to get that little furry animal home—that those were the ones that were being rehomed, that were ones from shelters. And that makes a good deal of sense, Speaker, because it pulls the rug out from those unethical players within the market.

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As I also look at this legislation, it reminds me of other legislation that this House has seen, in particular the opening up of training and trialling areas in the province. I think about how it was a past Conservative Premier, Mike Harris, who made new licences for training and trialling areas illegal.

Also, I think of the testimony of Rick Maw and Wayne Lintack, who were former conservation officers who talked about training and trialling areas and how that was cruel towards wildlife, in particular coyotes. You see, training and trialling areas are where dogs are trained how to track and hunt coyotes, but these areas are pens. They are massive areas that there is no escape from. These coyotes are often tracked down, they are cornered, and they are ripped apart by these dogs who are learning how

to hunt. In fact, those officers spoke about how they uncovered a coyote trade ring where these coyotes were caught illegally, stuffed into a small room in a barn and sold off to other hunters to be used in training and trial areas. Animal Justice and Coyote Watch Canada have said, “These operations subject captive animals to horrific physical and psychological distress, and also create an unsafe environment for the dogs who are trained to chase these animals being used as live bait.”

Ontario is an outlier when it comes to these sorts of what some would call very barbaric and anachronistic practices because no other province allows these training and trialling areas to use live animals as bait—except for Manitoba, which, in that case, uses live game birds. In fact, fox and coyote penning is banned in most US states. So it seems antithetical that this government is saying that they’re standing up for animals with Bill 159, the Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act, and then in the other case are allowing training and trialling areas where coyotes will be ripped apart and savaged, basically tortured, which—in a more balanced way—also does put those dogs who are being trained to hunt at risk themselves, because of course those coyotes are going to defend themselves in their last moments.

Really, Speaker, as we look at this legislation with Bill 159, it does do some things which are positive steps. I don’t think that the legislation goes far enough. I think that we need to listen to experts within the field who are stating that baseline fines are simply not enough. This legislation, on its own, is toothless. This legislation requires a licensing regime and enforceable standards of care. I think, if we are going to tackle the problem that is puppy mills, we need to make sure that we are able to not only know where they are, find where they are, but make sure they stop operating. These places operate under the cover of shadow. We need to make sure that everybody is licensed in order to breed dogs, so that we can make sure they’re doing it in a way that is ethical, in a way that is responsible and in a way that cares for animals properly—such as this bill purports to do. But as it stands right now, it doesn’t quite make the mark.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Questions?

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the member from London North Centre. Thank you for your summary of the bill. Could you just summarize for us again what are the specific things you’d like to see improved in this bill?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to my colleague from University–Rosedale for the question.

What animal advocates have indicated within this bill—they believe that baseline fines are not enough. The \$10,000 for an infraction, the \$25,000 for the loss of a dog’s life: While they are a start, we need to make sure that there’s a licensing regime in place; that all places that are going to foster and breed dogs are overseen by the province so that we can make sure that the care standards that are within Bill 159 are actually being enforced in all those places.

We need to shine a light into those places where these dogs are coming from and making sure they’re doing the

right thing. We need these standards of care to be enforceable, and part of that is making sure we know exactly where this activity is happening.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to both my colleagues for their remarks this afternoon on the legislation before this House. My question is to the member from London North Centre. I am a dog owner, as many will know. Does the member agree that regulating record-keeping and the sale and transfer of dogs would be beneficial to the welfare of our furry friends?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to my colleague from Perth–Wellington for the question.

I do believe it's important that regulations are in place to make sure that we know exactly when these animals are being sold, who they're being sold to. But first and foremost, we need to make sure that we have regulations in place ensuring that the people who are breeding these dogs are doing so in an ethical way, a responsible way and a transparent way by disclosing their location. We should not be in a situation where we don't know where this business activity is happening, because it's happening in cramped places. It's happening in basements. It's happening in barns. It's happening under the cover of night. And we won't be able to address this problem unless we know where this activity is happening.

You know what to do, government.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. Jeff Burch: A question for my friend from Kiiwetinoong, whose opinion I like to hear when there's a bill that affects First Nations communities, with respect to consultation: Has there been, in your opinion, enough consultation around this bill prior to the government bringing it forward?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch for the question.

Like any other time when we talk about legislation here in Ontario, there is—at the best of times, we get very minimal or very scattered consultation. At the worst, we get no consultation. And when I was speaking with some of the First Nations from Matawa, there was absolutely no consultation in the work that they're trying to do. They bring such valuable information on the impacts on-reserve—I guess rez dogs on reserve, pets that we have. I think it's important to say to this government that whenever there is legislation coming through that's going to have an impact in Ontario, you should speak to First Nations. Just because of that jurisdiction-on-reserve issue, that doesn't mean that we are not part of Ontario. We need to come together as people to be able to address these things.

But that's a great question.

Remarks in Anishiniimowin.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you to the member from London North Centre. I thank you for your remarks. I know that we share the same kind of concern about the unethical puppy sales act. I want to learn a little bit more

of your response, that we should ban breeding of female dogs at too young of an age.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to the member from Richmond Hill for the question. There are some things in this bill which are acceptable and things that I think do move the needle forward. I don't think it goes far enough, but there are such things as not allowing dogs to be bred under the age of one; as well, not breeding them with too many litters back to back; as well as a certain length of time after the animal has been out of heat, but also making sure that young puppies, those baby animals, are kept with their mother for a length of time, which makes good sense. We want to make sure that they have access to their mother's milk. We want to make sure that that helps them grow and be nourished and also be socialized in a way that is proper.

1400

But this bill is toothless in other ways. It is toothless in making sure there's a licensing regime and that there is enforcement. So it's a step in the right direction, but it's not a very big step.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. Deepak Anand: I was listening to the member opposite, and I was thinking about what the president for the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals said, that the PUPS Act “is a welcome and important step towards protecting dogs from unethical breeders and addressing the issue of puppy mills throughout our province.”

So my question is very simple to the member opposite: Do you agree with the president of the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals—yes or no?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to the member from Mississauga–Malton for the question. I've outlined in my presentation the things that this bill does well, but I think there are a great many things this bill is missing. There are so many opportunities within this bill to make improvements. I believe that there needs to be broader stakeholder engagement. I've mentioned a number of different voices which you need to be listening to, to make sure that you're actually adequately standing up for animals, for their protection here in the province.

As well, I'm hoping that the government members will have listened to my appeal for funding for the Humane Society London and Middlesex and their new location at 1414 Dundas Street. It's a brilliant plan. I've invited the minister there. I've spoken and sent letters to the finance minister as well. I hope that you will engage with them and make sure that they get the funding that they have requested, which was \$1.5 million.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions? And I want to apologize to the member for Waterloo for missing the rotation. It was my error.

I recognize the member from Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Currently provincial animal welfare inspectors are badly understaffed. The member referenced this. A CBC

investigation found that inspections were significantly down since the law was changed. Now, under the OSPCA, inspectors issued between 16,148 orders and laid 1,946 provincial criminal charges. That was between 2015 and 2018. However, since the PAWS law has been passed, PAWS inspectors only laid 6,970 orders and laid 667 provincial and criminal charges between 2020 and 2023. That's a significant reduction in holding people and organizations to account for how they're treating animals.

What does the member say, and how does this bill address this really serious issue around enforcement?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to my seatmate from Waterloo for an excellent question. I think it's important to recognize, after that CBC investigation, which blew a lid off of those numbers, the government has responded by stating that they are going to hire more PAWS officers, because I think the numbers are very clear. As you've said, in a similar three-year period, there are well under half of the orders the PAWS investigators have laid as opposed to the OSPCA, and with the other numbers, it's a third of provincial criminal charges in 2020 to 2023 as opposed to 2015 to 2018.

So the government should know that they have a problem, that there is not enough enforcement, that they're not looking after animals in a really solid, thorough way. But part of this, I strongly believe, as well, is knowing where those puppy mills are and making sure that they are licensed, making sure that there are inspections, making sure that we're going in proactively to make sure that bad things aren't happening. Really, the government should have learned its lesson with long-term care, where they cancelled inspections and were only going in and doing spot inspections prior to the pandemic, and we see what happened to our treasured seniors.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

Ms. Jess Dixon: I'm very happy to stand up and have the opportunity to speak about this act, and seeing as I have the floor, I want to tell a story that's unrelated but—well, somewhat related, but personal to me.

I articulated in the Ottawa crown attorney's office, and when I was an articling student there, there was an animal cruelty case in Ottawa that sort of took the media by storm. It's interesting because in animal cruelty cases, they are unusual by being almost universally the only cases that are identified by the name of the victim as versus by the name of the accused. That doesn't happen with person-on-person violence. So this was the Breezy case.

In this situation, a very violent and disturbed young man had a black Lab puppy. One of the things that's sort of sadly interesting about animal cruelty is its connection to domestic and family violence, and animals being used as tools of intimidation. He had a habit of being quite abusive to his mother, and on this day, his mother wouldn't let him in the house because she was scared of him.

The dog, Breezy, was in the backyard of their home, so he took the puppy and he went around the front of the house where there was a big picture window, and his

mother was in the living room, and he proceeded to—the dog, Breezy, should have died. He beat her with a large construction shovel, raising the shovel over his head and bringing it down on her skull. He was wearing steel-toed boots and he kicked her multiple times with it. And finally, when she stopped trying to get up, he took her body and he threw it, up and over, into an empty renovation bin.

The first officer on scene had the presence of mind—she thought the dog, Breezy, was dead. She had the presence of mind to take a photo from the top of the garbage bin—like, one of those ones that's about six feet down. It was empty at the time and you could just see this tiny, little black body in a pool of blood. Miraculously, she didn't die. She should have died. I don't know how she lived, but she lived.

Anyway, it attracted an enormous media storm and a large petition movement calling on the Ottawa crown's office to treat this case appropriately. I had been agitating to be part of this case before the petition had even happened, after we first got the file, and I was one of the first people to see the file. I was an articling student at the time.

What was really interesting about this case was, less than a year before that, the federal government had brought in new Criminal Code legislation. So prior to this amendment, animal cruelty had been only what's called a summary offence, which is the lowest grade of offence. So here, we have summary and indictable, similar to the States' misdemeanour and felony. Very recently—I think it was only maybe six months, maybe a year before that—Parliament had voted to amend the animal cruelty provision in the Criminal Code to make it a hybrid offence, which means it is subject to election. So the crown, in assessing the case, can choose to proceed by indictment or by summary conviction.

Luckily, there's a crown in Ottawa, who I actually have talked to about this bill—I've remained in contact with her; her name is Tara Dobec. She is, by far, one of the biggest champions for not just criminal prosecutions but also provincial prosecutions regarding animals. I went to her and basically said something along the lines of, "Tara, can you please assign yourself to this case and can I please be part of it?"

It became obvious that the accused was most likely going to plead guilty, but the issue is that we were going to be and became the—it was the first case in all of Canada where the crown proceeded by indictment, so we were in completely uncharted territory, legally.

When you're preparing for sentence, usually speaking, you prepare your sentencing charts. You do your sentencing research to look at similar cases and see what consequences they have got. But hither to this point, sentences for animal cruelty in Canada were laughable—absolutely laughable, insulting. We knew that defence counsel was going to bring us cases that had a similarly laughable sentencing regime and we were going to argue that because that was the standard, we should apply the standard now.

1410

Our issue became how to make an argument on sentencing that would encourage the judge to completely disregard all prior sentencing law in this brand new world that we were in. We also wanted—because when you’re looking at sentencing cases as part of research, you want the judge’s decision on sentence to include as much obiter comment and facts as possible, because then that case becomes a seminal case in prosecuting these offences elsewhere.

What I did at the time was I ended up—I went through, in painstaking detail, all of the Hansard debates about this change to the legislation in the federal Parliament, and it was fascinating because what they were talking about, their reason for doing it, was all to do with domestic and intimate partner violence and family violence. In some ways, they had overcome the opposition of some people who had that “it’s just an animal” attitude by saying, “Even if you think it’s just an animal, it’s also connected to this other extremely dangerous aspect in society.”

Then we went back, and we looked at the few other cases where Parliament had gone from summary to hybrid, and we prepared, I think, possibly the most comprehensive sentencing casebook that we’ve ever been part of, and almost 10 years ago now—it was June 2014—that individual was sentenced. Not only was it the first time in Canada where the crown proceeded by indictment, but it was also the first time in Canada for the accused to receive the maximum sentence. He received two years less a day on the animal cruelty alone, which was an unheard-of sentence at the time, and honestly remains, I think, probably one of the proudest moments in my legal career, and I was still articling at the time.

It’s fascinating; as somebody who has prosecuted, formerly, SPCA offences myself on many occasions, the fact that I’m standing in the Ontario Parliament now, becoming part of the Hansard debate on a law that is concerned with animal welfare, feels like a very full-circle moment to me. I will be very excited to see the first successful prosecution under this new legislation.

To talk again briefly about the legislation, I know I have spoken to some people who are not as big of a dog lover as I am that may question why we are doing this, and—frankly, I think it’s a misattributed quote, so I don’t really want to attribute in to Gandhi because I don’t think it’s actually accurate, but there’s that statement that we judge a society’s humanity on the basis of how it treats its most vulnerable. I will not say that we are close to any measure of perfection or even adequacy as far as that measurement goes, but every step forward is in itself a positive impact.

When we talk about puppy mills, particularly, they are an endeavour that is motivated by greed. It gives an opportunity for people who are lacking in ethics, lacking in kindness, compassion, morality, to keep dogs, a very loving and gentle animal, in often appalling circumstances in order to operate with very low overhead and generate puppies that can be sold for the profit of the operator.

When we look at how you prosecute this and why there needs to be a specific offence—because there are arguments that, “Okay, we already have a distress provision, so why not proceed under a distress provision?” The issue here is—it’s not akin to what happened federally, but one of the arguments that I literally made in convincing that judge to give that sentence, two years less a day, was I said, “The very fact that Parliament voted on this, that Parliament voted to make this a hybrid offence and give the crown the opportunity to proceed by indictment, is sending a clear message that the people of Canada, as meted out by the representative democracy, are saying that this particular offence”—in that case, animal cruelty; in this case, the operation of puppy mills—“is a particularly negative, pernicious behaviour that the government wishes to call out, name, shame in a very specific fashion.” That is part of the reason why this is so important: It is a clear message from this government to say that this is conduct that is not acceptable in Ontario society.

There’s also a significant amount of, what I would say is almost a consumer protection aspect to this. Now, I will be honest: I do not come from the supportive side of the “Adopt, don’t shop” logo. I own a purebred dog that I paid for, and I am far more likely to support the idea of, “Buy, own, possess your dog in a responsible and ethical manner.” Supporting ethical breeders is something that I’m happy to endorse versus the idea of just continually trying to deal with the overflow of unwanted animals that we’re seeing right now. Frankly, that overflow of unwanted dogs is in large part coming from puppy mills because they can simply churn out any number of litters and tack a multi-thousand-dollar price tag onto them and rake in the money. They rarely pay taxes or anything like that.

A lot of these dogs—never mind the parents of these dogs—are coming inbred, poorly socialized, riddled with disease, riddled with parasites. There is a statistical correlation between mill dogs and bite incidents, lack of socialization. So you have people who have failed to do their research properly to find the flags of a puppy mill and have bought these animals, brought them to their home—often at a fairly significant personal expense and emotional investment—only to find out that they have bought a dog that is ill, that in many cases they may now be just as in love with as any member of their family, but facing thousands of dollars in veterinary costs and a great deal of emotional distress. So by punishing these types of bad actors, we’re also protecting the Ontarians that wish to welcome a dog into their life, but want to do so responsibly.

I also want to briefly address the member from Kiiwetinoong’s concerns. I agree with some of what he said about the state of dogs up in the north; it’s considerably different than it is in the rest of southern Ontario, and a lot of that is to do with the lack of access to veterinarians. I’m pleased that our government has been providing more supports to OVC to open up more opportunities for veterinarians to train, but in a lot of these fly-in communities that wouldn’t be able to support a veterinarian themselves, he’s right: There is very little access to basic veterinary care or surgical services.

However—and I'll pull out a little bit of the lawyer stuff—as I said, I prosecuted these types of offences. Although it changed from SPCA to PAWS, the framework remains the exact same, and what is key to understand with PAWS offences, as well as with offences under Bill 159, is that these are what are called strict-liability offences.

I'll do a little mini-class on that. Strict liability implies that when you are dealing with this offence, there's no mens rea to it—so there doesn't need to be any intention to commit the act. The crown, the prosecutor, merely has to prove that the act itself was committed, and that is on the highest standard of proof, which is beyond a reasonable doubt. Unlike an absolute-liability offence, in a strict-liability offence, the accused person has the opportunity to raise one of two defences, even though there is no mens rea component, and those two defences are mistake of fact and due diligence.

I think that is what would, frankly, operate to mitigate that member's concerns about animals on northern reserves, because while we get to the point that the crown has, for example, proven that you have violated a section of the new Bill 159—we've made it past the actus reus; we've made it past the burden of proof of beyond a reasonable doubt—however, the accused then has the opportunity to raise their defence. I think that in the case of a lot of northern dogs—and I don't want to be seen to be making a sweeping legal statement here; this is just an interpretation of one person, in no way binding. What I anticipate would happen is—the assessment of due diligence is essentially whether or not a reasonable person in the same situation would have taken all possible steps to prevent the event from happening.

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I personally believe that, in the event of northern dogs being born in the conditions in which they are being born, it would be fairly easy for a person, if it had moved to charges, which I don't think it would, but if it had moved to charges for the person to be able to show a due-diligence defence, because the court would be obligated to take into consideration the fact that that person had no realistic access to veterinary services, no realistic access to spay and neuter services, that we have a massive overpopulation in those areas.

So I understand the member's concerns. In fact, that was something that initially occurred to me when I was looking at this legislation in the context of a PMB, but as somebody who has prosecuted this, I believe that were it to ever get to the point of charges, which I would find incredibly unlikely, that due diligence defence, essentially, would operate to prevent the type of people in his community or the Matawan community from actually bearing any responsibility legally for this.

I don't know if that put his mind to rest at all, but I certainly understand his concerns. I raised them myself, and that is my own answer to my own concerns.

Ultimately, I am very, very pleased to be seeing this today. It's a very small step, but right before I started my election campaign, I lost my dog. He was only three, and I lost him after a 10-month battle with terminal illness. I

won't say how much I spent on him because it appalls many people, but if time or money or tears or trips to the vet would have saved him, he would still be here; ultimately I lost. But it offends me on a deep moral level to see other people treating dogs like throwaway items that can be used and abused and profited from in any way.

I realize that we have a lot of distance to travel when it comes to animal welfare, but I am still in a position where I will celebrate the taking of this particular step and I am really looking forward to seeing, from the sidelines now, the first time that charges are laid under this new provision. I will be following with great excitement whatever provincial prosecutor first takes the reins on this and follows a prosecution to its conclusion. I think it will be a landmark day, and while specific deterrence and general deterrence are not always the strongest of sentencing principles, when you have offences that are motivated by greed, as a puppy mill operation is, the knowledge that conviction can happen and that the financial consequences of such can be swift and drastic I do think will have a significant impact on the perpetrators of this type of offence.

I also hope that it will give some support or some relief to our animal welfare inspectors as well, because part of what this does is it gives them a much clearer framework under which to actually lay charges rather than the more sort of amorphous area that is general distress provisions. So I am hoping that they will find it easier to investigate and lay charges against perpetrators, and I am hoping that—as I said, I'm looking forward to hearing the stories of the first provincial prosecutors who pursue prosecution under this offence.

Ultimately, I'll be voting for it, and I'm proud to be a part of it.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): It's now time for questions.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from Kitchener South—Hespeler for making the very important connection between domestic violence and animal mistreatment. I attended an event once where a woman very clearly told us that she specifically stayed in that relationship because of her dog. The dog, in the end, actually saved her life, because she was facing one more beating and the dog intervened. She got out of there with the dog at the end of the day. But it's an important connection to be made. If people are willing to mistreat animals, they're often willing to mistreat a human being.

I do want to say, I don't think we deserve dogs, personally. I know we're both dog lovers. I much prefer their company to people, I must tell you as well, which shouldn't surprise too many people.

But according to advocates, the key piece of any statute, of any law, is the enforcement. So how willing is the province to resource and equip PAWS animal welfare inspectors to enforce these standards? Because this is the key piece.

Ms. Jess Dixon: I appreciate the member's comments about domestic violence. I will be very enthusiastically looking forward to hearing some of the experts that testify

before our upcoming IPV committee. But one of the reasons that I think this does something is that when you look at the framework of how these prosecutions work, the crown doesn't, in fact, prosecute these; municipal prosecutors do, who are funded by municipalities, not by the province.

Animal investigations and prosecutions are extremely time-consuming and difficult. They attract media attention. They drag on for days and days and days. When you are a busy provincial prosecutor just trying to get through your HTA cases, frankly, these can fall behind. That further discourages our hard-working animal welfare inspectors.

By tacking on a very, very high fine, it significantly focuses and increases, I think, the desire and motivation for provincial prosecutors to prioritize these types of offences. So that is how I think this will have a significant impact.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Question?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I want to thank my colleague for her comments. I appreciated her lived experience, both as a prosecutor and as a pet owner. Like the members of this House, dogs are mostly good listeners, but they have their own minds as well, so they often make their own decisions, despite what we say.

Interjection.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Yes.

I also appreciate that it was a little like going back to law school, hearing about strict liability, absolute liability, obiter dicta—all terms that take me back to my law school days.

But my question to the member is the importance of the minimum sentences: In her experience as a crown prosecutor, how does she think that these minimum sentences or fines are going to make this bill more impactful?

Ms. Jess Dixon: Thank you for that great question. It will have a massive impact.

I did a lot of, at the time, SPCA prosecutions. The very last one I did before leaving the crown was a cat-hoarding case. That was six days of trial on cat hoarding alone with a single, self-represented defendant. I ended up getting a three-year prohibition. I don't even know if I got a fine. So that was six days of trial that I didn't end up being able to spend on the HTA offences that, frankly, fill up the municipality's coffers.

By having these very high fines, as somebody that operated as a provincial prosecutor, I would feel much more comfortable taking six days of provincial court trial time knowing that I would be getting a very significant fine as a result. So I think it has a huge impact.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you to the member for Kitchener South–Hespeler for her remarks about this bill.

I actually want to echo something that was said earlier in this debate by my colleague the member for London North Centre. He and I are both big fans of the London humane society. We both got our cats from the London humane society and are very excited about the move of the new home of the humane society in London.

This is a big undertaking. It requires significant support from the public and from other levels of government. The municipal government has stepped up. The federal government has stepped up. Londoners have stepped up, but there has been no commitment from the province.

I'm hoping, in the context of the initiatives that have been brought forward by this government to support animal welfare, that this is something that would be considered. So I'm asking the member if that would be the case.

Ms. Jess Dixon: I've followed the journey of the London humane society on Instagram. They have great social media, and they are creating a beautiful facility.

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If I could snap my fingers and dispense money to all these institutions, I would. However, I must say that, with all due respect to London, I would be advocating for the Humane Society of Kitchener Waterloo and Stratford Perth first, which is also planning on doing a similar expansion. I've done what I can. I think the issue with these types of projects is they tend to sort of fall between ministries.

But I really appreciate the work that these organizations do, both London and the Kitchener-Waterloo and Stratford-Perth humane societies. We would be quite lost without them.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: I really appreciate the member's comments explaining how extremely impactful it can be when you see something that you just love so dearly being hurt.

I think a lot of times that we're in this House, we debate bills and people out there, who are not always watching, are kind of wondering why we are talking about something like this. So I just wonder if the member can explain to those who might catch this in their searching why a bill like this is so important and why they should care about it—especially those who have cats. I have cats and we love our cats. Shout-out to Loki. But explain to us why a bill like this is just really important, why it should matter to them.

Ms. Jess Dixon: I think the first part is the fact that this bill is drawing the issue of puppy mills out into the daylight. These are things that operate on private property; in dark and locked-up barns; in cramped circumstances; in fetid, unbelievable conditions. And unfortunately, a lot of people really have no idea what a puppy mill even is. So the fact that the government is actually choosing to spend time and debate time on this issue, I think, forces people to even type into Google "What is a puppy mill," which would get a lot farther as far as even not supporting them.

But the other part that I touched on briefly is that even for those who may not feel a particular affiliation with animals or with dogs, there is a very significant consumer protection angle here, as well, which is the fact that people spend thousands and thousands of dollars on mill dogs that they bring home that are disease-ridden, full of parasites, inbred, unsocialized, prone to bites, and then often

dropped off at our humane societies that are absolutely crippled under the load of pandemic dogs. So that's why I think this is important.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Ms. Jessica Bell: I would like to thank the member for Kitchener South—Hespeler for bringing up the very real issue of the link between domestic violence and abuse of animals, and it was a relief to hear that Breezy was okay.

My question is about how this bill could be improved and strengthened. We have been approached by animal welfare and animal rights advocates who are very concerned about the care of wild animals in captivity. We're talking the care of animals in roadside zoos, in very small—or the care of a wild animal that's owned by a private individual. They're very worried that these animals just don't have the kind of protections that a cat or a dog would have.

Is there interest from this government to strengthen this bill in committee to ensure that wild animals in captivity have basic standards, welfare standards, as well?

Ms. Jess Dixon: I can say that as far as Bill 159 goes, it is restricted by what it is. It's the Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act, so wildlife would not be considered now or in committee.

However, I can say to the member that I meet and hear from the same people, and the government, I know—as I look over at a member in particular—has a number of extremely active supporters of increasing those types of standards. So that issue is far from lacking in champions on both sides of this House.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): It's now time for further debate. Further debate?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I rise to talk about Bill 159, preventing unethical puppy sales. We know this is a serious problem and that, in these cases, the dogs are treated simply as commodities, and it's all about profit. We do see this happening also with seniors, I have to say, with housing and long-term care, that there's a lot of that mixed in there as well—profit taking. According to advocates, the key piece to any statute or regulations will be on the enforcement and inspection end. I will come to talk about how that's happening on the ground right now a little bit later.

We do know that provincial animal welfare inspectors are badly understaffed right now. We also know that the abuse of animals doesn't begin and end with puppy mills but also with other animals that are bred illegally and sold and not kept well.

One of the things that really struck me right away with this bill—and I think there are ways to improve the bill and I think that requiring licensing is one of those ways. But I'm struck by the contradiction with the section of Bill 91 that slipped in this thing about train and trail areas, which had been actually outlawed in 1997. There were only 24 of these areas left in the province, and then all of a sudden, in a bill that was about something completely different, we have a section that allows that business to expand again. It's a very cruel business that traps coyotes,

foxes, rabbits and uses them as bait and trains the dogs to rip them to shreds. It does seem like a contradiction that some animals we care about and other animals we're prepared to let them be ripped to shreds. It struck me as a favour to somebody, because it had nothing to do with anything else in the bill at the time.

I'd like to look a little bit at what's going on in Thunder Bay. Robin Ratz, founder and board chair of Murillo Mutts—Murillo is a small community in Thunder Bay—Atikokan, and it's a specialized rescue facility. She says:

“Unfortunately, I guess my question would be is ‘What are the consequences, or how are they going to find out about these puppy mills?’”

And: “She said there are multiple puppy mills in the Thunder Bay area, including one that Murillo Mutts had a ‘really bad experience’ with last Christmas.

“A local resident had obtained a dog from a breeder, only to find out that the pup was extremely ill.

“In order for us to assist people like that, we have to have them surrender their animal to get care without our vet. Unfortunately, the puppy was too sick, and died. The breeder ended up contacting our rescue, and she had a second sick puppy and promised she would get it to the vet. The next day, she called and acknowledged she had no money to pay for vetting, so we brought that puppy into care as well. Between the first dog and the second dog, fees, stuff we had to throw out because it was parvo [virus], we lost about \$7,000 worth of stuff.”

This is a volunteer rescue organization.

“She questions whether the government's proposed crackdown goes far enough, pointing to a clause in the new legislation that would prohibit breeding a female dog excessively.”

The question is: “‘How are you gonna tell that a dog's been bred more than three times in two years?’ she asked. ‘I don't really think it's going to stop. It's going to take a lot of people getting those \$25,000 fines.... It usually takes an outcry before anything happens, and by then how many animals have already suffered, and how many people, like I said, at the hands of an unethical breeder?’”

So there are definitely people in the Thunder Bay area making a living off of puppy mills.

“It's just wrong to do that to an animal. Some of them just over-breed them, and they live in horrible conditions ... the laws don't protect the dogs, so they just keep going on.”

Further: “She recalled a local situation where provincial animal welfare services was informed about pups in distress, and visited the breeder to give advice but left all the dogs behind.”

I'm going to get into a case where there was an attempt to bring in supports to deal with the abuse of animals. This is what the ministry says: “Generally speaking, the most urgent calls are responded to on the same day, where possible, but there may be times when it takes longer to respond due to when the call may have been received or because an inspector is already responding to other urgent matters.”

This is a story that took place in Rosspoint, Ontario. It was a case where there were seven dogs in a house. Some

of them had escaped, and there was constant barking, and so many, many people tried to reach the provincial animal welfare officers.

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On September 2, OPP officers came and tried to help with the dogs. There was a “public safety issue of unattended aggressive dogs running at large and attacking each other.

“The Ontario Animal Protection Call Centre was called by numerous residents” the next day, September 3, “as the dogs in question had been left unattended in high heat for over 24 hours. The call centre staff in Sudbury could not locate Rossport when I called, despite the community having a unique postal code, and was triaged as an emergency.”

Let’s just think about this for a minute. Because the person at the end of the call for provincial animal welfare officers was in Sudbury—that’s about 12 hours from Thunder Bay and 10 hours from Rossport, and they had no idea where Rossport is. Anybody who has travelled on the North Shore of Superior would know Rossport. It’s what’s called an unorganized community, but it is very much a community and clearly a community that cared, because so many got on the phone to try and address this issue.

So on September 3, they called the OPP again and “were told the OPP would not respond as animal welfare was the responsibility of the animal welfare service. The humane society was also called and the resident was told they would not respond outside of Thunder Bay city boundaries.” Rossport’s about two hours outside of Thunder Bay so it doesn’t qualify. “As it was, the two OPP officers who responded on September 2 ... did an admirable job in capturing the aggressive dog running loose in the community....

“The situation was a total breakdown for the protection of animals that were in distress and constituted a public safety situation in an unorganized community. As Rossport does not have bylaws or enforcement officers to deal with these situations, residents must rely on provincial agencies to deliver their mandated duties....

“By not having an officer respond on September 3, they are not going to be able to view first-hand the conditions the dogs were left in (it’s like having the police show up 48 hours after a murder and allowing the scene to be sanitized).”

The other piece of this was that when they did finally reach someone, the officer said, “Well, the next day is a statutory holiday. Today’s the 4th. We’ve got a statutory holiday, so we’re just not going to come.” I can’t actually imagine anybody coming all the way from Sudbury to Rossport.

So there is a problem of not having animal welfare officers where they’re needed throughout the region.

Now, the next letter I’m looking at is from somebody who works for PAWS. He’s on leave for mental health stress, and that stress has come from not being able to rescue animals he knew were in distress. So cumulative post-traumatic stress disorder is what he’s dealing with.

He says, “Ontario public service ... has been nothing but incompetent due to me and my children having to go without pay for months at a time due to ... lack of communication with other entities.”

So, apart from the specific incidents that he’s talking about, the bulk of what he’s talking about is that this changeover from the OSPCA to PAWS has not resulted in better care; it’s resulted in worse. What we know is that the cost for PAWS is actually quite a bit more than it was before, but we’re seeing fewer results, we’re seeing fewer charges, and we are seeing traumatized workers.

So partly, he writes, “It has taken OPS a year to pay employees back for expenses” and the process at this time still had not taken place. “In Thunder Bay, where I was based since 2014, veterinarians and boarding facilities will not work with animal welfare services now because they don’t pay their bills or the processing times are ridiculous” and “this is province-wide, and their stats and information sent to the government are made up.”

Now, obviously, something like this letter is hearsay, but it does suggest that there are problems in the service that need to be addressed and need to be addressed at the Solicitor General’s level.

He goes on to say, “They were pushing inspectors to write more orders, seize more animals, and lay charges.... I’ve been doing this since 2014 and many others who were let go at the beginning because they spoke out against upper management on the legalities....” Again, I won’t go into that too much, because it’s a specific case.

But he does go on to say, “The government states they care about their staff and their first responders, but it seems to be all talk. It’s said by the remaining staff we are not saving any animals, just processing dead bodies.

“I waited five months for a warrant which, as per the legislation, I didn’t even require because the senior staff didn’t know what they were doing. I had to tell my senior investigator how to lay a charge which I had to send mine to him for approval, but they didn’t know ... how to write one....

“The warrant never came, and my partner was let go because he questioned the managers,” but he says he “was one of the best inspectors in the province.”

The point is, it’s funny that they “could write warrants in” their “sleep before ... and they were always approved by the senior justice of the peace at the courts and didn’t need a five-month approval process where animals go on suffering and dying of starvation. And yes, this is still ongoing” now. He was “finally given the approval and went to the property, and I walked into a barn full of dead and emaciated pigs. It haunts me to this day, the pain these animals suffered needlessly.”

I met that gentleman. He did come to our office, and those are stories that are very hard to hear, because he already knew that this was taking place and because of mismanagement—who knows what—he wasn’t given the means to actually address the problem and now has to live with what he saw and the pain and suffering of those animals.

“Other advocates have voiced frustration about PAWS since it was created in 2019, taking over for the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals....

“In animal abuse cases, some enforcement tools at their disposal include orders, provincial charges or criminal charges.

“But according to data obtained by CBC Hamilton through a freedom-of-information request, PAWS investigations are leading to far fewer orders and charges compared to when the OSPCA oversaw animal welfare.

“Ross, from the Ministry of the Solicitor General, didn’t give possible reasons for the drop in the number of charges ... but said the team is ‘highly trained,’ and some requests fall under the jurisdiction of police or local bylaw enforcement.”

But we saw in the case of Rosspport that, in fact, there wasn’t really coverage. There wasn’t anything there to support those animals or help the people who were aware of what was happening to those animals to do something about it, because there was also no food and water for them.

From 2015 to the end of 2018, the OSPCA conducted 64,000-plus investigations and issued 16,000-plus orders, and laid almost 2,000 provincial and criminal charges. From 2020 to June 30, 2023, I believe this is, PAWS conducted at least 70,000 investigations, almost 7,000 orders, but only laid 667 provincial and criminal charges.

Now, it’s pretty clear to me in reading about the Rosspport case—it’s laid out in quite a bit of detail—that charges would have been warranted in that case, but there was nobody there to actually follow through again and look after the animals.

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PAWS has an annual budget of roughly \$21 million, far more than the \$5.75 million budget of the OSPCA. That is really the question: Why is PAWS, with a vastly larger budget, issuing fewer orders? The data suggests the province needs to provide more support for animal welfare services and be more transparent—so it might not be about more money, it might be about money better spent.

Jennifer Friedman, a former OSPCA lawyer who now practises privately says that it’s troubling to hear the drop in charges and orders, especially given what many of her clients are telling her.

What needs to change? Coulter says that PAWS needs far more than its roughly 100 inspectors to thoroughly and quickly investigate cases across Ontario. She noted that the Toronto Transit Commission has more inspectors, with 110. But the TTC is located in Toronto, so if you compare that to having 100 inspectors over the entire province, you can see why the law is not being applied even as it is without even this new law in place. She added that more training and protective measures for inspectors are also needed. I think that’s probably a good place to stop.

I do want to note and thank the member from Kiiwetinoong for his comments on the situation in First Nations communities with dogs and the lack of access to veterinary care. I was really pleased to hear about Matawa’s pilot project, and I hope that part of that pilot

project is training community members to be able to give vaccinations. We know that having fully trained veterinarians available to go to communities as often as needed is difficult, even though we will be getting more veterinarians trained in Thunder Bay. One of the suggestions that’s come to our office is that if more community members could be trained to administer those vaccinations—obviously they can’t do spaying which requires a different level of skill and training, but to at least give the vaccinations, then they could be eliminating the spread of parvovirus and other parasites and problems.

In regard to the bill itself, it’s a step forward. I would like to see it have more teeth, and I’m hoping that when it goes to committee that will be possible, and that the idea of having licences for dog breeders is really thoroughly considered and hopefully put in to the legislation before it comes back for third reading. I think there’s a very practical aspect to having those licences, in that, if you go to a place, it’s easy to see a licence, it’s very quick to determine whether it’s a legitimate facility or not.

I think I’ll stop there. Thank you for the time and the opportunity to speak to this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): It’s now time for questions.

Mr. John Jordan: Thank you to the member opposite for her comments and really bringing to the House’s attention the reason for this bill. The stories that you’re telling are what we’re trying to prevent.

When I think about this bill—strengthening the inspections and the power of the inspectors when they go to sites, providing higher regulations and standards and communicating those out to the breeders and also educating the public so that these bad actors can be identified.

You mentioned the number of inspections, which actually have stayed fairly consistent, but the number of orders have declined. I think that would be my expectation as we improve the system and go through, and it will be further improved with this bill. I’m wondering if the member opposite would agree with that.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you for your comments. I also hope to see similar results. The part that worries me is that—you might be right; perhaps that is why the number of charges has gone down. It’s difficult to say.

What I’m concerned about is the number of inspectors and what’s going on in PAWS, because it sounds to me like all is not well and that the cost has gone up, but the well-being of people doing the inspections is not being looked after. And then there are geographical gaps where there is no service whatsoever.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Questions?

Mr. Jeff Burch: My friend from Thunder Bay—Superior North spoke about transparency in animal welfare services. I’m wondering if they’re satisfied with the level of transparency that this bill brings and how that will help with agencies in the Thunder Bay area.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I would hope that this bill would bring more transparency, but I’m not sure that I see the brass tacks to actually do that. What I have people coming in and asking for is also more transparency from PAWS

and regular reporting from PAWS, which we're not seeing right now. So anything that can be put in this bill that requires that transparency so that we can really all see what is happening and feel confident that life is getting better for animals, that will be to our benefit.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you to the member opposite for their remarks. We know puppy mills are the site of significant animal welfare violations. I, myself, am an animal owner and an animal lover. We know of things like overbreeding, crowded and unsanitary conditions, lack of veterinary care, amongst other issues.

This legislation, if passed, will set more stringent rules, including minimum fines, to hold puppy mill operators accountable. Does the member opposite agree that puppy mill operations—these kinds of harmful breeding practices cause both physical and mental harm to dogs in the province. Just wondering if you agree with—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for response.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you very much for the question. Yes, of course. They cause harm to the animals. They also cause harm to the people who take them home. I have seen that with friends who have been shattered by taking home animals who didn't have the capacity to survive or have a good life. So I agree completely that puppy mills need to be addressed. I support it.

Again, it's always in the application. Do we have the tools to make sure that the mills are stopped, that they're found and that it's possible to actually observe what is going on? That's really my concern.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you to the member for Thunder Bay–Superior North for her presentation on the amendment to the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act, 2019.

When I think about pets, when I think about puppies, when I think about dogs, I remember there are 134 First Nations in Ontario; in my riding, we have 31. I never really thought about this until now. I remember going from door to door; I don't know if it was during a campaign or just a regular door to door. I remember one recommendation that I got from the community members. They said, "Make sure you take a hockey stick." I said, "Why?" "Because of those rez dogs. Because of those dogs." I had to actually turn back because all of a sudden, you hear barking. All of a sudden, they come together. Then, all of a sudden, they start barking at me, so I had to turn back.

Is this bill going to help to address that issue for on-reserve rez dogs and on-reserve people to make sure that they're safe?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you for the question, to the member from Kiiwetinoong. That is a simple answer: No, it won't address that. As with many things in the House, what happens in First Nations communities is often hived

off somewhere to the side and is not part of the thought process that goes into how bills are constructed.

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The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. Aris Babikian: My question is to the member: if she agrees with the president of the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, who said that the PUPS Act is "a welcome and important step towards protecting dogs from unethical breeders and addressing the issue of puppy mills throughout our province."

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I think we all agree in this House that that is an issue, and I'm happy that the OSPCA is saying, "Yes, this is a good step forward." We just feel that the bill could be stronger than it is and that it's not fully addressing all of the issues that are there that are allowing puppy mills to proliferate.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you to my colleague the member for Thunder Bay–Superior North for her contribution to this debate today. She did raise the concern that we have shared, I think repeatedly on this side of the House, about the effectiveness of this bill if there are not the enforcement measures in place to follow up and deal with unethical puppy mills. I understand that there are only about 100 PAWS Act inspectors, and we have heard stories of acts of animal cruelty that have not been followed up on, not addressed, because of the lack of enforcement. Can she elaborate a bit more on that concern?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you to the member for that important question. As I was saying earlier, the only inspector who answered the phone was in Sudbury, and the one incident in question was taking place in Rosspport. It's a 10-hour drive between Sudbury and Rosspport, so there's absolutely no possibility of anyone coming to aid in that situation.

So we need more inspectors working for PAWS, and we need to be looking at what's going on within that organization, because there aren't enough inspectors, but there is more money being spent.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Mississauga–Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: To the member opposite: I was looking at the Toronto Humane Society, which said, "As an organization dedicated to improving the lives of animals, we applaud this push for stronger legislation against puppy mills."

Puppy mills often fail to keep a dog with a contagious disease away from other dogs or animals. Does the member agree that dogs raised in these types of conditions need to be taken care of?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have time for a quick response.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Yes, they need to be taken care of. It would be better if they weren't bred in the first place, which we hope that this bill will at least have some force in eliminating.

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

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE
POLICY

Mr. Trevor Jones: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order: the member for Chatham-Kent–Leamington.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent that, pursuant to standing order 112 and notwithstanding standing order 113(a), the Standing Committee on Justice Policy be authorized to examine, inquire into and report on intimate partner violence.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Jones, Chatham-Kent–Leamington, is seeking the unanimous consent of the House that, pursuant to standing order 112 and notwithstanding standing order 113(a), the Standing Committee on Justice Policy be authorized to examine, inquire into and report on intimate partner violence. Agreed? Agreed.

Motion agreed to.

PREVENTING UNETHICAL
PUPPY SALES ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 SUR LA PRÉVENTION
DE LA VENTE DE CHIOTS CONTRAIRE
À L'ÉTHIQUE

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

Mr. Adil Shamji: I thank all in the House for giving me this opportunity to share my perspective on Bill 159, the Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act. Over the course of my few minutes together with all of you, I plan on doing a few things: discussing some of the dogs in my life, who underscore the importance of passing this legislation; describing the context and landscape within which puppies are bred currently in the province of Ontario; outlining some of the things that this bill does, some of which are good; and then also highlighting some of the shortcomings which need to be addressed if this bill is to ultimately pass.

I want to begin by dedicating these remarks in particular to two dogs—one, to Stewie, a stunning black Labrador, who was the ultimate gentleman, who ultimately passed earlier this week, on Monday, at the age of 14. Even to the very end, he won over our hearts by still doing a dance for his families. His long life and his beautiful temperament, in my opinion, are a testament to the loving care that he got from his parents. I believe that this bill aspires to deliver that same loving care to every dog in this province.

Another dog that recently passed away is Lexi, a most loving, gorgeous goldendoodle. She passed away just a few weeks ago from an aggressive form of cancer. She left us too soon. She was a true friend of everyone: to my own dog and to the many people in our neighbourhood, who will miss her and, again, are reminded through her beautiful temperament of the importance of a caring and loving environment for dogs around us.

There are many more dogs in my life, in my neighbourhood, in community, in Don Valley East. I want to make, finally, one special mention of my own pup, Petunia, a four-year-old half golden retriever, half cocker spaniel, who is convinced that she's a sea otter because she loves to swim so much, and only wants to eat all day. Her full name is Petunia Wigglebottom, and she very much lives up to her name.

In reflecting on all of these dogs, it reminds me of the unconditional love that we feel from them. It is a reminder that for as much as they very much look after us, we need to look after them and we need to protect them. That protection begins very much at birth.

When I picked up Petunia, when we first got her four years ago and I held her in my hands, I could feel how vulnerable she was, how much she needed that protection. When I did the research to find a respectable, reputable breeder, I asked questions and I called, because there are many breeders out there that engage in unscrupulous practices. I wanted to know: What were the conditions in which she was raised? Who were the parents? Were they related to each other? These are, regrettably, questions that need to be asked, and far too often, there are breeders out there that can't share the answers, that won't share the answers. And so, urgent and pressing action is absolutely necessary.

Furthermore, in my own political work, I have encountered unspeakable cruelty to dogs. I've had people—and I won't repeat the stories—who have done unimaginable things, just out of a perverse sense of pleasure and some desire to assert dominance over these innocent creatures.

I've also worked in northern and rural communities where breeding was so uncontrolled that there were packs of animals that ran around, and when I would go running, I'd have to carry some stones lest one of these unattached dogs run after or try to bite me. There were even, in some of these communities, one or two days a year where all of those unattached dogs were culled to prevent packs from forming. All of these things underscore the critical importance to take issue on this matter.

So as I review Bill 159, I must admit there are some things in this bill that are good. The bill defines a puppy mill for the first time. That is a good thing. It sets standards for record-keeping—again, something that is valuable and much needed—and it identifies a number of offences and implements fines. I appreciate all of those efforts.

There are, however, important things that are left out. For example, I find the definition of a puppy mill a bit ambiguous, missing out on important things such as the real standards for how much space or the specific steps that must be taken in order to ensure that that living environment for those pups is healthy and safe. I acknowledge that, in some cases, standards have been identified. But in order to ensure whether those standards are being met, there need to be inspections so that enforcement can take place. And what that enforcement actually looks like, how those inspections will actually take place is not clearly defined in this legislation.

1510

Now, even assuming that this bill had everything necessary in terms of standards and definitions to protect animals, I have not yet seen any funding that is attached to this that could allow the inspections, and specifically, the increased inspections that are necessary to ensure some of the good things in this bill are actually operationalized. I understand, acknowledge and respect that there will be inspectors, and this is a good thing. I question, for example, what will be the mechanism for triggering inspections? Will they investigate proactively? Currently, we know that there is an inspection process in place and far too many puppy mills are operating without being inspected. So, will it be proactive or, conversely, will it be complaints-based?

I certainly worry about a complaints-based inspection process because that certainly hasn't worked well in the current environment. Think, for example, about patients in health care who are reporting unfair or inappropriate billing. Far too many patients that are experiencing that don't know how to make a complaint to OHIP, and far too many of those complaints are not actually acted upon. And we have also seen, within this process within long-term care, even where there may be proactive long-term-care inspections, those, regrettably, have failed miserably in protecting the residents of long-term-care homes and many long-term-care residences. So, of course I support the idea of inspections, but I am not convinced nor confident that this legislation enacts a robust and well-funded process.

In summary, I want to reflect on the fact that there is a lot that could be done. This legislation does move the needle in the right direction. But in my opinion, that needle could swing so much further, could offer so many more opportunities for protection, for inspection, for enforcement.

Finally, in my last moments, I want to reflect on one last dog, a beautiful small black Cavalier King Charles spaniel who goes by the name of Huey. He has been a little bit medically vulnerable, but through the tireless and most thoughtful care of his owner, Lauren, is able to live an incredible and fulfilling life. Let us give that opportunity to all dogs in the province of Ontario, especially those most vulnerable pups as they are first getting their start in life.

In summary, this bill does some of the right things, but could go much further, and I look forward to working with all members of this House to make it as strong as we can.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions to the member for Don Valley East? The member for Hastings-Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Ric Bresee: Thank you very much.
Interjection.

Mr. Ric Bresee: Thank you, Minister.

I thank the member for his comments and the stories about the pups. I mean, one of the comments that has certainly echoed across this chamber today—and I'm not sure who said it earlier—was humans don't always deserve the love that the animals in our lives have given us.

To that end, sir—to the member—I ask the question of, do you agree with the increase and the enforcement of the higher penalties for the abuses mentioned within this bill?

Mr. Adil Shamji: I certainly share that sentiment, that we don't deserve the love and kindness that our dogs give us, which is evidently always unconditional.

Yes, I do agree with the increased fines and the steps that have been taken to better delineate offences directed towards animal cruelty. I just want to give this legislation the best chance at success, at succeeding in its overall goal and premise. If we actually want to protect dogs, we need to have the framework in place to ensure that there is adequate enforcement and the right inspection framework in place, and I'm worried that I'm not quite seeing that yet.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from Don Valley East. I appreciate the fact that you started your comments off with personal stories and also saying that you want this piece of legislation to be successful. We do know that the only way that legislation can be successful is in the application and the enforcement of these rules. We are concerned, based on, after the PAWS Act was passed, between a three-year term, OSPCA inspectors issued almost 16,000 orders, but in the same period, between 2020 and 2023, the PAWS inspectors only laid 6,970 orders. So there is clearly a problem around enforcement.

Do you think this legislation will address that? Because if not, then we'll have good words and good intentions, but it won't be successful.

Mr. Adil Shamji: It is that very piece on enforcement that worries me the most. To the precise point that you made, I acknowledge that there is a dissonance here between words and action. The words do look very good, but if you actually take a step back and look at some of the actions on animal cruelty, this is a well-intentioned bill but a well-intentioned bill from a government that also passed legislation that allows penned dog hunting. So, taking everything in totality, the words—I wouldn't say that they're great. There are some good words in there. It is lacking, and I question the ability of this government to be actually able to deliver on the promises that are being made.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Mr. Deepak Anand: The changes proposed in the PUPS Act will prohibit the harmful dog breeding practices most often associated with puppy mills. It's helping out in doing many things: breeding a female dog that's less than a year old, failing to keep a dog with a contagious disease—and many more things in this.

So, my question to the member is very simple: The Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act, if passed, would restrict unhealthy breeding practices regarding the proximity of kin. So, is this member going to stand up and support this bill with us?

Mr. Adil Shamji: I will always stand up for marginalized and vulnerable individuals in our society, whether they've got two legs or four, and certainly in this case for our four-legged furry friends, I will absolutely stand up for

them, and in doing so, I urge the government to think very hard about how this legislation can be improved. Work with us. Reassure us that there will be an adequate inspections framework in place. Reassure us that there will be appropriate enforcement mechanisms that take place and come up with the funding that is necessary in order to allow all of these things to happen. In so doing, I am convinced that we can all stand up for our four-legged friends.

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

Hon. Rob Flack: I'm honoured to have the privilege of speaking to Bill 159, the Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act, or the PUPS Act.

Let me start off: Who remembers, in 1952—probably nobody here, but you might have heard this song: “How much is that doggy in the window? / The one with the waggly tail”—Patti Page, 1952. We all heard it. Who hasn't walked by, as a kid, a mall where you see a puppy in the window and you bug your mother, your father or whoever, “Please, can I have a dog?” Everybody wants a puppy. I get it. So, I commend the Solicitor General for taking action to protect dogs and increase the penalties for the operators of puppy mills with this bill.

1520

Speaker, this bill is not about the good actors, the breeders and marketers of animals—puppies, dogs, cats, kittens, whatever—who ethically manage their businesses, provide proper animal nutrition and proper animal health, and follow proper breeding practices. What this bill is about is the bad actors, those who do not follow proper husbandry: again, animal health, animal nutrition and unethical breeding practices.

What I like about the bill most is there are minimum fines and maximum fines to be applied. These minimum fines include a \$10,000 minimum fine for operating a puppy mill—it's punitive—and the \$25,000 minimum fine if the operation of a puppy mill results in the death of a dog. Businesses like this are unethically profitable and operate in clandestine environments. These fines are punitive and offer general deterrence value.

As someone who has worked in agriculture and agribusiness his whole life, and currently still owns and operates a farm with a herdsman, owning animals is a massive responsibility. It's huge. People cannot take that for granted. Ethical treatment of animals and breeding practices are key in the whole production of animal protein and also within our companion animal environment: how we breed these animals and who these parents mate up with. That is what is really wrong with puppy mills. We talk about a lot of animal abuse, which is right, which is understood, but most importantly, it begins with ethical breeding and breeding practices.

I've owned dogs and cats—mostly dogs—my whole life. I don't have a dog today, unfortunately. I'm trying to convince my dear wife that it's time for another golden retriever or whatever. She says I'm away too much, and we had two golden retrievers and lost the last one actually a couple of days after June 2, after the election. I miss them dearly. I've not even gotten to the point yet where I'll bury

the last dog. He's been cremated and ready to go. I've got the tree that he was going to go by. He'd stand beside me at the house at the farm, and I miss him a lot. They're friends and they are part of the family. It's important that we manage this business well.

We have, in our business on a farm, barn cats. The member from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston will understand that you need to have a good supply of cats around a barn for obvious reasons; mice can overtake. And I'm called the treat boy at the farm because I walk around with tins of special cat food in my pocket. They say, “Well, you shouldn't feed the cats like that; they're being well fed,” but I do, because it's not for the kittens; it's for the mothers, to make sure that they have good nutrition so that they can continue to care for their cats. So everyone has to have a heart when it comes to our barn cats, as well.

But I'm very proud to support this bill, and I'm encouraged by the government taking action to improve animal welfare. It is beyond my belief that people would engage in this behaviour. You know how they say a dog is a man's or a person's best friend? I hope that members from all parties will support this bill and we will better protect our pets from inhumane treatment. I've listened to the debate and I hear different examples, and they're heinous. I can't believe people would treat any animals like that at all.

Cleanliness standards for a dog's living environment is key. I've been to the London humane society, as my friends from London North Centre and London West have, as well, and you listen to the stories as to how animals and pets end up there. It's appalling, the standards of cleanliness that they live in and they're taken out of. Thank God people still are willing to adopt pets, and I'll talk about that in a few minutes. I had the London humane society join me in my consultations for the modernization of the vet act. We invited humane societies to be a part of these consultations and they offered their unique perspective that was well-appreciated by all.

This act also prevents puppies from being separated from mothers, unless recommended in writing by a veterinarian. Following proper weaning procedures in large animals or companion animals is crucial to the well-being of our animals. It includes rules around breeding; it includes standards that will prevent inbreeding, overbreeding or the breeding of dogs that are less than a year old. Again, I come back to proper ethical breeding practices in large and small animals, but especially at these puppy mills—mostly unethical.

It protects dogs by requiring the isolation of dogs or other animals where there are reasonable grounds to believe a dog is suffering from a contagious disease or would be at a high risk of developing a disease.

Failing to meet any one of these requirements in this bill makes that dog breeder an operator of a puppy mill and makes them subject to the minimum fines of \$10,000 and, again, \$25,000. It's punitive, as we previously mentioned.

Ontario already has the strongest penalties of any Canadian province or territory for animal welfare violations, and these measures address these serious repeat offenders and deal with them straight-on. Currently, individuals can

face up to six months in jail for committing less serious offences and up to one year for repeat offences, as well as up to two years for committing more serious offences. The new mandatory minimum fines would aim to further deter puppy mills by strengthening penalties and establishing even more severe consequences.

I should also note that the mandatory minimum fines are just that: minimum. Penalties for operating a puppy mill can go above and beyond the mandatory minimum. This is important. Furthermore, the \$25,000 mandatory minimum that applies when a dog dies also applies in cases where a dog is euthanized after a vet determines that to be the most humane course of action. Again, Ontario has some of the toughest penalties around, and I'm glad to see our government acting with this bill.

Prior to this bill, our government also introduced the Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act. I was happy to see there was widespread support in the House for this bill, which modernized the vet act. I'm pleased to have chaired that throughout the province, and we've seen some great results. Adding more vets to this province and more vet technicians, as we talked about, will also add in the health and well-being of your animals.

The bill targets puppy mills that have tried to churn out dogs for sale without any regard for the health or welfare of animals, and it establishes clear rules that define what practices are unacceptable for dog breeders. These clear and enforceable rules make it easier to target puppy mill marketers without creating an excessive burden for responsible dog breeders to provide their animals with the care they deserve.

While mandatory minimum fines in this bill create an even stronger financial disincentive to operate a puppy mill, when buyers are no longer willing to buy from a puppy mill, there is no financial incentive to begin with.

I'll just conclude by saying that during COVID—I think everybody has heard the term. I was in the feed business, the animal nutrition business, and as such, we sold a lot of pet food in Canada. Again, it may be somewhat anecdotal, but the number I heard is over a million new dogs entered homes throughout the COVID period—a million more dogs in homes. Obviously, because of that, today you are seeing an increase in animal shelters. Animals that were in those homes are now being abandoned because people are back to work or don't have the time or the financial wherewithal to manage them effectively.

I would conclude by saying that anyone who wants to buy a dog, a cat, whatever animal it may be, please consider buying one. Go to your animal shelter, understand where these animals came from, what their parents were—sire, dam. Go back in the generations, look at genetic disorders, look at how they've been vaccinated, how they have been managed. It is crucial because a good healthy pet makes a great family owner.

I am convinced, as we move ahead, that this bill is going to enhance the ability to act with strong measures against those bad actors in the province.

I'm sharing my time with the member for Mississauga Centre.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Mississauga Centre.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: I rise today in support of my colleague the Solicitor General and his incredible work in proposing much-needed reforms towards animal welfare in our province. These reforms show that our government is not only interested in caring for our residents but also our furry friends.

1530

In fact, this is not the first time our government addressed animal welfare. In 2019, our government implemented the most comprehensive and strictest animal welfare legislation in the country. The PAWS Act established standards of care and prohibitions against causing harm and distress to animals. We became the first jurisdiction in Canada to have animal welfare enforcement conducted by the province.

What's great about the PAWS Act is that while it does regulate all dog breeders, it does not burden responsible breeders with further care requirements. It specifically targets the bad actors.

In Ontario, we have some of the toughest penalties and fines for the mistreatment of animals—and the amendments in this bill will further protect vulnerable dogs in our province.

I cannot forget to recognize the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore for her incredible animal rights advocacy with her private member's bill, the Protecting Our Pets Act. In the last Parliament, I lived in Etobicoke, actually. I was renting an apartment, so I lived in the member's riding, and I would receive this beautiful calendar every year full of pictures of cats, dogs and furry friends. I certainly miss receiving that calendar, so maybe she can send one over anyway.

Dogs, like all animals, are sentient beings, capable of feeling pain, joy and a range of emotions. It is our duty, as a compassionate society, to ensure their well-being and advocate for their rights. It is a reflection of our values as a society, our commitment to kindness and our understanding of the interconnectedness of all living beings—Mother Nature.

I know, like many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, one of the best feelings is coming home to our furry friends, who are always so excited to see us. I think my dog is much more excited to see me sometimes than my very own husband, and so I really look forward to that moment, coming home and just getting that high burst of energy, no matter what the day was. We all know that days here can be quite ugly sometimes, but the moment I walk through that door and Cleo runs toward me, it all goes away. So I'm looking forward to that this evening as well.

This bill is a fundamental aspect of building a more compassionate and sustainable world. Today's bill, the Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act, is a groundbreaking piece of legislation that will change the way we treat our canine friends in Ontario.

As the saying goes, a dog is a man's best friend, but it is also a woman's best friend, too. Scientists say that it has been the case for almost 1,500 years. In fact, dog ownership is proven to improve human health in so many ways:

It provides a source of happiness, activity and daily physical exercise. Yes, Mr. Speaker, this morning, I took Cleo out for a walk at 5:30 a.m. She was a little confused why it was so early, but to get here in time for Parliament, 5:30 a.m. it is. So I can attest to that; Cleo keeps me happy and fit.

I'm the proud owner of a German Shepherd named Cleo who, at the age of two years old, is the most hyper and friendly dog you could meet. Her undying love for me and my husband cannot compare to anything in the human world. In fact, many of my colleagues have either met or seen Cleo since I bring her to a lot of events in the riding. For all members in the House, you know there's a dog vote out there. Because when I go out with my dog, people always come to me—and they want a picture with my dog, not with me, and that's totally okay. It's a great tool for campaigning, and I highly, highly suggest it to all of you.

I'm very grateful that when we adopted Cleo as a puppy, she came from a reputable source that cared for the welfare of their dogs and not an unregulated, dubious source. That's one of the reasons I am so proud of our government tabling the PUPS Act. Our government is amending the existing PAWS Act to stop the growing and disturbing practice of puppy mills. With this bill, we will stop these harmful practices and enforce the law, ensuring that dogs in Ontario are shown the dignity they deserve.

Puppy mills are widely prevalent in our province, operating in secrecy, and are notorious for their overbreeding, crowded and unsanitary conditions and lack of medical care—which pose huge threats to the present and future well-being of these precious animals. Many Ontarians know this, so I want to remind those in the chamber and my constituents: If you are aware of an animal being abused or in distress, call the Ontario Animal Protection Call Centre at 1-833-9-ANIMAL.

The reforms we are proposing to ban the harmful practice of puppy mills include:

- breeding a female more than three times in a two-year period;
- breeding a female younger than a year old;
- sequestering dogs with illnesses away from other animals;
- having an unsanitary environment for dogs; and
- separating a puppy from its mother before the age of eight weeks.

Mr. Speaker, anyone with a shred of decency would support these measures, which ensure that dogs in Ontario are not treated like disposable products, but as loving pets deserving our dignity and respect. On top of that, breeding dogs in this manner puts the puppies at risk, since they can develop serious health problems which might result in early death. With these puppy mills, people have no way of ensuring these dogs have been properly vaccinated or have been raised in an appropriate environment.

Alors, monsieur le Président, je sais que le procureur général travaille à la création de matériel d'éducation publique sur la façon dont les acheteurs de chien peuvent identifier un éleveur réputé et éthique, par rapport à une usine à chiots. Parfois, le premier endroit où les gens

regardent est Kijiji, qui peut parfois être une source de nombreux mauvais acteurs.

Ces deux choix font une énorme différence : une différence entre l'adoption d'un chien en bonne santé et prospère, et celle d'un chien qui pourrait être criblé de problèmes de santé.

Nous veillons à ce que ceux qui exploitent des usines à chiots en violation flagrante de la législation provinciale se voient infliger une amende minimale de 10 000 \$, et de 25 000 \$ si leurs actes de négligence entraînent la mort d'un chien.

The government also intends to hold consultations on potential regulations for unnecessary medical procedures on dogs and cats, such as declawing, tail docking, ear cropping and debarking. Many of these procedures are for purely aesthetic purposes that bring no benefit to the pet themselves. Declawing, for example: Cats need their claws to physically explore the world around them. Maybe my furniture might not agree with me, but getting rid of this crucial body part, in my opinion, is grossly inappropriate, and the same goes for tail docking and ear cropping. Dogs are beautiful the way they are, and there is no need for body modifications.

I want to recognize stakeholders who have shown support for the PUPS Act, such as Doug Brooks from the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Humane Society, who said:

“This legislation is a welcome and important step towards protecting dogs from unethical breeders and addressing the issue of puppy mills throughout our province. The Ontario SPCA and Humane Society looks forward to continuing to work with the Solicitor General to further develop the detailed regulations that will provide the greatest protection possible for both dogs and the public.”

Mr. Speaker, this endorsement rings true that our government is committed to animal welfare like no other jurisdiction in Canada.

I just want to share a very quick personal story about my dog Kumba, who passed away last year. In the last election, when I was campaigning, there were some turbulent times; there was some dirty politics being played, and there were anonymous flyers being sent to my entire riding. The one thing that kept me going each and every day was my morning walk with Kumba. I felt like I was getting ready for battle. Kumba and I, we would go and do our two-kilometre daily walk. I would listen to some Christian music and just prepare. I literally was feeling like I'm preparing for the battle of the day to go out there and door-knock and face some harsh and challenging moments. Kumba's presence and that daily activity of just walking my dog and having that half an hour to myself with my Kumba—it gave me the peace of mind and it helped my mental health and it helped me move forward.

Animals bring so much benefit to our life; that's why at SickKids we also have a pet-assisted therapy program. So I think it is the responsibility of all of us to ensure that our pets and dogs who do so much for us and for our society—even serving as service animals—are protected and kept in the best condition possible.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions, now, to the members who just spoke?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to the members who just spoke. My question is to my friend from Elgin–Middlesex–London.

I was interested in your comments about the Humane Society of London and Middlesex and also in particular your comments about these puppy mills. I did want to ask, do you think it would be adequate—would it not make more sense to ensure that all dog breeders are licensed in the province of Ontario, thus being able to make sure that there are standards in place for each and every one of them?

1540

Hon. Rob Flack: That's a good question. I guess when I take a look at those who buy their dogs through breeding associations, through breeders, they're registered through the kennel club. They do a really good job of that. Their animals have to be registered. The parents' and the females' lineage has to be documented.

So again, as I said in my remarks, really what we're talking about here are the bad actors. They're unethical. They're clandestine. They hide in the weeds. To find them and ferret them out and fine them is what we need to do, so let's not make it punitive to the good actors; let's let them continue to self-regulate, like they do a wonderful job of doing.

Again, I think this bill highlights the minimum fines and raises them. If we can hurt them financially, I think that's the most important part here. If we hurt them financially—that's why they're doing it anyway.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, the member for Hastings–Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Ric Bresee: First off, I'd like to say to the member who was speaking about how excited her dog was to come get her, we had a cat for about 18 years that we lost last year. We got a new cat, and I can tell you, undoubtedly, I've never received that kind of excitement from a cat. He very efficiently ignores me.

Interjection.

Mr. Ric Bresee: It's a wonderful cat, but definitely ignores me.

We heard the member speaking about the consultations that have gone on and some of the comments that have come from people like the SPCA and other groups. Could the member please elaborate on how the government intends to continue the consultation on the regulations for the PUPS Act?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you for that question. As the member knows, through the committee process and our proposed amendments, there will be opportunity for stakeholder feedback and to hear back from the public. The proposal has also been posted on Ontario's Regulatory Registry as another avenue for feedback to be provided.

I really do think that this committee will be oversubscribed because I'm sure so many people want to come and talk to us about their love of animals and what more we can do as a government and as a Legislature to protect

our vulnerable animals. Because they don't speak, so we have to speak for them.

I really look forward to those consultations. I think it will be a lot of fun. In fact, Speaker, I think we should do a "bring your dog to Queen's Park" day for all the members and do a nice little walk. Wouldn't that be fun? We should do that, Speaker. What do you think?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We'd definitely need unanimous consent for that.

Questions?

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the member for Mississauga Centre. Thank you for your presentation. It's good to hear about your pets.

My question is about the issue with wildlife that are kept in captivity: in zoos, in people's homes. Unfortunately, in Ontario, their animal welfare is not properly regulated. There's no enforcement. There's no inspection. I'm wondering if this government is interested in introducing amendments or changes to ensure that wild animals kept in captivity can have some animal welfare standards as well.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you so much for that important question. As far as I understand, this is actually regulated by the municipalities, because I was looking, in the municipality of Vaughan, at what wild animals are allowed to be kept at home. I think this actually differs from one municipality to another, where they have their municipal enforcement of these bylaws. So I think that's where that piece currently resides in terms of wildlife and other types of pets that are untraditional, like iguanas and other type of pets that are being kept in our homes. And so I think that's looking to our municipal partners on that issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. Graydon Smith: My question is to the Associate Minister of Housing. First of all, I would say that as a pet owner, and we've talked a lot about our pets today, I need to get my cat's name into the Hansard, which is Ellie. That will thrill my daughter to absolutely no end: that my cat is in the Hansard now. My daughter is in Hansard, but she'll be excited about the cat.

But she's also very excited, as is my son, about every puppy they see and every dog they see, and we are in the market for a new dog in our house. I have to explain to them—because they would take them all—that there are some bad actors out there, and as much as every puppy is undeniably cute, they may have been bred in some pretty terrible circumstances.

So a question to the associate minister on what you perceive the risks of not moving forward with this bill being.

Hon. Rob Flack: Thank you to the member to my right for that good question. I'm hoping you get a dog, and when you convince your wife to get one, you can help me convince mine, because it's overdue.

I think one of the great things we did in this House recently was pass the modernization of the vet act. We can talk a lot about puppy mills, and I think it's important, and

I'll digress a little bit, but I think adding more spots for veterinarians and, more importantly, creating an environment that will allow our veterinary technicians to do a better job of animal care will go a long way in helping dog owners, pet owners, manage their companion animals very well. I think it complements what we're trying to do here.

To not do this bill would hurt the good work we did in the modernization of the vet act, and I stand convinced that that's going to create some great results. At the end of the day, I would recommend a good dog. Check out the parentage, check out the lineage, make sure animal health is in order and genetic abnormalities aren't there and you'll have a good friend for a long, long time.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the member for Elgin–Middlesex–London. I'm sure that he has been following in the media the legal battle that's going on right now between Reptilia at Westmount mall and the city of London, because the city of London does have a prohibition on keeping exotic animals in captivity and was using their bylaw enforcement power to prevent Reptilia from setting up displays at Westmount mall, but the zoo is saying that it can go ahead because it has a provincial licence for a private zoo. That's very concerning for people who care about the welfare of these exotic animals that are being displayed at the mall.

So I wonder if the member can commit to using this bill to consider amendments that will help ensure the protection of exotic animals, to actually prohibit exotic animals from being held in captivity.

Hon. Rob Flack: To the member from London West: It's rather black and white, this contention in London. While I respect that the zoo, per se, is following the rules of the day, there's contention.

That being said, my primary care and concern is the ethical treatment of these animals, the care, whether it's making sure animal nutrition—we provided, in my former life, feed, animal nutrition, for exotic animals at the Toronto Zoo. Done properly and ethically and managed in the best way possible with good management practices, it's done very well. It's when it's not done well, so as long as the zoo is following the letter of the law and practising good animal health behaviour and animal nutrition standards, I'll continue to support them.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: It's always an honour to rise in this House to speak on behalf of the great people of Toronto Centre. In particular, today, I'm pleased to speak on Bill 159, Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act.

I am very pleased to see a bill of this nature appear before us. Like many who have spoken before me—this House seems to be filled with animal lovers and, in particular, dog lovers; I count myself as one of them. Having had three dogs in my life, one rabbit, two cats, three turtles and 31 tropical fish—at many different times, I've had a menagerie. And I can tell you, as we all know, they deserve our protection.

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That's why I think this bill is important. I look forward to seeing it go through committee and seeing what else

comes from it, including perhaps some amendments to further strengthen it.

When I was contemplating what I wanted to say about the bill, I reached out to constituents on social media, as we all do sometimes. I wanted to hear from my constituents, to see what they had to say about the issue of banning puppy mills in Ontario. Very proudly, I want to let you know that many of my four-legged constituents got their humans to respond on their behalf and to let me know that they strongly support seeing the protection of animals—especially puppies being banned from abuse.

We heard from:

—Cooper, a rescue chihuahua pug and the mascot for the St. James Town Residents Council;

—Misha, a very sweet basset hound who loves hanging out at the Cherry Beach dog park and all the other east end neighbourhood parks between Corktown and St. James Town;

—Rocco, an eight-month-old goldendoodle rescued from a puppy mill, who has some health issues, but those issues that came from the puppy mill overbreeding don't keep him down, and he just keeps on going;

—Zenia, a rescue dog from St. Lucia who lives in the Village and loves Barbara Hall Park and Riverdale Park;

—Rocky, a rat terrier adopted from the local Toronto Humane Society, who does get nervous from time to time, but she is curious and loves to go for walks around Regent Park;

—Louise, a rescue miniature pincher mix from Texas, who loves playing with her doggy friends at Toronto Centre's off-leash dog parks.

I was very pleased to be working on the expansion and the improvement of dog infrastructure when I was at the city of Toronto as a city councillor. I count that as some of my most proud moments.

I could go on, Speaker, because 50-plus canines actually had their humans write into us, and I might just come back to it, because they're too cute to ignore.

But I do want to get to the substance of the bill, because I think that is important and why we're here. This bill contains several changes to the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act that serve to protect dogs, which I support and many of us do support in this House. Some of these changes include:

—banning the breeding of a female dog more than three times in a two-year period, or breeding more than two litters from a female dog's consecutive heat cycles, as well as banning the breeding of a female dog that is less than 12 months old;

—banning the breeding of a female dog for the first time before its second heat;

—making it illegal to fail to isolate a dog from other dogs or animals where there are reasonable grounds to believe that the dog is suffering from a contagious disease or is at high risk of developing a contagious disease, including failure to ensure there is no contact with objects, including food and water containers, that are used by other dogs or animals, except,

—separating a puppy from its mother or substitute mother before the age of 56 days, except as otherwise recommended by a veterinarian in writing for health reasons;

—instituting a minimum penalty for operating a mill, set at \$10,000;

—instituting a minimum penalty of \$25,000 if the mill operation leads to the death of a dog, or of euthanasia by a veterinarian.

This is all very commendable, and I think that this is a fantastic foundation for us to build upon, and I hope that we can do that work at committee, because I know that when the bill goes to committee, there are a number of people who still want to see improvements to the bill—sorry, we’re on second reading. But the advocates want us to do more, so I wanted to give my platform to them, as I share their comments with the House today about what more animal welfare advocates want to see in this bill and how they think that we can work collaboratively to improve this piece of pending legislation.

They pointed out that breeding that takes place in the province is done under conditions that will now be prescribed, and that the ideal breeding conditions that could lead to pure and in-demand breeds being sold by pet stores is almost non-existent. So, clearly, that is one section of the bill that could see a significant improvement, because unless we are able to name the problem, we won’t be able to fix the problem.

According to the animal rights and welfare advocates, the key piece to any statute or regulation will have to be placed on enforcement and inspection. As we all know, because we’re lawmakers, unless we see adequate investments to inspection and enforcement, then any bill is really not worth a lot if we actually cannot make it do what we want it to do.

The bill doesn’t include funding to better resource or equip provincial animal welfare services, or PAWS, inspectors, and so the question will be, who is going to enforce the standards? If the bill is not improving the enforcement and investigation, that is certainly one area of improvement.

Currently, provincial animal welfare inspectors are badly understaffed. This has been widely reported now. The CBC has recently put forth a fairly lengthy investigation where they go deeper into the story, where they go behind the scenes to be able to understand what is wrong with this system and why we see that inspections pertaining to animal welfare have gone significantly down.

Under the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, the OSPCA inspectors issued 16,148 orders and they laid 1,946 provincial and criminal charges between 2015 and 2018, while PAWS inspectors only laid 6,970 orders and laid 667 provincial and criminal charges between 2020 and 2023. So, the animal advocates are saying the government is talking a big game about protecting animals, and they’re asking you to do a lot more.

How can we do more? How can the government work towards giving the real teeth to the legislation if there

aren’t adequate staff who are properly trained and on the field to then investigate and enforce? I recognize investigation and enforcement takes time. This is not something you can do over the phone. You’ve got to go in there like the CBC investigative journalists to go and dig deeper. Then, the charges are laid, and then at some point in time, you’ve got to deal with prosecution, because fines don’t just happen.

That’s why, when the CBC did an entire investigation into the drop in cases, advocates who then spoke to them have said PAWS is so understaffed that they often show up and take action only if the media shows up and there’s a public outcry. Now, clearly that’s not a winning condition, and that’s not going to make the legislation more effective. So, we have to listen to the advocates who are part of the system of democracy that holds each and every single one of us accountable, because they’re the ones who are pushing for the change.

Ashley DaSilva, who is the founder of the Hamilton-based group Fur Warriors, said that the inspectors need more support from the province.

“As a result, she said, it can feel like PAWS will only take action when there’s enough public scrutiny.”

So we’re forcing citizens to actually go off and protest and at their own time and energy lead the charge with the media.

“She pointed to a video that appeared to show a Hamilton man whipping his dog, Merlin, and dragging the dog down a sidewalk in late June.

“It took a week for police and PAWS to remove the dog from the owner, and he now faces provincial charges. But” Ms. DaSilva “is doubtful any of that would have happened without the media attention and public pressure.”

They state, “If you don’t cause a stink, nothing happens. What happens to the dogs that don’t have videos?”—which I think is a really important question. What happens if the act of cruelty is not caught by someone who has a camera? We need to have inspectors on the ground and in the field doing their work.

“Jennifer Friedman, a former OSPCA lawyer who now practises privately, said it’s ‘troubling’ to hear the drop in charges and orders, especially given what many of her clients are telling her.

““There’s a great deal of frustration.... They’re hoping animal welfare services would do more.”

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Amy Fitzgerald, University of Ottawa professor and animal welfare researcher, said it’s “particularly unlikely” the drop in PAWS charges and orders was because there were fewer animal abuse incidents. She pointed to how domestic violence was rising during the pandemic.

It’s also important for us to note that PAWS does not necessarily share the calls that it receives and that inspectors may be using more discretion when issuing orders or charges. So really, you don’t have the type of scrutiny or even audit procedure that one needs to have in order to know whether or not the system can be running more effectively.

It has also been noted that PAWS needs more than its current staffing allocation of 100 inspectors to thoroughly and quickly investigate cases across Ontario. Just think of it: 100 inspectors for a province as large as Ontario. The contrast to that is that the Toronto Transit Commission has about 110 inspectors just for our transit system, which is a much smaller geography that has to be covered. It has been commented on that more inspectors need to receive additional training, and they need to think proactively on how they can prevent the matters of animal abuse.

“Michèle Hamers, campaign manager at World Animal Protection Canada, said the wording in the province’s legislation is too broad and impacts what inspectors can do on the scene. For example, the legislation defines distress as an animal being:

“—in need of proper care, water, food or shelter;

“—injured, sick, in pain or suffering;

“—neglected, abused or subject to undue physical or psychological hardship.”

She further goes on to unpack the guidelines, where she provides that “guidelines defined for various species and that only allow various animals to be kept as pets. Those steps” should and “would make the system more proactive.”

Also highlighted for us was the need for more transparency, one of the missing key drivers that led to PAWS being taken over by the privately run OSPCA. Camille Labchuk, executive director of Animal Justice, who I had the esteemed pleasure of working with when we worked on the national shark fin ban of importation and use of shark fin products in Canada, an advocate who is a leading voice on animal rights, welfare and well-being in Canada and internationally, has said this about the case of transparency when PAWS took over: Things have “gotten far, far worse.”

Ms. Labchuk says Animal Justice has filed many complaints about Marineland, a theme park in Niagara Falls, but never heard back from the province. If you wanted to demonstrate that you care about animal welfare, there’s a great example right there that you can take action on. Why is Marineland still operating?

“Labchuk said PAWS should have a website, issue an annual report each year and, if it’s in the public interest, issue media releases when it issues orders, seizes animals or one of its investigations leads to charges.” Tell us what you’re doing. If you’re doing such a great job, share the news as broadly as you can.

“Labchuk also said PAWS legislation needs more regulations governing animal breeding, farms, zoos and other industries.”

It is important for us to be able to see the baseline of productivity. If we don’t know what is happening, and you have people who are saying that not enough is being done—and these are not just random people; these are people who have dedicated their existence to protecting animals and animal welfare—there is obviously room for improvement.

It’s important for us to also recognize that this government has not been treating all dogs equally. There are

some dogs you want to protect and other dogs you don’t. In fact, this government moved to regulate and expand legal pen dog hunting, a practice that was in the process of being phased out. Many advocates feel that it’s unsafe for dogs and it is unnecessarily cruel to the prey of animals, who are hunted in these pens with no way to escape. And yet the government went out of their way to include a clause in Bill 91 to more deeply enshrine those types of facilities into law, in essence legalizing animal cruelty.

Two animal rights organizations have requested a review of that legislation. So there will be more to be discussed about that because that story is not going away and clearly, if lawyers have deemed that they have enough of a case to go forward, this is going to be a very costly and time-consuming process for the Ontario government once again.

There is so much more in Ontario that can be done to increase animal welfare. In February of this year, Quebec banned all non-essential and cosmetic surgeries on pets, including ear cropping, tail trimming, vocal cord removal and cat declawing. These regulations in Quebec are just a formalization of an already widespread rejection of those surgeries among veterinarian professionals.

And it’s not just Quebec. All over the world, these surgeries have been banned or actively discouraged. Ontario is now the only province in Canada that does not ban cat declawing. It’s very difficult to find a veterinarian willing to do the procedure, but it’s not because it is banned by this government but because of veterinarians’ own professional expertise and their own code of conduct and their compassion. Without a formal ban, you can still find someone—a surgeon—to do the procedure.

Quebec is by no means perfect, but Ontario could do more by following their lead and studying what they’ve done well. The Quebec legislation also bans the euthanasia of an animal by inhalation, leashing an animal without a collar, mating animals whose sizes are incompatible and feeding meat to pet pigs. All of these measures in Quebec make a lot of sense, and they have done it after consultation and review of subject matter experts.

So, clearly there is much more that can be done here, and I want to extend a massive, big thank you to all of the advocates working behind the scenes to increase animal welfare and protection in Ontario. There are countless organizations that advocate for the humane treatment of animals, for them to be safe, to be clean, to be treated when they’re sick, to be provided with the enrichment that they need to grow and learn, and given the love and care that we all know that they thrive on.

Believe it or not, your constituents will agree with you and the animal advocates if you work together to take those actions. Just as I’ve noted, many of the canines in my community had their humans write in to tell us that they support the legislation, but more can be done.

So, as I conclude, I just want to continue to give a little bit more love and a shout-out to both the canines out there, but also to the workers and the volunteers who keep Ontario’s shelters, rescues and fosters going. It’s often heartbreaking and delicate work to get an animal who has

been through so much abuse and trauma, and to watch them try to be able to love and trust again.

This happened with my own dog. Her name was Tara. She was a black Lab-pit cross. She had been adopted and returned to the Toronto Humane Society three times by the time I picked her up. I don't know what it was, but I had to take her home. When I read that she had won the award for being there the longest—at the humane society—with very little dog experience in my background, I decided to take home this 65-pound dog and I loved her to the very end.

We all have stories similar to that on why pets make the difference for you, and you can stand up for them by doing the right thing and improving the legislation.

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The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions to the member for Toronto Centre?

Mr. Ric Bresee: I thank the member from Toronto Centre for their comments today. You made the comment that the—I've lost it. There was one part of your message that I was thinking about, and I was going to make a quip about it, but unfortunately I've lost it at this point.

I can tell you that I've received a number of emails specific to this particular piece of legislation. Unanimously they all said, basically, "Hurry up; get it done." We know that the president of the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has said that the PUPS Act is a welcome and important step towards protecting dogs from unethical breeders and addressing the issue of puppy mills throughout the province.

So does the member agree that we need to move this forward?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much to the good member for Hastings–Lennox and Addington. Yes, I agree that we should be moving the legislation forward. I've also read the communication coming from the advocates and the executives at the animal welfare organizations. Also contained in their body is the fact that they've identified that a good first step is usually some language, as I've seen, that it needs active enforcement and active investigation, which means resources from this government. So we have to take a look at their communication in its totality.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The next question will be the member for Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: To my colleague from Toronto Centre: You've touched on a variety of issues in your presentation today. Could you address again some of the improvements that you think are needed in this bill to address larger issues that we're grappling with in this society?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you to the member from Toronto–Danforth for that question. Obviously, one of the areas of improvement, as many members on this side of the House have spoken to, is about the need for funding and investments to ensure that we have field inspectors that are going to be able to respond to complaints and the identification of abuse in a timely fashion.

That means that the legislation is really toothless unless you add the power for investigations and enforcement.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston.

Mr. John Jordan: I'll just start by suggesting to the member from Hastings–Lennox and Addington that he take some advice from our associate minister and put those tins of food in his pocket. Then your cat will pay attention to you.

One of the things I wanted to talk about is—again, back to the associate minister, who has got some expertise on animal nutrition—the positive parts in this. There are a lot of elements in it to strengthen enforcement, with bigger fines and bigger penalties—enforcing and making the bad actors pay attention, hurting them where it hurts: in the pocketbook.

But also on the positive side, I'd like to get your comments on identifying what good best practices are for a responsible breeder, and educating the public on what those are so they know the advantages of purchasing an animal from a responsible breeder, and those elements that are within the bill and how you think those will help with reducing the number of—hopefully someday eliminating—the bad actors in the puppy mill business.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you to the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston. Any time we can improve education and public awareness around this issue I think is a good one. We, as all legislators, want to make sure that the information is out there, readily available and accessible. We want to educate the public as well on where to get an animal, including the fact that there are lots of animals for adoption through fosters and rescues, as well as humane societies. That is very good. I don't want to take anything away from that.

I think my remarks have been very generous about where this bill is good, but we know that every piece of legislation can be improved, and I wanted to focus on that in my remarks as well.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I want to thank my colleague for her fantastic presentation. We have talked about enforcement. Questions have been asked about that as well. I know there has been well-intentioned and well-meaning legislation that the government has tabled many times to change a behaviour or to change a practice, but enforcement is key to that.

One of the government members talked of doubling of fines and whatnot, but can the member speak to how the probability of being fined is often more important than the actual fine itself? If you double or triple fines but you don't have the enforcement, you don't have the inspectors doing the work, then will people often change their behaviours if they're not going to get caught?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much to my seatmate for that question.

Absolutely not. Unless there's real teeth to the legislation, people will continue to do what they do because it is so profitable.

At any given time, you can go online and find designer puppies being sold through puppy mills for \$2,000,

\$2,500. These litters are so profitable for the bad breeders and the bad actors, so they're not going to stop with just an increase in fines; you've got to go out and get them. They're advertising all over the place, so it's not even that you have to work that hard to find them; they're telling you where they are.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member for her speech today on this debate.

Does the member agree that we should not be breeding female dogs at a very young age?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I agree.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I think we can all agree that living things have their own dignity, but sometimes I've found it strange or actually disappointing to see that we often assign dignity as human beings to our pets, even in terms of aesthetics. Tails are cut off, ears are cut off, and other things happen in these cases, but they don't actually help the living creature; it's just our subjective aesthetics. Does the member have any thoughts about that, when it comes to our pets and what we do to them?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you for that most important question.

Yes, I have all sorts of opinions, because I was—at one point in time, I was uninformed. I did not know that the declawing of animals, especially for cats, was inhumane, because it was not widely understood. I thought that was just a way that you stop a cat from scratching your furniture—I was also significantly younger, until I learned as an adult.

I also thought that little golden cockapoos had short tails. It was not made known to me that someone cropped them off, or that ears of dogs were clipped.

So we need to ensure that legislation goes out that is going to be enforced and investigated—well-resourced—but we also have a responsibility to educate the public so they can also make good, informed decisions.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last quick question.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Mr. Speaker, the Preventing Unethical Puppy Sales Act introduces minimum fines for harmful dog breeding practices, including \$10,000 for the bad actors operating puppy mills; \$25,000 if these violations result in the death of a dog.

Simple question: Does the member recognize the necessity for minimum fines for puppy mills?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much for the question.

I thought I was fairly clear in my comments that I did support big sections of the bill. Again, we can always do more and go further. And if you can't catch them, charge them; they're not going to get fined.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We don't have time for another question, I apologize.

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Chatham-Kent–Leamington under standing order 59.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Under standing order 59 for the benefit of all members in the House:

—on Monday, April 22—this is for the week of April 22 of course—in the afternoon we'll be debating Bill 188, Supporting Children's Futures Act, 2024;

—on Tuesday, April 23, in the morning, again, resuming debate on Bill 188, Supporting Children's Futures Act; in the afternoon, opposition day number 4;

—on Wednesday, April 24, in the morning, Bill 188, Supporting Children's Futures Act; in the afternoon, the same bill; and

—on Thursday, April 25, in the morning, we'll be debating private bills; in the afternoon, third reading of Bill 162, the Get It Done Act, 2024.

PREVENTING UNETHICAL PUPPY SALES ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 SUR LA PRÉVENTION DE LA VENTE DE CHIOTS CONTRAIRE À L'ÉTHIQUE

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

Mr. John Fraser: I think it's great we're debating this bill and talking mostly about our puppies and our dogs and a bit more about the bill. It's a good way to end the week, and I love everybody's story about their dogs and their pets and how much affection they have for them.

I have to give a shout-out to Kealey, my black Lab who's watching at home I'm sure right now. Somehow she has this uncanny knowledge of when I'm going to be home about five minutes before I get home. Whatever day, whatever time, she's at the front window before the car is visible—well before. I don't know how that works.

A shout-out to Jackie who was our other black Lab who remained a puppy well into her teens. She lived to 15; we lost her a few years ago. That's why we got Kealey. Kealey was a bit of a surprise. I'm going to talk about my first dog in a second, but I want to talk about the bill.

There are good things in this bill with regard to puppy mills and with regard to the fines here. I think animal health is very important. We all agree on this. We all have affection for the animals whom we've domesticated. I want to juxtaposition that later in the debate to some things that we have to turn our minds to.

I will be supporting this bill, so let me just put that on the record right now. There are very good things in this bill. It could be a bit stronger. A lot of what will make this bill work is what happens outside of here with regard to enforcement.

Here's the story about my first dog. I've got to do this quick. I don't have too much time—I could go on all afternoon. I was working in the grocery store, managing a grocery store in Kanata. This beagle wandered into what

was called the “car pickup” and didn’t want to leave. I guess it sensed food, and it wanted to hang around. So I called the SPCA. Well, it was in the evening and they weren’t open; they weren’t available. No one was there to pick up the dog—and I didn’t have the money. So I take the dog home. I took the dog home for four days and became attached to the dog I think, because when I eventually found the owner, which is another story altogether, and the dog went home, apparently I fell into a slump and my family was all worried about me.

About two months later, my dad says, “I’ve got something I want to show you.” I said, “Sure. Great.” He says, “We’ll go out next week, midweek, and I’ll show you.” One week passed and we missed it, another week passed—three or four weeks, and he finally says, “We’re going to do it this morning.” So I get in the car with him. We’re driving south of the city in Ottawa and he stops at the bank machine. “What the heck is he doing?” I’m thinking.

We’re driving to this place called Patterson’s Berry Farm. They have pumpkins and berries, and this is around Halloween time, and the only thing I can think of is, there’s a picture on my parents’ fridge of my dad with a pot-bellied pig at Patterson’s Berry Farm, and I think, “Oh, my God, he’s bought a pot-bellied pig.” That’s all I could think. I got out to the farm, and it’s pumpkin time. All the moms and dads are out there with their kids, and my dad’s with his kid. The kids were like five and six with the pumpkins. I’m a 37-year-old. I’m there with my dad—I feel a little awkward because I’m older than most of the kids, but I feel like one of the kids. My dad says, “Come with me.” So he takes me around to this barn and we go in the door. He pulls out a little collar and says, “I never bought you a dog”—when I was a kid, and so I had to go into the pen and the dog came to me. She got the little collar so I could pick her up a couple of weeks later because it wasn’t time for her to leave.

Anyway, her name was Marty. So Marty and I were very close. We shared many baguettes, bags of Cheezies and other foodstuff that you’re not supposed to feed dogs. We had a relationship that was really built a lot on food and a common affection, lots of naps together. She was quite an amazing dog. We used to joke—the last dog, Jackie, thought she was a puppy. Jackie thought everybody else was a puppy, but Marty thought she was a person, because she would be looking at whoever was talking in a group.

Anyhow, she was about 10 years old, and she kept getting sick. Eventually, I went to the vet and the vet said, “We can’t do much for her. Bring her back on Monday.” She hadn’t been eating and she was sick, so I got her into the car. I went, “We’re going to the cottage,” because she loved the water. So we’re driving to the cottage. She’s lying in the back. She hasn’t eaten anything for days and days. We stop at Dairy Queen. We get ice cream cones. The dog pops up in the back seat, ends up having an ice cream cone.

We got her to the cottage. I picked her up out of the car and I carried her down to the beach. She went for a little swim. She got pretty tired, so I brought her up, put her on

the front porch. She stayed there for the weekend and was visited by all the family—dozens of people. And then we brought her to be put to sleep. She was very close to my mother-in-law—we spent a lot of time at her home when our kids were young—so my mother-in-law, my dad, who had bought the dog, and I were there when she was put to sleep. So it was very crowded in that little veterinary office.

And that’s how much—I’m not telling you a story that’s uncommon or unusual. We have this affection, because we get so much affection from them and there’s so much love. You can pet them; they’re ours, and in a sense, they’re free—they’re free to roam in the domain of our homes, our backyards, the fields where we can take them to do that.

So, in some ways, it’s easy to do this. It’s easy to do this bill because of the affection that we have for animals, and the cruelty that we see is something that hurts us, and sometimes more than when we see the same kind of thing happening to people. I can’t explain the phenomenon.

I can remember when—look it up; I’m not going to go through the story because we’ll be here until midnight: Bam-Bam the deer. It was a deer a family had taken in, and the ministry had to come in and take it away because they had it in a cage, and you can’t cage wild animals, right? Go and check it out. It’s an interesting story. Or if you want, one day, I’ll buy you a beer and tell you the story—or a glass of wine.

Here’s the thing, and the member from Toronto Centre brought this up: animals in pens. I’ll start with penned dog hunting. Why did we open that up again? Two decades ago, we closed it down. The animals that are affected, that it’s cruel to, well, they’re not our domesticated pets, but they’re still animals. It’s not a right practice. I don’t think we should be doing it. I don’t think the government’s ready to revisit it. It’s not the right thing to do. And I’m not saying this to criticize the bill or—it’s just, I really don’t think it’s the right thing to do. I think most reasonable people would think the same way, especially if we thought of them the same way—coyotes and other animals—if we thought of them as our pets. They’re still animals.

The second thing is—I want to bring this up—another penned animal. Marineland: I think it’s important that we bring that up. There have been 17 whale deaths in Marineland—I think I’ve got the number right—and there have been more undersea mammals that have died. As a matter of fact, there have been more mammals that were transferred out of Marineland, more whales that were being transferred out of Marineland that died. And at the same time they were being transferred out, the ministry said—the ministry has been investigating since 2020, four years. The ministry said that, essentially, the sea mammals, the marine mammals, were not doing well because of poor water quality—poor water quality.

Again, penned animals: You can’t pet a whale—well, at least maybe not safely, a killer whale.

Why is that? It’s not right. And the ministry won’t disclose—it doesn’t appear as though we’re enforcing, and then it comes back to this enforcement in this bill. I don’t

want to—we raised the fines in long-term care a couple of times, our government, your government. “We’re going to be harder. We’re going to fine people when things go wrong.” Things go wrong; nobody gets fined. That’s the thing about this bill: If it’s going to work, you’ve got to put money into it. You’ve got to have enforcement.

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So, I guess what I’m trying to say out of the bill is, we all love our pets. And we should. And we’re really lucky to have them and they mean really important things in our lives. They’re part of our family. But there are other animals that are equally worthy of our consideration, who we don’t have a relationship with, but they are beings. They exist. And penned dog hunting—just not right. I mean, if you put this bill up and you had a picture of penned dog hunting, you’d go, “What? This doesn’t make sense. You’re doing this and you’re doing this?” It’s not right.

Marineland: I know why we’re having a problem with Marineland. It’s because it means jobs. And that’s important. I think it’s important. But it’s time for us to say, “Well, we’re going to be good and right and stop this practice, and we’re going to make sure people have jobs.” Yes, it’s a problem. It’s not unsolvable. It takes two groups of people to get together to do that. I think it’s the right thing to do. I think it’s reasonable.

What’s happening at Marineland is cruel. It’s not just the fact that whales or other sea mammals, marine mammals have died; it’s the fact that they’re penned in, just like Bam-Bam the deer couldn’t be penned in and the ministry rushed in—I won’t go into the story right now. It’s the law. It’s a rule, right? How come you can’t keep a deer in captivity, but you can pen in a coyote or a whale for show, make them do tricks? I mean, it’s 2024.

Anyway, to the minister: I’ll support the bill. I congratulate him for bringing it forward. But let’s think about these other things, because they’re not right. We shouldn’t be doing them, and we should revisit whatever decisions that we’ve made on that.

I thank you for your time. I know it’s late in the afternoon, but I thought that needed to be said.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions to the member for Ottawa South?

Hon. Rob Flack: I very much enjoyed the honourable member’s comments. We could all go through the painstaking moments when we take our dogs to the vet for that final time. Just when you think you’re a tough, big, old guy, you sit down and you break down and you cry like a baby, but, you know, it’s good because you love them.

The business of this act, to me, the punitive fines that these unethical bad actors—their unethical behaviour is really bad. Do you agree—are the minimum fines, \$10,000 to \$25,000, enough? Should they be more?

And the next part is—when I spoke, it was about the bad breeding practices, which, to me, is the absolute worst part. What they end up creating in this world are dogs that just don’t have a chance in life. Do you agree that we go far enough in this bill in those particular measures?

Mr. John Fraser: Yes, I think the measures in there will make a difference, but they’ll only make a difference if you enforce it. That’s the only way. It’s like the long-term-care fines and—on us, too. We raised the fines. Nobody was getting charged. So, it’s a thing where we make laws here, and then once we get outside, we don’t put what we need behind it. And I believe all members of this House want something behind it, so it’s not a criticism.

So, about putting animals down: I had a cat. We got a cat, which I said we weren’t supposed to get. My wife and my daughter went out and got the cat. We lived in an apartment building, eight-storey. My wife had the cat, Deedee, out on the balcony and the cat—the screen door slammed, the cat jumped off—eight storeys. I got down there; its leg was broken. I took it to the vet. Long story, the cat survived. It cost me way more money than they said it would.

So 13 years later, the cat’s ready to pass away, and I’m the one who has to take the cat in. The cat and I were indifferent. I didn’t want the cat. I’m bending over putting the cat in the crate, and I’m sobbing. I’m choked up. I’m like, “Why am I crying?” We never really liked each other. But it’s true.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: It’s always great to hear the member. His speeches are always very personal, and it’s always a pleasure.

I just wanted to ask: I know that you were asked a question about enforcement, and I’ve already asked one about enforcement as well. But if you really want to change bad behaviours or bad practices, can you talk a little bit about why it’s more important—or it’s as important—to increase the chances of being caught by having enough inspectors and having active inspections, and not just doubling or tripling or even quadrupling fines, but making sure that there are inspectors out there and getting the job done?

Mr. John Fraser: You’ve got to have inspectors out there, and you’ve got to be able to target where your risks are. All my dogs are farm dogs. They’re not puppy mills. It’s a litter once a year or once every couple of years. They’re great dogs. But you’ve got to put some money into it if you’re going to enforce it, and then you’ve got to levy the fines. It’s that simple.

Like I said, there are problems that are happening in Marineland right now. There are corrective measures that could be taken. It’s hard for people to get information about what’s going on.

I think it’s a legitimate concern for all of us, in supporting this bill and wanting it to be effective, that there will not be what’s needed there to make the bill effective. I think the government has to put an emphasis on that and let all of us in here know what exactly they’re going to do to make it work.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, the member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

Mr. Aris Babikian: My condolences to your cat.

Puppy mills often fail to keep a dog with contagious diseases away from other dogs or animals. Does the member agree that dogs raised in these types of deplorable

conditions are not suitable to be bred, and that this matter is negatively contributing to the conditions of dogs in the province?

Mr. John Fraser: Well, I agree totally that, yes, those conditions—we've all seen it. One of the challenges that I have living in Ottawa, and other members that live in the east and in the west, is that you're very close to another province, and they have challenges with enforcement around that. You just see sometimes terrible, terrible stories of the conditions that animals are living under.

And then, of course, when you're producing puppies and the market slows down or dries up—as it has in some cases—then you have some really disastrous situations where animals suffer.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Any further questions for the member from Ottawa South? Okay. Thank you.

Further debate? Further debate?

Mr. Kerzner has moved second reading of Bill 159, An Act to amend the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act,

2019. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading? No? All right. I recognize the Associate Minister of Housing.

Hon. Rob Flack: Speaker, please refer the bill to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bill is therefore referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

Orders of the day? I recognize the member for Chatham-Kent–Leamington.

Mr. Trevor Jones: On a point of order: Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6 p.m.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Chatham-Kent–Leamington is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to see the clock at 6 p.m. Agreed? Agreed.

It is therefore 6 p.m.

Report continues in volume B.

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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

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Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
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Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)	Willowdale	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
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Dowie, Andrew (PC)	Windsor—Tecumseh	
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Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
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Gallagher Murphy, Dawn (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
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Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
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Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
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Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hazell, Andrea (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
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		Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre
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McCarthy, Hon. / L'hon. Todd J. (PC)	Durham	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises
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		Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones
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Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
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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	
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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
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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
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Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle

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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	