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111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
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Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act, 2020, Bill 204, Mr. Clark / Loi de 2020 visant à soutenir les locataires et les petites entreprises, projet de loi 204, M. Clark

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 23 September 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 23 septembre 2020

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HELPING TENANTS
AND SMALL BUSINESSES ACT, 2020
LOI DE 2020
VISANT À SOUTENIR LES LOCATAIRES
ET LES PETITES ENTREPRISES

Mr. Clark moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 204, An Act to amend various Acts respecting municipal elections, to amend the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020 and to provide for a temporary residential rent freeze and specified temporary protections for certain commercial tenants / *Projet de loi 204, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui a trait aux élections municipales, modifiant la Loi de 2020 sur la réouverture de l'Ontario (mesures adaptables en réponse à la COVID-19) et prévoyant un gel des loyers d'habitations temporaire et des protections temporaires précisées pour certains locataires commerciaux.*

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the minister care to lead off the debate?

Hon. Steve Clark: Absolutely, Speaker. Good morning. I'd first like to say that I'll be sharing my time with the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Good morning, Speaker. It's always great to see you in the chair. I see we're having a Speaker switch, so I'll allow that to take place.

Good morning, members. I'm proud to rise in the House today to speak about the Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act. First, this legislation, if passed, would freeze rent increases, starting on January 1, 2021, until December 31, 2021, for almost all of Ontario's 1.7 million tenants.

Second, it would continue our ongoing efforts to help small businesses by extending the temporary ban on evictions for small businesses whose landlords are eligible for the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance program.

Third, this legislation would amend the Municipal Elections Act, the Municipal Act, the Election Act, the Assessment Act and the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation Act to create a single registry of electors.

In addition, to support better compliance with the public health guidelines across Ontario, amendments to the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act would, if passed, create a new offence and fines in relation to breaking the rules for social gatherings.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's great to see you in the chair this morning. Before I turn things over to my parliamentary assistant and the parliamentary assistant for the Solicitor General—they're going to speak about other details of the bill—I'm going to speak about the proposed residential rent freeze.

Our proposed changes regarding residential tenancies are simple: to freeze rents on residential units across Ontario in 2021. This would provide financial security, predictability and stability to the vast majority of Ontario tenants as we continue to recover from the impacts of COVID-19. At a time when so many Ontarians are facing temporary changes to their hours at work or even temporary job losses, we need to ensure that they do not see an increase in their rent, because we know in times of crisis every little bit helps; parce que nous savons qu'en périodes de crise, chaque coup de pouce est utile.

The Residential Tenancies Act sets out the rent increase guideline formula. It's a formula that only applies to rent increases for units covered by rent control. It does not apply to units occupied in November 2018 or after. Our government excluded new rental buildings from rent control to encourage more purpose-built rental construction, because we all know in this House that Ontario has a housing shortage.

And our changes to rent control were working. Rental starts in 2018 and 2019 were the highest they've been in decades. It doesn't matter what metric you use—new rental starts, new rental completions or permits for new rental construction—we were seeing new housing at levels we hadn't seen in over 20 years. I think that's good news not just for tenants but good news for Ontario.

But as we all know, almost everyone has been impacted by COVID-19 in some way, so our proposed rent freeze would apply to all units covered under the Residential Tenancies Act. It would include units that typically would be exempt from rent control. It would be supporting families who rent houses, students renting suites, couples in mobile homes and seniors in land-lease communities or retirement homes. It doesn't matter if you are in a rent-controlled unit or not, our changes would freeze your rent. It would also apply to individuals paying the lower end of market rent or who receive rental assistance in community housing, and it would support vulnerable people in care homes.

It is designed as a temporary, one-year rent freeze to remain in place for the duration of 2021. This means no rent increases could come into effect during the freeze period, even if a rent increase notice had already been provided. In 2022, the system would return back.

We recognize that landlords often count on rent increases to maintain their businesses and recover increases that they may be facing in their costs, and I want to thank landlords across Ontario. We know that they have shown the Ontario spirit by working together with their tenants, and, for that, we want to say thank you. We want to say thank you to those landlords who are working with their tenants.

Landlords will still have to give at least 90 days' notice for any rent increase that will take effect in 2022, and some of those notices may be issued by the end of 2021 for planned increases in early 2022. This will allow both landlords and tenants time to prepare for the transition. But let me be clear: Landlords in rent-controlled units will not be able to catch up on 2021 rent increases.

0910

Mais je te tiens à le préciser : les locataires de logements assujettis au contrôle des loyers ne pourront pas rattraper les augmentations de loyer de 2021.

Any rent increases in rent-controlled units in 2022 will have to be calculated based on rents in 2021, which will be the same rents that they've experienced in 2020. And we will provide the public with plenty of notice on the rent increase guideline in 2022, announcing it no later than August of next year.

Mr. Speaker, this rent freeze is in response to extraordinary times. Like every action our government has taken in these challenging months, it reflects our putting people's health and safety first, and supporting everyone in the province as we work to get Ontario back on track.

As we prepare for the year ahead, we are being proactive in addressing financial security for tenants. We are aware of the economic impacts of the pandemic on so many Ontario residents, whether that be through temporary layoffs, temporary salary reductions or any other reason. We want to reduce the pressure on Ontarians struggling to pay for utilities, food and other basic needs. That's why we're helping tenants in the form of a 2021 rent freeze. Our government is the only province in Canada to announce our intention to freeze rent in 2021. We know that Ontarians do not know what the next year will bring, but our proposed rent freeze offers some financial security for 1.7 million Ontarians.

Speaker, we know even with such protections, many Ontarians will struggle with paying their rent. We have listened to the calls for more direct financial assistance for vulnerable tenants, and I want to assure you that we have been doing exactly that. We have been giving direct help to thousands of Ontarians in need through the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit. With the federal government, we've committed to a \$1.4-billion investment over the nine years of the program. It's a portable housing benefit so that individuals and families can use it to pay rent in any home anywhere in the province. More than 3,000 households

have been approved for the benefit already, and we expect this number to grow to over 5,000 by the end of the year. The Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit is a groundbreaking program, and this government was groundbreaking as being the first province or territory in Canada to sign on to its launch in April of this year.

Speaker, I want to thank the Premier for his strong leadership in these unprecedented times. He has listened to public health experts, consulted with municipal leaders, businesses and every sector in this province as we faced something we had never faced before. He has engaged with Ontarians on the front line. We need a government that listens and then acts based on the best information available, adjusting course as required—every week, every day or every hour. Our government's approach with this legislation involves that kind of listening and responsiveness.

We heard the concerns of tenants facing rent increases in 2021—and we listened.

Monsieur le Président, nous avons entendu les préoccupations des locataires confrontés à des augmentations de loyer en 2021, et nous avons écouté.

While many have shared with us the need for this rent freeze, they've also communicated the need for some flexibility and some balance. That's why the proposed legislation allows for some special exemptions. We know that in order to maintain a healthy and safe rental stock, landlords invest upfront capital in making their units safe and their units secure. This rent freeze would not apply where a landlord receives approval from the Landlord and Tenant Board to raise rent in order to recover the cost of certain repairs.

Let me be clear: This is not an across-the-board exception. It is only for eligible capital improvements and for operating costs related to security services. The legislation would also continue to permit some rent increases if landlords and tenants come to an agreement to cover the cost of adding a specific service—for example, air conditioning or parking. Our government also recognizes that homes for special care and group homes offer supportive care. They have unique operational needs and funding arrangements, so the rent freeze would not apply to them.

Mr. Speaker, throughout this pandemic, our government has worked to ensure that Ontarians can stay in their homes. It started with our temporary moratorium on evictions, but that's not all we've done. In response to COVID-19, our government has invested an additional \$510 million into our communities to help our most vulnerable. Our social services relief fund is providing innovative housing solutions in the long term but is also providing immediate assistance for those that need it right now. This fund has expanded shelter capacity across Ontario, purchased PPE for those in need, and gone towards rent banks and utility banks to keep the lights on and to keep people in their homes.

But, Mr. Speaker, that's not all we have done. The Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act introduced numerous changes that will help tenants across Ontario. We know that many landlords and tenants

have shown the Ontario spirit by working together during these difficult times.

The Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act enhanced protections for tenants to deter illegal evictions and to further encourage landlords to work with their tenants during COVID-19. In fact, the protecting tenants act doubled fines for landlords who broke the law. Individual landlords who engaged in bad-faith evictions now face up to a \$50,000 fine. Corporate landlords could face up to a \$250,000 fine. Victims of bad-faith evictions now qualify for up to a year's rent in additional compensation.

We've also introduced changes that would require the Landlord and Tenant Board to consider whether landlords tried to negotiate repayment plans with their tenants before resorting to an eviction. This highlights the necessity of working together and maintaining tenancies while we work to get Ontario back on track.

Speaker, at the root of so many housing challenges is the need for more supply. It's something that we tackled with More Homes, More Choice, our housing supply action plan. This legislation set up a regulatory and policy change to transform Ontario's broken housing system and encourage more construction of housing of all types, including rental. As we cautiously ease the restrictions on construction across this province, not only are we seeing more rental construction, but we're seeing new construction of affordable rental units. This is a direct result of our government's investment and our partnership with non-profit and community organizations.

Speaker, I've had the great opportunity, as you know, to see many new projects in person in the past few months when touring the province, and I think that those projects are really offering people and communities new hope. I see the member for London—Fanshawe. I know that she's very interested in this, because she attended the announcement in London, where our government invested over \$1.6 million towards the construction of a new affordable and accessible rental building geared to seniors and people with disabilities. When I visited this building—the residents are just starting to move in—and I'm sure the member opposite agrees, there was tremendous excitement. The new home is located near essential services such as grocery stores, transit and medical care, and has easy access to the YMCA, a public library and parks. It's beautiful inside, and it's beautiful outside.

0920

But it's exceptional for a number of other reasons, Speaker. Thanks to a partnership between the province and the Royal Canadian Legion, 10 of the units at this brand new building are dedicated to veterans. Too many Canadians who have served our country struggle to find housing. This project is a great example of how we can all partner, all levels of government, to do just that.

Speaker, I was up in Sault Ste. Marie, in the Minister of Colleges and Universities' riding, where we're teaming up with the Urban Indigenous Homeward Bound program to create new affordable housing. Working with our partners there, we have invested nearly \$3 million in the transformation of the former St. Bernadette Catholic School into

affordable housing. When the project is complete, the 15-unit rental complex will provide a home to Indigenous women and children who are at risk of homelessness. The Homeward Bound program provides a sense of community as well, providing mothers with on-site child and family care, life skills, assistance in obtaining post-secondary education and employment mentoring.

Speaker, whether it's that converted school in Sault Ste. Marie or an apartment in Kitchener or a basement suite in downtown Mississauga, Ontario is our collective home, and our government is investing in ways to make it more welcoming, safe and secure for everyone.

L'Ontario est notre chez-nous collectif, et notre gouvernement investit de façon à le rendre plus accueillant, plus sûr et plus sécuritaire pour tout le monde.

We are doing all we can through this legislation and our proposed rent freeze in 2021. We're providing protection against illegal evictions and new investments to boost the construction of affordable homes, to ensure that everyone has a roof over their head, now and in the months ahead, as we work to get Ontario back on track, because everyone—everyone, Speaker—deserves a place to call home.

I am pleased to provide a little insight into the rent freeze portion of this bill. As I said, there are four sections of this bill. The two parliamentary assistants will now go through the other sections of the bill that I have outlined in my remarks. With that, I will turn it over to my parliamentary assistant, MPP Jim McDonell.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I now turn debate over to the member from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for the opportunity to speak about how we are working to support municipalities across Ontario through these challenging times. I will be sharing my time with the parliamentary assistant to the Solicitor General.

As the minister outlined, our proposed legislation will provide relief from rent increases for most of Ontario's 1.7 million residential tenants, who all need some sense of certainty in a time of uncertainty.

It will also provide relief for the thousands of small businesses, the backbone of every village, town and city in Ontario. It recognizes those who made the hard decisions, like scaling back their operations as customers stayed home, as well as the investment of business owners in additional cleaning, PPE for staff and hand sanitizing for customers, so they can operate safely. Our government understands the extraordinary cost of operating a small business during a pandemic. Not only have they had to miss rent payments, but too many have worried about whether they would have to shut down permanently.

The COVID-19 outbreak has taken a heavy toll on all of us as individuals and as communities. That's why Ontario is continuing to step up for our small businesses. This proposed legislation will help both residential and commercial tenants, and will also help our municipal partners. The Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act proposes the creation of a single registry of electors.

As the province reopens safely, Minister Clark and the Premier have been tremendous leaders in advocating for local governments. Our government is focused on strengthening communities, restarting jobs and the economy, and ensuring critical services are delivered right across the province.

Commercial rent assistance: The Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act will play a crucial role in our efforts to help small businesses recover from the financial impact of COVID-19.

Just as our government moved quickly to put a moratorium on residential evictions this year to keep tenants safely in their homes, we've put in place a temporary ban on many commercial evictions from June 17 to August 31 of this year. And it had to be done, because small businesses form the backbone of our communities. The Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act would extend that ban.

We recognize that local businesses need more time to recover from the impacts of COVID-19. We know that when small businesses suffer, the impacts are felt not only at the local level, but at the provincial and national levels as well. The Premier, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Minister of Finance have worked diligently with their federal counterparts, making the case that Ontario's small businesses need support, and our government continues to balance the needs of landlords with those of tenants. That is why we established the temporary moratorium on commercial evictions to coincide with the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance for small businesses, or CECRA, for the commercial landlords and their small business tenants.

Ontario committed up to \$241.2 million as its share of the federal-provincial program, making more than \$900 million available in urgent relief for small businesses and their landlords across Ontario. Small businesses should not be alone in taking on the financial cost of the COVID-19 outbreak. Landlords who apply to the program can receive forgivable loans equal to 50% of the monthly rent that their tenants would normally pay. In turn, the commercial tenants would still pay rent, but the financial burden is greatly reduced down to just 25% of what they would normally pay.

Meanwhile, under the program, landlords must cover the remaining 25% of the rent, ensuring that all our small businesses, our friends and our neighbours, can stay in business. It's crucial, because the cost of saving our local hardware stores, barbershops, galleries, pubs and restaurants and what they contribute to make our neighbourhoods unique and support local jobs is worth it. That is why we are proposing to extend the moratorium on evictions for CECRA-eligible small businesses.

The federal government had been ready to end the program at the end of August, but on September 8 the federal government announced its decision to extend the program for the month of September. With that essential funding in place to support both landlords and tenants, we're proposing to extend the ban on commercial evictions from September 1 to October 30. The amendments we are

proposing to the Commercial Tenancies Act mirror those implemented in June through the Protecting Small Business Act, and would extend the changes to align CECRA for small businesses.

We are proposing this as a temporary measure, but we believe it is essential. Extending the ban on commercial evictions gives small businesses a longer runway to return to normal, to create jobs and to help rebuild the economy. We know we're not alone in this thinking. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Restaurants Canada and the local business improvement areas have all been calling for eviction protection for commercial tenants to help keep them in their rented space and to support their recovery.

Our municipal partners have also expressed support for any measures that help local businesses as part of the economic recovery. Toronto mayor John Tory called the commercial eviction ban "absolutely the right thing to do" so small businesses could focus on their operations.

If passed, this legislation would amend the Commercial Tenancies Act to protect small businesses from being locked out for non-payment of rent. The extension of the commercial evictions ban would ensure landlords could not seize a small business's assets and sell them in a distress sale. For the duration of this ban, landlords would not be able to get an eviction order for rent arrears, and the ban would be retroactive. Any landlords who have already served an eviction notice as of the day after the previous ban ended, September 1, would have to allow their tenants back in. Any landlords who seized goods from their tenants on September 1 or later would have to return any unsold goods.

0930

Mr. Speaker, this is not the only way our government is supporting small businesses and communities. We've also invested funding into local manufacturers in order to keep our front-line workers and communities safe. In April, we launched the Ontario Together Fund to provide financial support to innovative businesses to retool their processes and increase their capacity to make personal protective equipment, or PPE.

For example, in Concord, we invested over \$1 million to a manufacturer and assembler of medical devices and subcomponents. This funding will allow the company to increase its output of face shields from 200,000 per week to more than 1 million per week. This increased capacity will help them deliver 10 million face shields more quickly.

In Barrie, our government is investing \$1.8 million to a medical device manufacturer that distributes to more than 60 countries around the world. This will help the company re-engineer and retool its current operations and purchase new moulding equipment. With this new equipment, the company will double its output of oxygen masks; triple its output of ETCO2 masks, which are used to monitor breathing prior to ventilator use; and quadruple its output of eye and face shields to meet Ontario's need for PPE. The funding will also allow the company to reorganize its production facility to allow for physical distancing. This is

just another great example of how our government is committed to supporting small businesses as we get Ontario back on track.

Mr. Speaker, municipalities are also our partners in this important work to keep people safe and get Ontario back on track. They are on the front lines, working hard to keep their communities safe during the COVID-19 outbreak, finding innovative ways to deliver the important services residents rely on. We have been listening to our municipal partners, working with them to ensure that we can respond quickly to their evolving needs. Whenever possible, we have been reducing burdens to help ensure that municipalities have the flexibility to continue making important decisions and providing their critical services. For example, in March, we worked across party lines to introduce and pass the Municipal Emergency Act. Back then, a quorum of municipal council members, 50% plus 1, needed to be physically present to conduct business. That didn't make sense and wouldn't work in a time of self-isolation and restricted gatherings. That is why we made it possible for members of councils to meet electronically and be counted for quorum during emergencies. Municipalities of all sizes have successfully adopted this new way of doing business.

We've removed other barriers that didn't make sense during a state of emergency. We temporarily suspended decision-making timelines under the Planning Act so municipalities could focus on what was most important: local public health needs. We extended timelines for existing municipal development charge bylaws that would be expiring during the emergency, and for those expiring up to six months after the end of the emergency, so municipalities could keep collecting revenue related to growth. With an emergency order, we gave municipalities the flexibility to redeploy certain staff to critical municipal services, including bylaw enforcement, homeless shelters and public health services.

These challenging times have shown us, more than ever, that flexibility is critical for all governments, and we know that it will be necessary as we move forward. For example, this summer we issued a new emergency order, and amended another one, to allow municipalities to quickly pass temporary bylaws to create and extend patios. This allowed for covered outdoor dining areas where people could safely enjoy a meal, and helped local restaurants keep and create jobs.

We all know that our municipalities are key partners in Ontario's economic recovery and we need to use every tool available to help them recover, because municipalities' success is our success.

Mr. Speaker, another way our government wants to reduce the burden on municipalities is by addressing issues affecting voters, candidates and municipal clerks. In his post-election 2018 report, Ontario's Chief Electoral Officer recommended the government consider the creation of a single registry of provincial and municipal electors and give him and Elections Ontario the responsibility to manage the list. We are proposing to do just that.

Under the Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act, we are proposing changes to the Municipal Elections Act, the Municipal Act, the Election Act, the Assessment Act and the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation Act.

Our proposed amendments would create this single register of electors for use in municipal and provincial elections. The single list would be used by Elections Ontario and municipalities. It is expected to be more accurate, meaning fewer corrections for voters at polling stations, as well as fewer delays for Ontarians on election day. Our proposed changes would create a consistent approach between municipal and provincial elections, and more certainty about the accuracy of information when Ontarians exercise their right to vote.

We have heard from municipal councils across the province that municipal voters' information needs improvement. Some of these municipal councils have passed resolutions to encourage our government to explore ways of improving it. And if passed, our proposed changes would do just that.

Currently, the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. provides municipalities with a preliminary list of people eligible to vote in every municipal election. Municipal clerks then correct and revise this information to develop the voters list. The Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario and several municipal shareholders have expressed support for appointing the Chief Electoral Officer and Elections Ontario as the authority responsible for a single register of electors. If passed, our proposed changes would help make voting easier for voters, candidates and municipal clerks, in time for the 2026 regular elections and any municipal by-elections initiated after January 1, 2024.

Mr. Speaker, this is just one way we are working to ease the burden on municipalities and support their recovery. We know that municipalities across the province—and across Canada—are facing financial challenges as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. The Premier championed this cause across the province. He fought hard for a good deal for Ontario, and under the Safe Restart Agreement, we were able to secure up to \$4 billion in funding for municipalities, including up to \$1.39 billion to help them address their operating pressures related to COVID-19.

We committed to helping municipalities bounce back by providing the tools and resources they need to keep their communities safe and functioning. I'm pleased that the federal government partnered with Ontario to provide urgently needed funding for communities across the province. This month, as a first step, \$695 million will flow to all 444 Ontario municipalities on a per-household basis. Later this year, a further \$695 million will be available to those in need of additional support to address financial pressures. This important funding provides the flexibility municipalities need to address specific priorities in their communities and help ensure that our municipal partners can continue delivering the crucial services people rely on every day.

This funding goes hand in hand with the legislative changes proposed today to support our municipal partners,

and help ensure they emerge stronger than ever and ready to lead Ontario's economic recovery.

Mr. Speaker, our government wants to support municipalities and help them deliver efficient, critical services to their residents. This work was under way well before COVID-19's outbreak. We understand that every community is different, and we are committed to giving municipalities the flexibility they need to meet their unique needs. But making life easier for municipalities and improving municipal voters lists is just one of the important aspects of this bill.

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My colleague Minister Clark has also spoken to you today about how this proposed legislation would make positive changes to enable our government to better support tenants and small businesses during the COVID-19 recovery. Taken together, the proposed changes would help strengthen our communities as we work to restart jobs and the economy during this extraordinary time. We have said from the beginning that we were all in this together, and I am heartened by the stories of people across the province who are buying local, investing in the health of the local businesses and communities. With this legislation, the province is doing the same, demonstrating its support for local businesses and local communities—a support that is ongoing—because we have to work together to support all small businesses and help our communities recover from COVID-19.

Thank you, Speaker. I now turn it over to my colleague.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: It's great to join in this debate on second reading of Bill 204. I'm proud to speak about the proposed legislative amendments to the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020.

Before I dive into the specifics of the proposed amendments, I just want to first remind the House of the tremendous sacrifice the people of Ontario have made over the last several months, and the steps we as a province have taken together in our fight against the deadly COVID-19 virus.

I know throughout the summer and over the last couple of days, everybody has shared stories from their ridings of special people who have gone above and beyond just to help each other out. When COVID-19 first hit, our neighbourhoods gathered together and we helped out our seniors, we helped out our young people, and we wanted to protect each other. If you were walking down the street, you would choose a side of the street and nod at each other from a distance. The kindness that people showed each other was quite astonishing. Even though it is a tough time, it was a rewarding experience to be part of.

At 7 o'clock every night in my neighbourhood, we all banged our pots and pans to cheer on our front-line workers and our first responders. It was great community spirit. In Etobicoke–Lakeshore, that's something we did. And I know that on all sides of the benches, we all had some stories to share of people really showing the Ontario

spirit. So I do want to thank our businesses, our store clerks, our grocery store workers and our transit workers.

I had the opportunity to tour our Metrolinx site, one of our GO Transit stations, with the Minister of Finance and our Associate Minister of Transportation, to see first-hand how they sanitized, put in directional arrows and had signage, just to make sure that people who were taking transit felt safe to do so. I want to assure people out in the community, especially people in Toronto, that taking transit and getting on the GO and taking our TTC is safe. I want to thank those workers who go to work every day and make sure that the customers feel safe on transit.

On March 17, Ontario declared a provincial state of emergency in response to the pandemic. We took extraordinary steps to protect the health and the well-being of all Ontarians. We closed non-essential workplaces. We limited bar and restaurant services to takeout food and delivery. We restricted social gatherings to five people. We implemented enhanced measures in long-term-care homes, closed schools, and implemented online resources, among so much more.

Between February and July alone, this Legislature passed 18 pieces of legislation, including emergency measures needed to protect public health and prepare for economic recovery. The Legislature debated and extended the declared provincial emergency five times.

Then, after a long, difficult spring, we had reached a point where Ontario's COVID-19 numbers were trending in the right direction. New cases were down, hospitals had fewer cases in their intensive care units and a large percentage of cases were resolved. It was proof of the progress we had made together after months of Ontarians shouldering an enormous burden.

We charted a path to recovery. We moved cautiously to open regions of the province in stages, based on case counts and other information about what was happening in different regions. We closely reviewed the guidance of our public health officials across the province as we carefully took each step forward. We were making progress—so much progress that we terminated a declared provincial emergency on July 24, 2020, and continued orders that were necessary to protect the health and safety of Ontarians under new legislation, the reopening Ontario act.

Now, more recently, schools have reopened across the province and students are getting back to learning both in school and some online. They're getting to see their classmates and they're getting to see their teachers once again, and I thank those teachers who prepared the classrooms to make sure our children were safe.

In long-term-care homes, residents can once again leave their residences for short stays and temporary absences and visit their loved ones. In communities across Ontario, hair salons are open, restaurants are operating with dine-in services and people are able to reconnect in ways they once didn't, in ones we used to, in ones we used to expect. All those little things that we used to love to do we can now do again. These are examples of the progress towards recovery that are only possible because of the collective efforts of Ontarians who have constantly followed

public health guidance while the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic exists.

Unfortunately, the progress has been tempered by recent spikes in COVID-19 cases, not only here in Ontario but across the country and around the world. As I mentioned, on July 24, 2020, the reopening Ontario act came into force to ensure important measures remained in place after the declared provincial emergency came to an end. Under the act, orders can be extended for up to 30 days at a time. The act also allows the government to amend certain orders. It does not, however, permit the government to create new orders.

But orders are only useful and effective if they're followed by everyone. Sadly, as we've heard in the news over the past few weeks, we have seen an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases across Ontario. Four weeks ago, we were averaging about 100 new cases a day; two weeks ago, we were averaging just over 200 daily cases; and earlier this week, we saw 478 new cases.

With the way the current public health trends are going and the current rate of infection, we must take stronger action. It is needed now to protect our seniors and our most vulnerable, and to safeguard the progress we've made together. As the Premier said on the weekend, "The alarm bells are ringing."

For public health and safety, our government amended orders setting the rules for areas in stage 3 to reduce the number of people permitted to attend social gatherings and organized public events in places that are not operated by a business or organization across the province, to a maximum of 10 people indoors and 25 people outdoors, subject to limited exceptions. This reduction applies to such gatherings or events as social functions, parties, dinners, gatherings, barbecues and wedding receptions held in private residences, backyards, parks and other recreational areas. Mr. Speaker, everyone knows this is not something we wanted to do, but we cannot jeopardize the progress we have made.

Additionally, last week, all orders under the ROA were extended until October 22, 2020. But, again, these orders can only work to protect public health and safety if they're followed, so now it's time to look at what we can do to stop the rule-breakers.

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It's not about the people who are following the rules; it's about the people who are breaking the rules, because unfortunately, not everybody is doing their part. We hear about this on the news. We heard about a situation in Hamilton. We hear about situations in Cherry Beach. I hear about situations in my riding in Etobicoke, along the beachfront. Our police officers are trying to enforce the rules. Unfortunately, there are just some rule-breakers.

We can't have these parties. We can't, and everybody knows. You go into a party in good faith, and everyone's just gathering and having fun, and they just don't realize as time goes on that—and this is actually younger people. Unfortunately, it is the younger people. And, hey, I was a younger person at one point too, and you like to be social with your friends, but you don't realize that once you leave

that party or barbecue or wherever you are in someone's backyard, you may go home and visit your grandparent; you may go see your nieces or your nephews or your cousins, and you may have caught something from somebody else and you may not even know it because you feel just fine. That's why this government needs to put forward some rules and fines. We need to protect those. We're not thinking sometimes when we're at a party, and there are some consequences.

Based on the data and reports from local medical officers of health, social gatherings at private residences are a significant source of increased transmission of COVID-19. I know we've all heard the Premier ask people to please stop the partying; stop the partying. He says, "I don't want to be that dad." But you know what? That is the voice we kind of need in our heads. You know what? Maybe we should stay home. Maybe we can just wait a little bit or maybe we should continue to social distance or wear that mask for the sake of everybody.

To ensure better compliance with the orders, we introduced proposed amendments to the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020, that would, if passed, create a new offence regarding hosting or organizing a gathering at residential premises or prescribed premises that are exceeding limits under the order: a minimum fine of \$10,000 for organizers or hosts of gatherings that exceed limits.

The proposed amendment would also authorize the Lieutenant Governor in Council to prescribe additional types of premises for the purpose of the new offence. The amendments would also give authority for police officers, special constables or First Nation constables to order the temporary closure of premises where there are reasonable grounds to believe that any gathering exceeding the number of people allowed is taking place and to require individuals to leave the premises. Well, that's a mouthful, Mr. Speaker. Under the new set fines established in relation to the current reopening Ontario act orders, people attending one of these gatherings could be fined \$750 for just being present. Again, this is not something we want to do; we just don't want to jeopardize the progress that we have made.

Every decision the Ontario government has made in response to COVID-19 has been informed by medical advice and scientific evidence. We continue to act swiftly and nimbly while being accountable and transparent. We've ramped up testing, we've developed legislation, we've extended orders and we've issued health and safety guidance.

Thousands of front-line health care workers have put their lives on the line to treat and to save others. Volunteers, businesses and Ontarians across the province have rallied together to battle this pandemic. Sadly, some Ontarians have lost their lives to this virus, impacting the lives of thousands of others, including family members and friends. As I mentioned earlier, we've all shared those stories in the House over the last couple of months.

It's important to talk about what has been going on over the last couple of months and some of the positive things

that have come up. We talked about our front-line workers, our firefighters, our paramedics. They're all doing some great work, and for us as a province to have to go back because of a simple party—those simple parties, we think about them as just going out and having some fun, but we don't know the effects that they are causing. We all are seeing the lineups of people getting tested, and the numbers are rising every day. It's time for us to step in, and sometimes it might have to hurt your pocketbook if you're seen at a barbecue or a party, because we need to protect our loved ones. We need to protect our seniors.

Nobody here wants to stop and not have that opportunity to see their loved one in a long-term-care home, if it's their grandparent, if it's their parent. We all have a responsibility as a whole. As parents who send their children to school, we have to make sure that those children are safe before they go to school, make sure that we're not bringing anything into our homes. We all have been doing that as a collective, and I appreciate all the work everyone has done, but especially as our schools are opening.

You know, I always think of my nephew and my step-daughter going to school. You want to ensure that they have a safe environment. We have to put faith in the other parents, in the other families, that they're also doing their part. Sometimes they have young teenagers in the home, or they have young adults living in the home. It's just our nature—we're social beings—to go out and have some fun. Unfortunately, sometimes with that fun you may catch something. As I said, you may not feel it yourself, because you may be asymptomatic, but you don't know how that's going to affect your loved one or someone who is a vulnerable person in your home if they have different conditions.

Also, when we have these parties—I just want to give a shout-out the great people at 22 Division here. They're some wonderful folks. During the summer, we had a lot of bonfires in the park—which is illegal; they shouldn't be doing that—and we stepped up enforcement around our park areas to make sure that people were safe. We wanted to make sure we were safe, so we're using our law enforcement. We have to think about the cost to society when our police are sitting there, trying to say, “No, you can't come in the park,” or “You can't start this fire,” or “You should be here,” or “You should be there.”

We have to use some common sense, and we have to share that common sense with our family members. As we age, sometimes we have lessons learned from the past. I'm sure my parents told me not to go to parties many times, but now we tell our kids not to go to parties for different reasons.

But we have to make sure that we are utilizing our first responders for what they need to be used for, not to be breaking up parties during COVID. There are fires. There are different incidents that the police, the fire and the ambulance should be at. They shouldn't be policing parties, really, so we really need to buckle down and stop these parties from happening. Anybody who is watching and who knows me from the past would probably have a little snicker at me talking about not going to parties, but it is

true. We are in a different time. It's a crazy time; 2020 has been a very different year, so we must continue to be vigilant and make sure that our first responders are used for the appropriate duties versus breaking down parties.

I think I read a story once about how there were about 200 people, and someone had charged everyone an entry fee to go to this house. Everybody was having fun, because that's what young people like to do, and they should have fun, but right now we're in a different stage and we just need them to maybe wait—wait until there's a vaccine, or have less people at the event. Now we're having rules of 10 inside or 25 outside, so we want to make sure that they follow those rules, and that's why we have to put these rules in place.

Anyways, Mr. Speaker, every decision that the Ontario government has made in response to COVID-19 has been informed by medical advice and scientific evidence, as I mentioned earlier, and we need to remember that we will continue to do so to ensure the safety of all Ontarians.

We must remain vigilant, and we all must continue to follow public health guidance. Situations are different in every community. I was in Sudbury a couple of weekends ago. It's where my in-laws live, and I was at a 50th birthday party. There were some people social-distancing; some were not. We were outside with some friends who are just a little bit more vulnerable so they decided not to go inside the house. In Toronto, a little different story—some people have a lot of family members in their homes, so we have to still be careful and still be vigilant. Smaller towns like Thunder Bay or out east—every community is a little bit different.

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So everyone has to bring their story forward, but we still have an obligation to tell our young people, “Maybe we need to follow the rules.” Because of the rising number of COVID-19 cases, we cannot take this lightly. And we cannot take this lightly because we don't want any more deaths. That is why this government is going to take strong action. Violators who behave recklessly and refuse to follow the rules should face steep fines as they risk not only their health, but the health of others. They also jeopardize the path to recovery for Ontario as a province.

This amendment, if passed, would provide Ontarians with the confidence that we are taking the necessary steps to ensure compliance with orders. Creating an impactful minimum fine for hosts and organizers of social gatherings that exceed limits at private residences is one way we can support the health and safety of our communities and, in turn, Ontario's path to a safe recovery. As we heard the Premier, please, let's all continue to do our part.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the fight against COVID-19 is far from over. We have come too far and sacrificed too much to go backwards. I ask everybody to share with their communities, ask them to be safe, wait to go to those parties, please be vigilant and look after one another.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Ms. Suze Morrison: I would like to direct my question to the minister. When we look at the eviction ban, the ban on evictions for businesses, my concern is as we see cases increasing across the province—we're looking at a long

haul here in terms of increasing cases and a potential second wave. Why does the commercial eviction ban expire in this bill on October 30? Does the minister think that COVID-19 is magically going to be over on October 30, that we're going to have a vaccine by then, and that the threat to small businesses will be truly eased by that point? Can you defend the short time frame on the eviction ban?

Hon. Steve Clark: Thanks very much for the question. The federal government announced on September 8 that an extension to the CECRA program for businesses would be to the end of September while they explore other supports for small businesses. So, as the member notes, this legislation, if passed, would extend the previous commercial eviction ban past September 1, 2020, to align with the end of the expected application deadline for CECRA for small businesses in that program. The proposal would also allow that the deadline could be extended as far as October 30. However, the eviction ban could be ended earlier if the deadline changes. So we will continue to work with the federal government. We will continue to encourage commercial landlords to apply for this program.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Hon. Doug Downey: I thank the minister for bringing forward this very important legislation to continue to protect Ontarians with health and safety at the core of it.

We know some small businesses are struggling, in particular restaurants, and some of the employees then are not there. A lot of those employees may well be renters. I guess my real question is, can you expand on some of the things we are doing to help protect the tenants of this province?

Hon. Steve Clark: I want to thank the Attorney General not just for the question, but also for his quick action to apply to the court for the residential eviction ban that he did at the start of the pandemic. He acted extremely quickly. He was extremely responsive, and I want to thank him for his efforts.

We've made a number of legislative changes to strengthen tenant protections. The last bill that was passed discouraged renovations and bad-faith evictions. We also invested, now the total is \$510 million, in our social services relief fund, where we've encouraged municipalities and our other providers to strengthen rent banks and utility banks. Many of them have created temporary assistance programs that kept people in their homes.

There has been a tremendous amount of co-operation between ourselves and the federal government as well. We will continue to work to keep people in their homes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Suze Morrison: Back to the minister: This bill may prevent evictions temporarily for small businesses, but it does nothing to prevent evictions for residential tenants, despite the fact that we heard the Premier say back in March that, "No one will be kicked out of their home or their rental apartments based on not being able to pay the rent. It's just not going to happen; we won't allow it to happen." That's from the Premier back in March.

Why is it, then, that in this bill, you have done absolutely nothing to prevent the eviction of residential

tenants? In fact, eviction orders and eviction notices are continuing to proceed at the Landlord and Tenant Board as we speak right now.

Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, through you to the honourable member: Thank you for the question. The Attorney General continues to monitor the situation. Again, the Superior Court of Justice's suspension of residential evictions concluded on July 31, 2020. That was a measure that the Attorney General did very early on in the pandemic.

The member has mentioned that one specific item, but again, I want to take this opportunity to talk about a number of things that we've done for tenants. Obviously, this bill will provide some certainty for the vast majority of tenants in our province by having a rent freeze for 2021. Again, we're the only province or territory that has indicated that they would be doing this for 2021. We're, again, working with a number of our providers to find those longer-term sustainable solutions to keep people in their homes.

We will continue to work with our municipal partners, and we will continue to encourage them to spend some of that \$510 million on rent banks and utility banks. We really want people to stay in their homes, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions.

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova: Ma question est pour le ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement. Mes félicitations pour ses efforts de parler en français.

Mr. Speaker, affordable housing and housing security is a social determinant of health, as I have learned during my nursing studies. This social determinant of health is more important now than ever.

I know that in my own riding of Mississauga Centre, people are struggling to pay rent and they will welcome this legislation. This move to freeze rent in 2021 is a positive step to protect the 1.7 million Ontarians who rely on rental housing. I want to congratulate the minister and his team for his leadership, for leading the way in Canada as the only province that has introduced this type of legislation to protect renters in 2021.

Can the minister please highlight to the House what this government has done to support renters during the COVID-19 outbreak?

Hon. Steve Clark: Thanks to the member for that excellent question. I want to compliment her as well for her advocacy during the pandemic, not just with her constituents, but also in her capacity as a nurse. I called her early on in the pandemic and really thanked her for being one of those front-line heroes. Thank you for all the work that you do.

As the member noted, there are a number of measures that this government put forward—the Attorney General, with the eviction ban, early on in the pandemic. We also worked collaboratively with the opposition on the economic statement that we tabled early on, and that included the \$200-million social services relief fund. We bolstered that fund to \$510 million.

I know in her area, in Peel region and in Mississauga specifically, they've done some great work to keep people housed, to buy PPE, to ensure that people who are in

community housing are safe. But at the same time, we're working collaboratively on creating new housing. I was just in one of her colleague's ridings. We turned sod at a great developer called Indwell, that is doing great work with supportive housing, and we're going to build upon that supportive housing. We're going to work with groups like Indwell to create more opportunities in more communities to support those who are most vulnerable.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Suze Morrison: A commercial eviction ban alone will not save small businesses that are currently staring down, in some cases, hundreds of thousands of dollars of back rent. It will not save their businesses alone. Nor will the residential rent freeze, alone, save tenants from the clutches of evictions—evictions that this government is currently allowing to continue.

Why has this government continued to ignore calls from the NDP for both a residential, as well as commercial, rent subsidy program? That is what is truly needed in this province to save small businesses and protect residential tenants from eviction.

Hon. Steve Clark: Again, Speaker, I want to correct the honourable member. I will put up our \$510 million that we've placed to help residential tenants and to strengthen our community housing system up against any province or territory in Canada. I want to remind the member that, in my speech this morning, we were the first province or territory in Canada to sign on to the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit. We've already been able to help 3,000 households since April to make sure that they have a safe and secure place to call home.

Again, on the commercial side, we want to ensure that businesses have the support that they need to recover from this unprecedented situation. That's why our government has created and committed up to \$241 million to deliver the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance plan for small business programs, in partnership with the federal government.

We'll continue to work with the federal government. We will continue to pass along the comments and the feedback by our commercial tenants. We're all in this together, and we're going to continue to build upon our previous investments to help people and businesses across Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Unfortunately, there isn't enough time for another question and comment.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ROBERT MULLIGAN INVITATIONAL

Mr. Ian Arthur: I rise today to recognize a bond of friendship that spans the years. In the summer of 2012, rowers at Trent were faced with the worst of fears, a cancer diagnosis of one of their own. Brent is one of the most

competitive people I know and a cornerstone of our team at university, but as the treatment robbed him of his ability to compete, a community came together to support a friend.

To keep the competitive spirit going, they began mini-putting, a sport where they could all still meet on an even playing field—or a green, as it were. While this particular story is a tale of success—Brent is recovered and is expecting his first child—these friends knew that the legacy had to continue. So was born the Registered Association of Mini-Putters, or RAMP, and each summer has now held the Robert Mulligan Invitational, the only mini-putt tournament/cancer research fundraiser of its kind, where this team of friends still comes together to do what small thing they can so that the stories of other families may end happily.

Competition and community service: A day of humble beginnings is now one of Peterborough's key fundraisers in the battle against this terrible disease. Thank you to all the contributors, the putters who brave the little mountains, the widows of the course, who, each year, renew the bonds of friendship and commitment to a cause. Occasionally, I get to spend time with this team of friends, and for this I am thankful. They are the best people that one could know.

Congratulations on achieving this year's fundraising target, and good luck in all the years to come.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Speaker, in June I spoke about the people working so hard in our long-term-care homes. I thanked them for rising to the enormous challenge of COVID-19. More challenges are still ahead of us. Many more of us will need long-term care. We'll need more staff: PSWs, nurses, administrators, activity coordinators, volunteers and many others. We'll need modern, accessible buildings, because these buildings are the residents' home. We'll need them in the cities, in small towns and in the country, and all of them will need to be prepared for future pandemics.

For all these reasons, our government is focused on the future of long-term care. We gave the go-ahead to projects like the new West Perth Village Seniors' Community. New beds are also coming to Knollcrest, Royal Terrace and Strathcona. But there's so much more to do.

I want to thank the long-term-care operators who have put in applications for new beds in Perth–Wellington. I have met with many of them and written letters of support. Make no mistake: As MPP, I support every single one. I've said that many times, and I'll keep on saying it.

Working with all long-term-care operators—for-profit, not-for-profit, and municipal homes—we can meet this moment. We can build the future of long-term care in Perth–Wellington and across Ontario.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: With parents returning to work and kids returning to school, the wait times at

London's testing centres have never been higher. Lines are so long that Londoners are getting discouraged from seeking out testing altogether. They're giving up and going home.

Last weekend, Mary, a mother in my riding, needed to get her children tested after they began showing COVID-19 symptoms. Mary could not get them tested because London's only testing site open on the weekend was already at capacity by 12:30 p.m. That's less than two hours after it opened. Another Londoner, Karen, waited nearly four hours with her elderly mother before the two of them could get tested.

Parents and caregivers like Mary and Karen are trying to do the right thing. For months, this government told the public to get tested. But now this same government is not stepping up to the challenge. As demand increases, so must our testing capacity.

Speaker, I'm asking this government to give Londoners peace of mind and help alleviate the burden on the Carling Heights and Oakridge centres. We need more testing by expanding assessment centres, their hours and hiring additional staff. The health of Londoners must be a top priority.

ARMENIAN INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mr. Aris Babikian: On September 21, the Armenian community of Ontario, along with all of Canada, celebrated the 29th anniversary of the independence of the Republic of Armenia.

After 600 years of colonization by the Ottoman Empire and genocide, the Armenian people rose like a phoenix from the ashes and established the Republic of Armenia on May 28, 1918. Regrettably, the short-lived republic was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1920. Today, the Republic of Armenia is a member of the free world.

The history of Armenians in Ontario dates back to 1887, when Mr. Garabed Nergarian settled in Port Hope, Ontario. Since then, Armenian Canadians have become an integral part of our society. They have excelled in arts and science, business, academia and politics.

As a token of their appreciation to Canada for providing them a safe haven, many Ontario Armenians conscripted in our defence forces and fought in both world wars to defend the values and the principles for which Canada stands.

We are proud to have such a vibrant community that has contributed so much to our province and country. Their presence in Ontario enriched and strengthened our mosaic.

Congratulations to the Armenians of Ontario on the 29th independence anniversary.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, the climate crisis deepens on a daily basis, and yet this government sleepwalks towards disaster, either rolling back the partial steps that

have been taken before, undermining half measures that are already in place or outright going backwards.

In the city of Vancouver, people have recently experienced some of the worst air quality in the world because of the giant climate-stoked forest fires just south of them in California, Oregon and Washington. The climate-stoked hurricane season south of us is already breaking records, and we are only halfway through it.

And yet, we have a government that is planning to ramp up gas-fired power plants, which will accelerate the climate crisis. At the same time, we see the Premier and the Prime Minister agreeing to further weaken the system of reducing industrial climate pollution, an example of outright irresponsibility. It is as if there was no crisis, as if we had all the time in the world to stop this unfolding emergency.

Speaker, we have a responsibility to protect human life and provide a future for ourselves and our young people. The way this government is going on climate, we won't be able to do either.

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CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Good morning. Mr. Speaker, there's a ruling class in this country, and they are all "family." That's not a quote from the 1800s when Upper Canada was ruled by a small group of men known as the Family Compact; that's a quote said on March 9 by a lobbyist from Crestview Strategy to Cambridge resident Jim Karahalios, informing Jim that he had to support Erin O'Toole to remain in the Conservative Party leadership race. Party brass preferred this candidate. After my family didn't take the deal, Jim was removed from the race twice.

But stealing an election wasn't enough for Mr. Rogers, Mr. O'Toole, Senator Don Plett, Lisa Raitt, Dan Nolan and Derek Vanstone. We needed a court victory to repay campaign debts. A few weeks later, 19 volunteers in the local PC riding association were expelled without cause by a fellow member of this supposed ruling Conservative family, Brian Patterson.

Mr. Speaker, I don't serve this made-up ruling Conservative "family." I already have a family, and I serve my constituents. I am grateful for the support of my family and from Canadians across the country and would like to specifically say thank you for the support of the 19 people expelled from the Cambridge PC board, who chose to stand up for democratic principles rather than try to gain the acceptance of some made-up ruling Conservative family.

COVID-19 RESPONSE IN MISSISSAUGA EAST-COOKSVILLE

Mr. Kaled Rasheed: On August 19, I was joined by the Premier as well as some of my colleagues from neighbouring Mississauga ridings at Trillium Health Partners hospital to participate in a funding announcement on behalf of the Muslim community.

COVID-19 has been the greatest challenge this province has faced, and it has become a defining moment in our history. We will honour those who struggled, became ill or passed away, and we will celebrate those who stood up and made a difference in big and small ways to help those who are struggling through these difficult times.

Last month, the Muslim community handed over a cheque of \$100,000, the first instalment of a \$5-million commitment to the Trillium Health Partners hospital. I'm so proud of the community for coming together through the most challenging times to support the health care facility that benefits our greater community here in Mississauga and Peel region. I'm grateful, as I'm sure we all are, to know that the public can count on individuals in the community to ensure our hospitals and the important work they do are supported and ready to serve the needs of everyone. I want to thank and congratulate the community for their outstanding generosity.

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. John Vanthof: The lack of broadband access has long been an irritant in rural Ontario. With COVID-19, it has become a crisis.

In 2018, in this House, the NDP proposed a long-term strategy of \$100 million a year, \$1 billion over 10 years, to actually come to grips with it. It passed unanimously. The government responded with a \$300-million promise over 10 years. The Premier himself stated that he was going to be on this “like a dog on a bone,” in that folksy way that only he can say—like a dog on a bone.

In the 2019-20 budget, there was indeed over \$31 million allocated to rural broadband infrastructure. But in the report from the Financial Accountability Office, it was laid out that not one dollar of that \$31 million had actually been flowed through to fund rural infrastructure. So the Premier was on it like a dog with a bone, but in the country, we know what dogs do with bones: They bury them. And that's the same as what this government did with the \$31 million. Sadly, that is a recurring trend. What the Premier says is going to happen and what actually happens are often never the same, and for rural broadband, that has got to change.

RUSSELL MACKAY

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: It is my pleasure to rise to pay tribute to someone who truly displays the Ontario spirit. Russell Mackay was planning on leaving \$5,000 for the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario in his will, but his daughter, Crystal, suggested that he donate it now. With that, Mr. Mackay decided to walk the cheque 125 kilometres all the way to CHEO.

On Tuesday, September 5, he presented a cheque for \$105,000 to CHEO.

Mr. Mackay was not the only one that displayed the Ontario spirit. Passing drivers honked their horns in support, with some even pulling over to give him money

to add to his donation. A Tim Hortons dropped off sandwiches, doughnuts and coffee. In Carp, in the riding of my friend, the MPP for Kanata, residents of a nursing home cheered him on and gave him money as he passed by.

Mr. Mackay, when he arrived at CHEO, said, “I thank each and everybody who helped me, sponsored me. I'm overwhelmed by the amount we raised, and we're still raising more until the end of the month.”

This year has highlighted the importance of supporting each other through tough times. As the MPP for Ottawa West-Nepean, I want to thank Mr. Mackay for his tremendous work to support a critical hospital in our community, and for anybody watching at home, if you would like to donate, you still can by going on the www.cheofoundation.com website.

PASTA IT FORWARD

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: I'm happy to rise today to speak about an excellent initiative that I had the pleasure of working with throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Pasta it Forward is a local project from Vaughan started by Frances Tibollo, president of the Canadian Italian Heritage Foundation, and her friends with the idea in mind to help members of the community who may be unable to access food with a hot pasta meal.

To date, Pasta it Forward has prepared and delivered over 55,000 meals, thanks to the generosity of countless donors, suppliers and volunteers who have worked to ensure that the initiative is the success we see today. These meals have been delivered to many different people in need, including persons who have found themselves food-insecure, hard-working front-line health care staff and public safety workers, and even to persons in our remote First Nations communities.

I was thrilled to collaborate with Pasta it Forward on numerous occasions, when we delivered meals to hard-working personal support workers; for example, at Amica residence community in my riding of Mississauga Centre or at Chartwell Robert Speck Residence, as well as Copernicus Lodge in Parkdale-High Park, and to the nurses at my very own hospital working in the emergency room at Etobicoke General Hospital.

Pasta it Forward exemplifies the best of the Ontario spirit. It shows the ability of the great people of this province to organize and collectively tackle rising dilemmas. I continue to be inspired by the work of Ms. Tibollo and everyone else at Pasta it Forward, because you know what? A little pasta can go a long way.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. That concludes our members' statements for this morning.

LEGISLATIVE PROTECTIVE SERVICE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Before I ask for oral questions, I want to acknowledge the presence in the House today of the current class of the Legislative Protective Service's cadets-in-training, who are observing the House

in session as part of their training program. This class will complete their training and be sworn in as officers of the Legislative Protective Service this Friday. Welcome to the Ontario Legislature. We're delighted to have you here.

Applause.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question this morning is to the Premier. Families are watching with growing concern as more and more Ontarians are becoming ill with COVID-19. Yet after months of suggesting that the government had a plan, the Premier had nothing to say at all yesterday about protecting students in schools, about seniors in long-term care and protecting them, about helping working moms and dads caught in long lines waiting for COVID-19 tests. Families need to see immediate action and investment by this government. Instead, we're a day late and \$6 billion short.

Why is the Premier yet again so unprepared?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. We have been prepared and continue to be prepared to fight COVID-19 across the province of Ontario. That includes significant investments in public health. It includes significant investments in testing. We understand how important it is to the people of the province of Ontario that their health and safety is protected.

Not only are we investing in health care, but the Minister of Education has made significant investments to ensure that our students are safe. The Minister of Long-Term Care has been working very closely within her industry to make sure that our long-term-care homes are ready. Of course, the Minister of Government and Consumer Services has been ensuring that some of the shortages that we had in PPE are certainly not the case going forward. So we are prepared. We are ready. I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for her question.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier spent much of last year cutting our public health system, hospitals and our schools. Those cuts left us scrambling to deal with COVID-19 in the spring. In July, the government claimed they were planning for a second wave of the pandemic, but they refused to make the needed investments. They refused to make the needed investments in schools. They failed to create a testing regime that could withstand a second wave, and our long-term-care homes tell us that they are not ready. They are telling us that they are not ready, regardless of what the Premier and the ministers say.

Is the Premier actually prepared to take the urgent action that's necessary to get this province in gear when it

comes to the second wave of COVID-19, and if so, when is he going to do it?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, I thank the honourable member for the question. This government has been seized with ensuring the safety of the people of the province of Ontario with its COVID action plan right from the beginning. It started in March, when we moved aggressively to bring forward public safety measures to protect the people of the province of Ontario. It resulted in the closure of much of the economy, the honourable member will know. But significant investments were made in health care. Significant investments have been made in testing. We, in fact, lead the nation in terms of testing. Our response has been one of the best responses in North America, Mr. Speaker. We should be very proud of that.

At the same time, we understand how important it is to keep our students safe. We understand how important it is to learn lessons from the first wave with respect to our long-term-care homes, and we've moved very aggressively to do that. We understand how important it is to make sure that we have made-in-Ontario access to PPE, and we have done that. We are going to continue to ramp up testing. It is important. Obviously, we all want the people of the province of Ontario to be safe, and we will continue to do all that we can and spare no expense in doing so.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, with all due respect, here's a reality check: As one health expert put it yesterday, "This is time for the full-court press. On all fronts." It's time to go.

In other words, health experts are very worried that this government's actions are lagging behind when it comes to the severity of the crisis in front of us. We need investment and we need action, and we needed it yesterday.

The president of the Ontario Hospital Association says this: The "hospital sector's labs cannot sustain ... testing under these conditions.... The system is heading for a crash."

Long-term-care homes say, "Homes are not currently ready to manage a second wave." That's the reality check.

Schools are scrambling to meet students' needs and operate safely.

Will the Premier finally admit that he either has no plan or the one that he apparently has isn't working?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The plan that we've put in place is a plan that leads North America in terms of protecting its people. I'm very proud of that, Mr. Speaker. But did we learn from parts of the first phase? Absolutely. We learned that we had to have a made-in-Ontario source of PPE. All jurisdictions were fighting that battle. This Premier stepped up to the plate and made sure that, going forward, we have access to PPE right here in the province of Ontario.

We learned that we had to increase testing capacity, and we have done that. Across every region of this province, we're increasing testing capacity. It is good news that people are going to be tested, but we understand that as kids go back to schools there would be rising concern.

That's why, across every region in this province, testing will be increased.

The Minister of Long-Term Care has been working non-stop, day and night, to make sure that our long-term-care homes are prepared. I'm told that some 99% of our homes right now are not in an outbreak and that we have some of the most stringent responses when they are, Mr. Speaker, so I'm very proud of what we've done. That doesn't mean that there isn't more work to do. We will continue to spare no expense to make sure that the people of the province are—

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

The next question.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Minister of Long-Term Care, but I can tell you, all those folks who are waiting literally hours on end and being turned away don't think the testing story in Ontario is good news.

But my question is to the Minister of Long-Term Care. Our loved ones in long-term care face the greatest risk as the second wave of this pandemic grows. Yesterday, even as the Minister of Long-Term Care was dismissing concerns about the risks facing seniors in long-term care, as the government House leader just did, Ottawa's medical officer of health was ordering a takeover of two for-profit facilities where the pandemic has claimed 11 lives since August. Homes themselves say that they are not ready for the second wave.

When will the Premier and this minister take action and make the investments necessary so that staff, residents and their own experts can know that the government is actually taking their advice? Because up until this point, it sure seems as if the government is not taking the advice of staff, experts, residents and family members.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you for the question. Our government's priority is the safety and well-being of residents and staff in long-term care. There is no doubt about that. I have always acknowledged the vulnerability of our residents in long-term care. I have been in contact with the medical officer of health in Ottawa over the past weeks on a regular basis to understand what more we can do for our homes that are hard hit right now in Ottawa.

I appreciate the support and the actions by the medical officer of health that we have worked in conjunction to achieve, to have the hospitals going into the homes that are affected and providing additional support. It is an expedient way to provide this through the Health Protection and Promotion Act, and our government will continue to work with our partners, whether it's the medical officer of health, whether it's the Ontario Long Term Care Association, AdvantAge Ontario or our long-term care sector, hearing from resident councils, hearing from family councils. We will continue to work and endeavour to make sure that our residents and staff are safe.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Their families are not reassured, frankly, by the minister and this government's empty words and empty promises when it comes to long-term care. While the minister has insisted that 99% of homes are not in outbreak, government documents filed at the Premier's own long-term-care commission show that 149 homes, nearly 25%, are classified as high-risk.

Now, I find it pretty bizarre that the minister doesn't know what to do. What she needs to do is get more PSWs. She needs a higher ratio of staff to residents. She needs to do the things that have already been clearly identified that need to be done to fix our long-term-care system.

But when asked to make the details of that report of the high-risk homes available, the government refused. They're refusing to let people know where those high-risk homes are. Will the minister today make that information public? Tell us which homes are high-risk so that people can be prepared.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. We've said before in this chamber, and I've said before in this chamber, that the high-risk situation of our homes varies depending on where the hot spots are in the province, and the staffing issues. This is something that we are constantly monitoring. My ministry and our government have been entirely focused on making sure that our long-term-care-home staff and residents get the support they need.

We're working in three stages, really: the emergency response, as there are flare-ups across the province, and addressing those in a timely way—as you have seen with the medical officer of health in Ottawa, that relationship and those ongoing efforts that we collaborate on to make sure our homes get the support they need is really critical. The stabilization plan for the staffing, for our PSWs and other staff in long-term-care homes, is ongoing. It was informed by an expert panel. We're taking action on that and also looking at the modernization and capacity issues that were so badly neglected. This is continuing. We are continuing in COVID speed to keep our staff and residents safe in long-term care.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, in the spring, while the Premier was promising that there was an iron ring around long-term care—over 1,850 residents have died in long-term care from COVID-19.

Now, this minister and the Premier are insisting that experts, front-line staff and even operators of long-term-care homes themselves are wrong when they say that they are not ready for the second wave. It is not myself as the leader of the official opposition who is making these claims; it is the homes themselves that are saying to the government, "You haven't helped us get ready for the second wave of COVID-19." Now there is a list of high-risk homes that are at risk for outbreaks, and yet they refuse to share the information.

Will the Premier and this minister admit that this crisis actually needs urgent action and urgent investment, stop

hiding the facts from the public and implement the recommendations of his own experts to save lives in long-term care? That 11 more people have died since August is absolutely unacceptable—absolutely.

Interjections.

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

The Minister of Long-Term Care to reply.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you for the question. I'm going to repeat that 99% of our homes have no resident cases and are managing very well. Our attention is on the ones that are having difficulties, making sure that we layer on additional supports for them and the \$243 million and \$45 million that have flowed to help homes with their IPAC.

But I would like to mention a quote from the September 21 joint letter by OLTCA, AdvantAge, CanAge, OLTC Clinicians, Family Councils Ontario and the Ontario Association of Residents' Councils: "Your government's response in wave 1 with the launch of the long-term-care action plan was critical in helping our long-term-care homes fend off and contain COVID-19." So I do take exception to your characterization. The quote continues: "These measures have improved our homes' readiness for the next wave."

I want to impart to you, member opposite, that there is a difference now compared to wave 1. It encompasses many different things that we've learned over this span of time from our health experts and our scientific experts. So we are listening. We're listening across the board to our sector, to residents, to families and to our scientific experts.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier. As families across the province line up five, six or even eight hours with thousands of potentially sick people to get their tests, the Premier declared that he was perfectly okay with a new private company that plans to offer people testing at home for a price. The Premier says, "It's a free-market society."

Speaker, through you to the Premier: We know the Conservatives wish that we had a American-style two-tier health care system—just ask the Minister of Long-Term Care—but does the Premier really think that families should have to pay \$400 for this government's failure to plan?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the question. I'll remind the honourable member that it was actually a Progressive Conservative government that brought in socialized medicine here in the province of Ontario, and we're very proud of that.

Since coming into office, we have made historic investments in health and long-term care. Many of the problems that we inherited from the previous 15 years of the Liberal-NDP coalition in this place, we have started to

address, whether that's providing additional resources for our long-term-care homes—when it comes to COVID-19, we have spared no expense in preparing the province of Ontario, and that includes testing, Mr. Speaker, across every region of this province. We have increased the capacity for testing and we are going to continue to do so in our fall preparedness plan.

I'm very proud of the people who work in health care across this province. They have done a spectacular job in making sure that Ontario is amongst the safest jurisdictions in North America in which to live, work and raise a family. I'm proud of that record.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Mr. Speaker, the last time I asked a testing question in this House was six months ago. What has this government learned? The Premier's plan does not do enough to prioritize the needs of families across the province. In Waterloo region, lineups for testing have gotten so bad that the police were called. I heard from a student who has taken transit to the testing centre four days in a row, and still they have not been able to get tested. This morning, the testing facility in K-W was full for the day at 7:15 a.m. People arrived at 3 o'clock in the morning. People can't afford to spend hundreds of dollars and sometimes days waiting for a COVID-19 test.

Speaker, does the Premier expect everyday Ontarians to shell out hundreds of extra dollars for a private COVID test when they can barely afford to take the day off in the first place?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, I'm not sure where the member has been. The Premier outlined yesterday, as did the Minister of Health, the significant investments we are making in testing across every region in this province. We're massively increasing testing capacity because we know how important it is not only to ensure that people have the confidence that they are safe in their communities—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The official opposition, come to order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —that our educators feel safe, that our students feel safe, that our economy continues to be working. It is because of that that we've made such investments in testing. We have tested more than any other province, combined—Ontario is doing more testing than all other provinces combined. I think that is something that we should be proud of.

Does more have to be done? Absolutely. If there's one thing that we are learning through this COVID crisis, it's that you can never let up; you always have to be prepared and expect the worst. That's what this government has been doing since day one, sparing no expense in making sure that Ontario remains the best place in which to live, work, invest and raise a family and, ultimately, we'll make sure that the people of the province of Ontario are safe because that's our obligation.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. The Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry must come to

order. The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services must come to order. The member from Windsor West will come to order. The Leader of the Opposition will come to order.

Start the clock. The next question.

SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova: Ma question s'adresse à la ministre des Affaires francophones. La communauté franco-ontarienne contribue à la culture et à l'économie de notre province depuis plus de 400 ans. Le vendredi 25 septembre, on célébrera la journée des Franco-Ontariens et Franco-Ontariennes avec tous les membres de cette communauté, y compris les francophiles comme moi.

La COVID-19 a été un défi pour tous les Ontariens et Ontariennes. Comment le gouvernement a-t-il soutenu la communauté franco-ontarienne au travers des enjeux auxquels ils ont été confrontés?

L'hon. Caroline Mulroney: Je remercie ma collègue de Mississauga-Centre pour sa question. Depuis le début de la pandémie au milieu du mois de mars, nous avons travaillé fort et en collaboration avec la communauté franco-ontarienne pour répondre à ses besoins, que ce soit avec la mise sur pied du comité ministériel de la relance économique francophone, l'annonce de l'édition 2020-2021 du Programme d'appui à la francophonie ontarienne, l'annonce de l'équipe Santé Ontario d'Ottawa-Est et, bien sûr, la traduction simultanée des conférences de presse du premier ministre.

Hier, il m'a fait un grand plaisir d'annoncer un investissement de 500 000 \$ pour le tout premier Réseau économique francophone en Ontario et un fonds pour la campagne de promotion des entreprises franco-ontariennes, deux mesures qui découlent du travail du comité ministériel sur la relance économique et de leurs recommandations sur les leviers nécessaires pour le redémarrage de l'économie francophone de l'Ontario.

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

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova: Merci, madame la Ministre, pour votre réponse—ce sont de bonnes nouvelles—et pour tout ce que vous faites pour la communauté franco-ontarienne. Ce sont là des progrès remarquables.

Vous avez mentionné l'annonce de 500 000 \$ d'hier. Que signifie plus concrètement cette annonce pour les petites entreprises franco-ontariennes?

L'hon. Caroline Mulroney: Je remercie la députée pour sa question. Notre gouvernement comprend l'importance du développement économique francophone dans la promotion et l'épanouissement de la francophonie ontarienne.

Le réseau, qui reposera sur une plateforme virtuelle en ligne, permettra la mise en relation d'entrepreneurs francophones et permettra d'accroître leur visibilité et la visibilité de la communauté francophone tout entière. Il permettra d'augmenter les opportunités d'affaires, d'engendrer des partenariats et des alliances stratégiques, et aussi la multiplication des échanges.

De son côté, le fonds de promotion pour les entreprises permettra aux produits et aux services franco-ontariens d'être connus au-delà des marchés locaux, à travers l'Ontario, ainsi qu'au Québec et au Nouveau-Brunswick. Le besoin de ces initiatives existait avant la pandémie et le besoin est d'autant plus large maintenant que nous passons à travers ce moment difficile.

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Monsieur le Président, notre gouvernement agit de façon proactive et adopte des mesures concrètes pour que les entrepreneurs franco-ontariens et franco-ontariennes prospèrent et continuent à contribuer à notre province, à l'économie et à la culture de l'Ontario.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Minister of Long-Term Care, in hopes to get an answer today. Earlier this week, when asked about the protections for workers at West End Villa, the Minister of Long-Term Care said, "I can assure this chamber and Ontarians that West End Villa has the PPE that it requires, including N95s, available to the staff to use."

But yesterday, workers on the front lines of this devastating outbreak bravely came forward to clarify that this is simply not the case. Despite claims from the government and their private for-profit operator friends at Extendicare, workers are now saying that this vital PPE is available to some employees but not to others.

Why is the information peddled by the Minister of Long-Term Care so wildly different than that of the workers on the front lines of this pandemic?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you for the question. First of all, I want to recognize the dedication, the commitment and the compassion that our front-line workers bring every single day to our long-term-care homes and residents.

I have been in regular contact with the Ottawa hospital that is involved in supporting these two homes, and I have received assurances that the N95 masks are available to our staff in those homes. I have been seeking to make sure that these are available to our staff—and I say "our staff" because I consider all the people working in long-term care to be serving Ontarians—and that it is available in the homes. I have had reassurances. I will double back and I will make sure that that is accurate information.

I want to remind everyone here that we have developed a procurement process for masks that is unlike anything this province has ever seen to make sure that our staff and residents are protected in the way that is necessary.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, what's disappointing is that this minister hasn't actually acknowledged what we've been questioning this last week and a half about it. The second wave of the pandemic is here. We are already reliving the horrors of the first wave in our long-term-care homes. To date, the horrifying outbreak at Extendicare West End Villa has infected 23 staff, 37 residents and claimed the lives of 11 other residents. Workers

in these homes are laying their lives on the line to care for our vulnerable seniors. Each and every one of them should be able to freely access PPEs they need to stay safe and do their job.

When will the workers at West End Villa be given the PPE that they deserve and need to survive the deadly outbreak?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you again for the question. If we look at the differences between wave 1 and wave 2, there are multiple, and the first really is the PPE. The availability of the PPE and the supplies of the PPE are much more secure. The staff in these homes do have access to the N95s. As I said, I will make sure that we have that information as it is confirmed to me by people on the ground and the hospital assisting this home.

But if we look at the testing, as well, the surveillance testing done in our homes, and the acknowledgment of asymptomatic spread within the elderly in the long-term-care homes, these are differences from wave 1. We can say with accuracy that those are making a difference. We're picking up cases of staff through this testing process so that it's not coming into the home, and only a very tiny percentage of homes are affected. My heart goes out to all the residents, the staff and their families who are affected. We will continue to do everything possible to ensure their safety. That is our—

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

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is for the Premier. It's time that this government begins to be truthful and honest. For seven months, the public has been fed—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member will take his seat. I'm going to caution on his language.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Pardon?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Did you hear me?

Mr. Randy Hillier: No.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I will caution the member on his language that he's going to use.

Place your question.

Mr. Randy Hillier: —some real, some probable and some imaginary. Although the elderly who are sick and frail are at a high risk to COVID, the rest of the population is not.

Unlike the repeated messages of panic from this government, we do find clarity in other jurisdictions. Dr. Lawrence Rosenberg, Montreal's medical officer, has stated this COVID virus is "much like the seasonal flu." A group of 400 Belgian doctors have stated COVID is "not a killer virus, but a ... treatable condition." Eighteen Canadian doctors wrote the Premier: Your policies risk "significantly harming our children ... with life-long consequences."

Speaker, to the Premier, will you start being honest about the risk of COVID?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Withdraw.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Respectfully, I disagree with just about everything the member said.

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: Again to the Premier.

Our deputy chief medical officer of health has stated our testing results are over 50% false positives, yet we keep testing, knowing full well that the results are near meaningless. Another group of Australian doctors have spoken out: "Ordinary sensible people if properly informed, should inevitably conclude that the ... government policy is ill-focused, heavy-handed, and unjustifiable." But your government keeps creating new restrictions. A group of UK doctors have stated the objective of virus suppression is "unfeasible and is leading to ... harm across all age groups," but the government limits access to our health care system, putting everyone at risk. I believe that this government has caused enough harm.

To the Premier, why are you using COVID as an election campaign strategy at the cost of health—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member will take his seat.

The next question.

WILDLIFE PROTECTION

Mr. Toby Barrett: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. As we know, here in Ontario, we have a thriving resource-based tourism sector. In normal times, we draw tourists from around the world, who come for the pristine wilderness in the northern parts of our province. Hunters and anglers spend more than \$560 million and \$1.6 billion, respectively, each year in Ontario to support jobs in many of our rural and northern communities.

We know that a disease that takes hold in animal populations can upset the balance in an ecosystem, threaten the safety of our food supply and hurt businesses and livelihoods for many who work in agriculture, hunting and resource-based tourism. Minister, what is our government doing to ensure that we're on top of this threat posed by disease in wildlife populations?

Hon. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the great member from Haldimand-Norfolk for that question. He's right to the point on the importance of monitoring livestock and wild animals.

Our government gets it. We represent people in every corner of the province and understand the interconnectedness of our ecosystems and our economy. The health of our wildlife and rural economies affects the food supply chain for people in cities, from Ottawa to Toronto and Windsor. Earlier this year, we took action to further protect wildlife populations from chronic wasting disease, CWD, and ensure continued hunting opportunities in the province. CWD is a progressive, fatal disease that affects members of the cervid family—deer, elk, moose and caribou.

Speaker, I'll have more to say in the supplementary.

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Minister, for that response. It's one thing to say that we're on top of things when the going is good, but it's great to hear that we're being vigilant with respect to this threat of chronic wasting disease and other similar diseases.

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I was pleased to find out that in Ontario we've tested over 13,000 deer and elk over the past two decades and all the tests have been negative. But as we know, we can never take things for granted. There have been cases in neighbouring states and neighbouring provinces.

My question to the minister is, what are we doing here in Ontario to ensure that we continue to keep our cervid populations safe?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you again to the member for the question.

I have attended the testing facility at Trent University in Peterborough, as well, to see the great work they do.

While CWD has not been detected in Ontario, as you say, it is important to remain vigilant. CWD was discovered in 2018 on a deer farm in Quebec, close to the Ontario border, and has been found in all five states bordering Ontario.

In December 2019, our government announced a CWD prevention and response plan to ensure that approaches are in place to minimize the risk of the disease entering or spreading within our province.

Additionally, this summer we proposed to prohibit the import of live, captive cervids from outside of the province, in most circumstances.

The newly proposed changes would enhance protections that are already in place. These measures will protect Ontario's wildlife and support sustainable hunting, which creates jobs and makes an important economic contribution to our province.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre.

Speaker, I think we can all agree that we are living through some scary times right now. But one thing that people can count on to calm our anxiety is our public health care system. We all know that we can count on our hospitals to care for us—not just for COVID-19, but for all the health challenges that we face.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, it has been all hands on deck for every health care worker, and, with a looming second wave, the demand on our health care system will continue to increase. But now we've learned that 97 nurses will be laid off at Southlake hospital in Newmarket.

I know the Premier likes to cut expenditures, but in the middle of a pandemic, how can he justify laying off 97 nurses from the front line?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: While I'm not going to specifically comment on negotiations between the hospital and its staff, I will say this: The member is absolutely correct that the provision of health care services is incredibly important. It's one of the most important things that government can do, and that's why we've made significant investments. In fact, we've increased the budget to the largest that it has ever been in Ontario history.

I think what the Minister of Health has been doing since the beginning is transitioning our health care system to Ontario health teams so that we can get a ribbon of care, so that whether you're in home care or in long-term care or needing access to a family doctor or to the hospital, that care is available to you and it's easier to access. That means providing more services where people need them the most, in the community. I'm proud of the work that we've done.

And let me just say, Southlake is an incredible hospital. I've used it on a number of occasions—both myself and my family. The nurses and staff there are exceptional, and I know all of us in York region are grateful for the work that they do.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: It gets worse, Speaker. According to the nurses at the hospital, the layoff of 97 front-line nurses is based on a best-case scenario, based on the province's actual funding. Let that sink in. Newmarket could lose over 100 front-line nurses.

Now, more than ever, the Premier should ensure that our hospitals have the resources they need to deliver the care people need and, frankly, to save lives. The Premier has a huge role to play in making sure that people trust our health care system and that that trust does not get eroded.

Should I remind the Premier of baby Sophia, who was sent home from that hospital only to die three days later?

Will the Premier do the right thing and protect Ontario's families and ensure that these 97 nurses will be there to care for us and don't get laid off?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, we moved very quickly as a government to ensure that the resources were in place for our health care professionals. That includes an increase of over \$5 million for Southlake. But, as the member knows, it's not just about money; it's about how we access quality care.

Myself and my own family were seeking assistance for a father-in-law who needs to get from radiation treatment and needs home care. It has been very difficult and challenging to access all of these services, even for somebody who has been in public service for many, many years. The changes that the minister is making, the changes that this government is making will mean that it is easier for people to access care that they need, whether it is home care, whether it is long-term care, whether it is a test, whether it is access to a hospital. That's why we are making these changes.

Nurses are vital to this. That's why the Minister of Education, with the Minister of Health, has been hiring more nurses for our education system. We value the work

that nurses do. We can't run a system without them. There are going to be continued investments to make sure that all Ontarians have access to the highest-quality care that this province can provide.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} Lucille Collard: My question is to the Minister of Long-Term Care.

I recently had the privilege of convening a panel of medical experts in Ontario to explore how long-term-care homes have responded to COVID-19 in order to identify what improvements should be prioritized going forward to ensure better protection for our seniors. This forum was really well-attended and very informative.

This panel is in the process of producing a report, which I will be very happy to share with the minister. Unfortunately, we were surprised to learn that there is no mechanism for sharing this important research with the ongoing long-term-care commission. Given the wide-reaching consequences of COVID-19, it is important that we ensure that the commission hears important contributions from medical experts and communities from across the province.

The Ministry of Long-Term Care established the terms of reference for this commission. Why was a meaningful process for consulting the public not included in these terms of reference?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you for the question. The terms of reference for the commission are very broad and comprehensive. They have a website that is available to provide information and update the public and any other group that's interested.

I've been very clear, and our government has been very clear, that this is an independent commission. They have the ability to summon individuals. They have the ability to have public hearings and they will issue a public report. But it is their decision. The ministry does not have the ability to influence them in any way. They are independent.

I think this is a very important point that seems to be forgotten that, as a ministry, we have three very capable and respected commissioners and they have started their work already. So we have a process. They have a website. Please reach out and use the link available, but this is an independent commission.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Again, to the Minister of Long-Term Care: While we must protect the independence of the commission and respect the expertise of the panel, it is equally important to have a framework to allow the commission to conduct its inquests fully.

Nowhere on the website can we find information about public meetings or any way to make submissions to the commission. In order to make an inquest fully, it requires ensuring that the mandate includes a clear process for being able to solicit input from Ontario's medical professionals and hear about the different ways that COVID-19 has affected Ontario's diverse communities in long-term care.

Under the commission's terms of reference, the minister has the discretion to make amendments to the commission to ensure that it may conduct its inquests comprehensively and accurately, and avoiding the perception that the work is being done behind closed doors without hearing from the public experience.

Will the minister use this discretion to include a clear and well-defined process for consulting the public in order to allow experts producing helpful research on this exact issue to submit this research to assist the commission inquiry?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you, again. It's very clear that the reason the independent commission was established was to do exactly that: to understand what happened, to hear from individuals and organizations, and to investigate how COVID-19 spread within long-term-care homes; how residents, staff and families were impacted; and the adequacy of the measures that were taken by the province and other parties to prevent, isolate and contain the spread. It's very clear that our government is being transparent about this process.

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The terms of reference are comprehensive and wide, and they do have the power to do the things you mention. The intent from this government is to provide an independent commission. It is independent. They have three highly respected commissioners—one very respected in government; the other in the health field, the CEO of the Ottawa Hospital. Also looking at—

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

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: My question is for the associate minister responsible for small business and red tape reduction. In my riding of Perth-Wellington, COVID-19 has forced many businesses in the riding to adapt to the new business climate. Every day, I get phone calls from struggling small business owners.

With COVID-19, we know that we're facing an unprecedented challenge. Businesses are facing unique problems created by the global pandemic. They need help from the government to adapt to this new environment. Business owners in Ontario aren't looking for handouts. They're looking for just a little help to get back on their feet.

Minister, can you please tell me how our government is supporting businesses as they respond to the challenges caused by COVID-19?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you to the member for Perth-Wellington for that question. Our government has taken a number of steps to help small businesses respond to COVID-19. We have provided, at the onset, \$10 billion in provincial tax deferrals, Workplace Safety and Insurance Board premium deferrals and other business supports. We have provided over \$900 million in urgent relief to small businesses to help with

their rental payments. We have helped over 54,000 businesses receive rental support through this program.

We have made investments to help businesses go digital: a \$57-million investment in Digital Main Street, the largest investment in the history of this country to help businesses go digital. Mr. Speaker, we have launched the Tackling the Barriers web portal to help businesses pivot and support them during this very difficult time.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, I want to thank the minister for that answer. Economic growth and job creation will be key priorities as we get our economy back to where it was before. Businesses need the support to survive but also thrive and continue growing after we get through this pandemic.

Can the associate minister please tell this House how our government can get our economy back to where it was before the pandemic hit?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Our made-in-Ontario plan for growth, renewal and economic recovery will bring us back and make us stronger than ever before.

In July, our government passed the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act. This piece of legislation is helping restart thousands of jobs, is attracting new investments and is helping businesses adapt to the new environment.

Making Ontario a modern regulator, one that communicates clearly and operates effectively, will free up our people and businesses to focus on what is most important: recovering and re-emerging stronger than ever before.

The pandemic has reinforced the need to take stronger action to make regulations better for people and smarter for business, and that's exactly what we are doing. We are going to continue to modernize outdated regulations, remove duplication and minimize costs for business. We're going to continue to work with our businesses to ensure that they can rebuild, rehire and re-emerge stronger than ever before.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Ian Arthur: Speaker, through you, my question is to the Minister of Education. My office has heard from many alarmed parents, including Kimberly, and they all attest to the same thing. As more students are being kept home, local school boards are collapsing classes, making them larger without social distancing. We have heard of classes with three or four grades in them, with less than one metre between desks, without adequate safety. In Kimberly's case, the child's school went from 13 to 11 classes.

Now the minister has said that this is being done by school boards, but he can direct those boards. It is within his power to cap all class sizes at 15 and provide the funding so that we have safe schools in Ontario right now. The current approach, signed off on by this minister, is clearly not working, and it is endangering the lives of people in Ontario.

With outbreaks in dozens of schools in Ottawa, will the minister commit right now to limiting students of all ages to 15 per class? Why are there crowded classrooms when the teachers have been hired, the money has already been allocated and the classrooms are sitting empty?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The plan that we unveiled in this province has been fully endorsed by the Chief Medical Officer of Health. Moms and dads of this province can have confidence that it has been informed by the best medical and pediatric science this country has. We have worked every step of the way to build up capacity, to introduce layers of prevention to mitigate the spread and the risk within our schools.

We are cognizant that the risk in our schools is reflective of the risk within our community, which is the basis for why yesterday the Minister of Health and the Premier announced the largest flu vaccination campaign in Ontario's history: \$70 million to procure 700,000 more vaccines for more young people, particularly for our kids. It's very important to help mitigate the spread.

We've taken action to hire more custodians, to improve ventilation and, obviously, to hire more teachers to reduce the classroom sizes in all boards, including in Limestone, including in Algonquin and Lakeshore, including in CEP de l'Est de l'Ontario and all of the boards within the member opposite's riding. They're receiving more funding to ensure that those classes are as safe as humanly possible.

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

Mr. Ian Arthur: It's not enough funding to only have 15 students per class, and that is exactly what they need.

Three days ago, there were three outbreaks in Ottawa; today there are 38. Your plan is not working, no matter who signed off on it.

Tackling a pandemic is about the management of risk. It is about taking every action that anyone possibly can to move that needle to a little less risk—which means that for every classroom that only has 15 students in it, we have less risk of an outbreak. Every time you commit to a 15-person classroom, you're helping to protect more people in this province—and the minister knows this. I can only imagine that the minister weighed the risks of a 30-person classroom versus 15 and found out that he thinks it's an acceptable level of risk to pack 30 students into a classroom.

Will the minister commit to 15-student classrooms for every class in Ontario right now?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: In the words of the Ottawa Catholic School Board chair, this year they have the smallest classroom sizes in the history of that board because of government funding, because we've helped support the unlocking of reserve funds—together, provincial, federal and boards—ensuring that they have the capacity to do more hiring.

Well north of 2,600 teachers are being hired because of the funding we've provided. In various school boards, the challenge is not access to funding, as acknowledged by the Toronto District School Board yesterday; it's access to supply of educators, in fact.

Nonetheless, in Ottawa, we're seeing classroom sizes in junior kindergarten and senior kindergarten averaging 22, well below the provincial average pre-COVID-19; in grades 1 to 3 at 17.6, well below the provincial average before COVID-19; in grades 4 to 8 at 22.2, also below the average. In every board, funding is flowing to ensure that it is safe.

I've spoken to Dr. Etches as well as the leadership of the medical team in Ottawa as recently as this weekend, with the aim to work with them to ensure that we reduce the risk and improve the safety of our schools in Ottawa and across our province.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My question is to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

Speaker, at the outset of COVID-19, it was clear to everyone in the province and across the country that a significant response was required to ensure that front-line workers had the PPE they required. We were reminded daily on the news that the global market for critical personal protective equipment and medical supplies was highly constrained.

Could the Minister of Government and Consumer Services please tell the House what actions the government is taking to ensure that Ontario's front-line workers have the PPE they need?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I'd like to thank the hard-working member from Niagara West for that question.

My colleague is rightly pointing out the immense challenge that our government was presented with to ensure that Ontario had a solid supply of PPE and other critical supplies. Our government took immediate action to ensure that we have had the sufficient critical supplies needed to protect our vulnerable groups and essential services.

I must say, Speaker, given the Premier's expertise in supply chain management, he led by example. Our government mobilized the procurement specialists to rapidly leverage existing partnerships so that all Ontarians working in the broader public service and the education sector have a consistent supply of quality products to meet their needs.

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We also employed innovative solutions. With Minister Fedeli, we put out the call to Ontario businesses to help us address COVID through the Ontario Together portal, and as a result, we've had thousands of businesses across this province reach out and add their assistance in helping to protect our front-line workers.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I want to thank the minister for her work on this important file. I'm certain that these actions have helped in our fight against COVID-19. I know I have also seen across the province, as well as in Niagara West, a homegrown local industry for protective equipment being built, and I think it's very, very important

for the future sustainability of our entire health and protective equipment ecosystem.

Our front-line heroes rightly want to know that the supplies that they are being provided are procured from reputable sources and are being made of safe, quality materials. Could the minister please tell the House what the government has been doing to ensure that the PPE which is being used and which has been procured by the government is in fact safe for use?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I can tell you, nothing is more important than the safety of Ontarians, and that brings all of us together in this House, and it's a principle that we hold above all else when it comes to procurement.

Ontarians can be assured that all of the products that we have purchased, both domestic and at the foreign level, have Health Canada's approval. Over and above that, we have worked with partners around the world to undertake inspections of overseas facilities. This is to ensure that the manufacturing of critical supplies and PPE that we can't access locally are safely manufactured, because again, safety comes first.

All of the products undergo a rigorous quality insurance process once they arrive here in this province in our warehouse, again, whether they're domestically manufactured or at the foreign level. We want to ensure that they are safe and effective for our front-line workers.

I'd like to take this moment to thank all of our officials in government and consumer services. We have the—

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

The next question.

CAREGIVERS

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday, Ontarians were shocked when the Premier's promised COVID-19 second wave plan turned out to be even more delay tactics, though deep within yesterday's no-actual-plan press release was a line that read, "recruit, retain, train and support health care workers, while also continuing to engage families and caregivers." Families laughed at that comment, because they haven't been engaged at all.

As the Premier knows, this Conservative government hasn't supported health care workers, and has continued to prevent residents in long-term care, group homes and all congregate care settings from accessing essential caregivers during the pandemic. Many seniors and people with disabilities have suffered mentally, physically and emotionally in isolation for six months, unable to receive the direct love, care and support from their family and caregivers. The harm that has been done in some cases is irreversible.

Can the Premier confirm that his yet-to-be-seen second wave plan will ensure that no resident in congregate care is denied meaningful, consistent access to their essential caregivers going forward?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the question. The member obviously raises some very important points. One of the things that we saw through the initial first wave was how difficult this pandemic has been on families and caregivers, quite frankly, especially those who are in long-term-care centres and in congregate care centres. I will say, in my own riding, at Participation House, we certainly had a challenging time, but first and foremost, with the hard work of the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, we were able to address that.

Going forward, obviously we've learned a lot of lessons from the first wave. The government will be putting in place continued measures to ensure the health and safety of all of those, whether they're in congregate care, long-term care or those health care professionals who are working in the community and visiting, whether they be seniors or other people who need care in their homes.

So yes, we are listening, and we do appreciate how hard it has been for the people of the province of Ontario. Stick with us; we'll continue to work hard.

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

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's great that the government House leader can appreciate how hard it's been. What the people need is for him to actually do something about it.

Last week, I tabled a bill called the More Than a Visitor Act. This bill is a legislative solution to this crucial issue of access to essential caregivers. It would do three things:

(1) It would enshrine rights and protections for residents in congregate care, including the right to consistent, meaningful access to their caregivers.

(2) It would ensure the government provides the resources, staffing, infection prevention and control training, and supplies to safely facilitate this.

(3) It sets out parameters for the development of a provincial caregiver strategy, created in consultation with residents, caregivers, workers and experts.

Speaker, will the Premier commit to truly engaging essential caregivers and families by passing my bill and creating this strategy with residents, caregivers, workers and experts engaged at the table?

Interjection.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I just heard someone, I think the Minister of Community and Social Services, say, "No." Don't heckle; do something for these people.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services to reply.

Hon. Todd Smith: Well, Speaker, once again we're getting misinformation from the member opposite. I did absolutely no—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Okay. Take your seat. Stop the clock.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's the families, Todd.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

I'm going to ask the minister to withdraw.

Hon. Todd Smith: Yes, I'll withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And to conclude his answer.

Hon. Todd Smith: It's unfortunate, because we've been doing a very good job in dealing with our partners in the developmental services sector. Since the pandemic began, we've been working very closely with Community Living organizations and Christian Horizons. I know the Minister of Long-Term Care has been working extremely hard.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's not happening.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Todd Smith: And in spite of the fact that the member opposite continues to heckle, Mr. Speaker, we have been working extremely hard, as the government of Ontario, to put guidelines in place that are going to protect those vulnerable people in our group homes, in our congregate care settings, in our long-term-care facilities, in our violence-against-women shelters. We have been working every day, day in and day out, to make sure that we're putting guidelines in place that are going to allow those essential caregivers to get into the homes to visit their loved ones, while protecting their safety and their health, which is the paramount responsibility of all of us here in government.

I hope that the member opposite can realize we are working extremely hard and communicating as best as we can to allow those family members to get in. In June, we allowed them to visit outside. In July, we allowed them to visit inside. In August, we've allowed them to have short-term overnight stays. We're continuing to work with families and we're continuing to work with our partners in the sector.

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr. Billy Pang: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, last week you introduced legislation that will help small businesses, municipalities and renters across Ontario. I know that since the onset of COVID-19, our government has been taking decisive decisions to help tenants stay in their homes and pay their rent. Could you please explain to this House what this legislation would do to help our province's renters?

Hon. Steve Clark: I want to thank the member for Markham-Unionville for the question. He's right; last week I had the pleasure of tabling Bill 204, the Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act. I did my leadoff with my parliamentary assistant and the parliamentary assistant to the Solicitor General this morning. The bill, if passed, would stabilize rent for Ontario's 1.7 million tenants.

As we all know, this year has been incredibly unpredictable, and as we recover we want tenants to have some certainty regarding this process. It's why we're investing \$510 million with our municipal service managers. We're encouraging them to increase their rent banks and utility banks. That's why this legislation is proposing a rent freeze in Ontario for 2021. The maximum increase for rent-controlled and non-rent-controlled units will be 0%.

We want to thank landlords for their patience. We want to thank tenants for their patience. Together, we will get Ontario back on track.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Mr. Billy Pang: Speaker, through you to the minister: Thank you for your continued advocacy for tenants across our province. I can still remember the great announcement that you made the other day about senior affordable housing in my riding of Markham–Unionville. I know that the tenants of my riding of Markham–Unionville will appreciate the freeze at a time that many of them are still facing uncertainty.

Minister, you have said multiple times that this rent freeze would apply to the vast majority of tenants. Could you explain what exactly you mean when you say the “vast majority”?

Hon. Steve Clark: Again, I want to thank the member. That’s a very important question. Because he mentioned it, I also want to thank him for his work. We had a great announcement in your riding with Mayor Scarpitti, creating more affordable housing units in your region. Again, I want to thank you for hosting me that day, and for everything you do to represent the people in your riding.

When I say that the “vast majority” of tenants are going to have a 0% increase in their rents in 2020, I mean almost every single tenant in the province. We have tenants who are living in rent-controlled units, non-rent-controlled units, retirement homes and land-lease communities. From condos in Ottawa to basement apartments in Sudbury, we will have a 0% rent increase in 2021.

Now, there will be a few circumstances where tenants can see an increase. That’s when landlords have to make costly repairs to units for things like safety and security.

I know that landlords and tenants have come together during these unprecedented times, and I want to thank each and every one of them for the work that they do. They’re showing the Ontario spirit, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our question period for this morning. There being no further business, this House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1131 to 1500.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

JOUR DES FRANCO-ONTARIENS ET DES FRANCO-ONTARIENNES FRANCO-ONTARIAN DAY

L’hon. Caroline Mulroney: Chers collègues, je suis très heureuse de prendre la parole aujourd’hui devant cette Assemblée pour souligner le Jour des Franco-Ontariens et des Franco-Ontariennes, qui sera célébré ce 25 septembre par l’ensemble des francophones et francophiles de l’Ontario.

Cette année, cette journée symbolique revêt un caractère tout particulier puisque nous célébrons le 10^e anniversaire du Jour des Franco-Ontariens et des Franco-Ontariennes dans des circonstances exceptionnelles. J’en profite pour rendre hommage au courage et à la résilience

dont la communauté franco-ontarienne a toujours fait preuve à travers son histoire.

C’est alors avec une immense fierté que je souligne le fait que le drapeau franco-ontarien est désormais un emblème officiel de l’Ontario. Grâce aux efforts et à l’engagement de la députée de Mississauga-Centre, le drapeau franco-ontarien est, depuis ce lundi, un des huit symboles de l’Ontario, aux côtés du drapeau provincial, du trille blanc, du tartan, du huard, du pin blanc, de l’améthyste et des armoiries.

Je tiens donc à féliciter ma collègue députée pour avoir déposé le projet de loi 182 sur l’emblème franco-ontarien, et je remercie à cette occasion tous les membres de l’Assemblée pour leur soutien.

Reconnaître le drapeau franco-ontarien à la fois comme emblème de la communauté francophone et comme emblème officiel de la province de l’Ontario est un geste symbolique puissant de la part de la province toute entière. C’est une façon d’honorer la contribution des francophones dans nos communautés à travers la province, ainsi qu’à notre économie et à notre culture. C’est une façon de reconnaître la riche histoire des francophones de l’Ontario, qui remonte à des centaines d’années. Et c’est une façon de réaffirmer notre engagement à les soutenir à l’avenir.

Les symboles sont importants. Ils incarnent nos valeurs. C’est un geste à la fois symbolique et concret qui témoigne du fait que l’Assemblée législative valorise la francophonie ontarienne et entend la faire rayonner sur tous les plans.

Depuis plus de 400 ans, la communauté francophone façonne l’histoire de notre province et contribue à son dynamisme et à sa prospérité. Elle fait tout simplement partie intégrante de l’ADN de l’Ontario. D’ailleurs, l’Ontario est la province du Canada qui, en dehors du Québec, a de loin la plus grande population de francophones. Aujourd’hui, plus de 622^e400 francophones vivent en Ontario, et 1,5 million d’Ontariennes et d’Ontariens parlent français. À l’instar de l’ensemble de la province, la francophonie ontarienne est dynamique, diversifiée et résolument ouverte sur le monde.

En tant que ministre des Affaires francophones, et sur le plan personnel, c’est pour moi un réel privilège d’être au service de la communauté franco-ontarienne.

La présence des francophones se fait sentir partout en Ontario, aussi bien dans l’est de la province que dans le nord, ou bien le centre-sud-ouest ou bien le sud. En plus d’animer et de renforcer l’identité profonde de la province, la communauté francophone représente un avantage économique significatif pour l’Ontario.

Je profite donc de cette déclaration pour rappeler que notre gouvernement croit fermement en l’apport de la communauté francophone comme vecteur de développement économique partout dans la province. C’est pourquoi nous soutenons la communauté francophone, afin qu’elle continue à contribuer à la vitalité économique et sociale de l’Ontario. Pour ce faire, je me suis engagée, de concert avec mes collègues, à mettre un accent particulier sur le développement économique, afin

de promouvoir la réalisation du plein potentiel de la communauté francophone.

La crise de la COVID-19 a engendré de nouveaux enjeux et défis. Touchée de plein fouet par la crise sanitaire, la communauté francophone fait de nouveau preuve de détermination afin d'assurer le bon fonctionnement et l'essor de notre province pour le bienfait des francophones. Dans cette optique, notre appui est vital si l'on veut que les francophones de l'Ontario puissent continuer à jouer un rôle de premier plan dans le cadre de la relance économique de l'Ontario.

Dans la foulée de ma tournée économique de 2018 et de 2019, et plus récemment dans le contexte de la pandémie, j'ai créé le Conseil consultatif ministériel de la relance économique pour les francophones post-COVID-19. Ce conseil consultatif ministériel a sondé, au travers de multiples consultations, les organismes et les entreprises francophones. Ce travail d'analyse a débouché sur des constats clairs qui permettent de guider notre travail de relance. Ce conseil a aussi identifié des secteurs clés d'intervention. Je suis heureuse de rappeler que notre gouvernement a agi rapidement afin de répondre aux besoins pressants exprimés par la communauté francophone, ses acteurs économiques et les membres de ce conseil.

En effet, hier, j'ai eu le plaisir de confirmer, au nom de notre gouvernement, un investissement d'un demi-million de dollars pour la création du Réseau économique francophone de l'Ontario et la mise en oeuvre d'une campagne de promotion des produits et des services franco-ontariens. Ces deux initiatives donneront une plus grande visibilité à l'économie francophone ontarienne dans son ensemble. Elles serviront à faciliter la coopération entre les entrepreneurs et les petites et moyennes entreprises, engendrant des partenariats et des alliances stratégiques. Elles permettront ainsi la multiplication des échanges, afin d'adopter de meilleures pratiques et de développer de nouveaux produits, services et marchés.

De plus, lors du sommet Ontario-Québec les 8 et 9 septembre derniers, nos deux provinces se sont entendues pour établir un groupe de travail pour promouvoir le développement économique francophone entre nos communautés d'affaires.

Je rappelle aussi que nous avons lancé en juin la troisième édition du Programme d'appui à la francophonie ontarienne destiné aux organismes francophones à but non lucratif et aux petites entreprises francophones ou desservant une clientèle francophone. Ce programme a été lancé le plus rapidement possible, afin de soutenir ces organismes et ces entrepreneurs francophones durement touchés par les retombées économiques de la COVID-19. Bientôt, nous pourrions dévoiler les bénéficiaires de l'édition de cette année.

Nous savons aussi que la main-d'oeuvre bilingue qualifiée est un des principaux leviers stratégiques pour assurer le dynamisme et la bonne santé des entreprises et des organismes francophones. Cette thématique relève de

plusieurs domaines d'intervention, notamment ceux de l'éducation et de l'immigration.

L'immigration francophone permet en partie de combler la pénurie de main-d'oeuvre qualifiée, en permettant aux employeurs ontariens de recruter directement les talents dont ils ont besoin à l'étranger, et elle permet dans le même temps d'accroître le bassin de talents bilingues disponibles en Ontario.

L'éducation, quant à elle, joue un rôle considérable dans la formation et la montée en compétence de la population francophone ontarienne et des nouveaux arrivants francophones. Elle permet ainsi d'ajuster l'offre de compétences disponibles à la demande et elle contribue ainsi à créer un environnement favorable pour les entreprises et pour les entrepreneurs franco-ontariens.

1510

D'ailleurs, en éducation, véritable secteur névralgique, nous avons accompli des avancées majeures. Tout d'abord, je suis extrêmement fière de rappeler que nous avons relancé le projet de l'Université de l'Ontario français sur des bases qui sont, pour la première fois dans l'histoire du projet, solides, en négociant avec le gouvernement fédéral un plan de financement innovant et original. Cette institution, première université de langue française autonome de la province de l'Ontario, gouvernée par et pour les francophones, ouvrira ses portes en septembre 2021 et accueillera alors sa première cohorte d'étudiants.

En second lieu, notre gouvernement continue d'investir dans l'éducation en langue française en Ontario avec une projection de financement pour les conseils scolaires francophones ontariens de l'ordre de 1,8 milliard de dollars pour l'année 2020-2021. Cela représente 16 383 \$ par élève, soit une augmentation de 353 \$ par rapport à 2019-2020.

Les effectifs devraient augmenter dans les 12 conseils scolaires francophones d'environ 1 960 élèves supplémentaires pour 2020-2021. Nous avons d'ailleurs annoncé tout récemment, en juillet, le financement de la construction de cinq nouvelles écoles de langue française en Ontario.

Nous avons également réalisé le transfert de gouvernance de l'institut Jules-Léger, le seul institut francophone ontarien spécialisé dans l'accompagnement et l'éducation des enfants francophones avec des déficiences auditives ou visuelles et nécessitant un accompagnement sur mesure, pour qu'il soit gouverné par et par les francophones. Ce transfert de gouvernance était attendu depuis de nombreuses années, et je suis particulièrement fière, encore une fois, de voir une institution éducative franco-ontarienne accéder à ce degré d'autonomie grâce aux efforts de notre gouvernement.

Par ailleurs, concernant l'immigration, notre gouvernement est actuellement en négociation avec le gouvernement fédéral pour obtenir une plus grande maîtrise de ses flux migratoires et doubler son allocation annuelle d'immigrants économiques pouvant être accueillis dans notre province.

Comme vous le savez, ces deux dernières années, le nombre d'immigrants francophones retenus dans le cadre

du Programme ontarien des candidats à l'immigration a augmenté. L'immigration francophone dans le cadre du Programme ontarien des candidats à l'immigration a vu la part des francophones se hisser au-dessus de 5 %, avec 7,7 % de francophones venus s'établir en Ontario en 2018 et 6,1 % en 2019. C'est un record, monsieur le Président, et cela démontre factuellement toute la volonté de notre gouvernement à travailler d'arrache-pied et créer des conditions favorables pour les entreprises et les entrepreneurs franco-ontariens et pour renforcer notre francophonie ontarienne.

Le contexte actuel de la pandémie nous oblige cependant à identifier des solutions innovantes pour maintenir cette tendance et ainsi pallier aux besoins de main-d'œuvre bilingue des francophones de notre province.

Renforcer le tissu économique et social franco-ontarien, c'est aussi prendre soin de la santé des francophones et de répondre à leurs besoins. Le troisième domaine d'intervention prioritaire est celui de la santé. La Loi de 2019 sur les soins de santé pour la population assure la reconnaissance et le respect des droits des francophones en matière de soins de santé en français. Notre gouvernement s'est ainsi engagé à collaborer avec la communauté francophone à chaque étape de la transformation de notre système de santé.

D'ailleurs, je suis heureuse de souligner l'arrivée du major-général retraité, Jean-Robert Bernier, le 38^e médecin-général du Canada, en tant que représentant de la communauté francophone au sein du premier conseil d'administration de Santé Ontario. M. Bernier saura à coup sûr appliquer une lentille francophone aux travaux de Santé Ontario.

J'aimerais aussi mentionner l'investissement significatif de 75 millions de dollars que nous avons effectué dans le projet du Carrefour santé d'Orléans, qui permettra d'offrir, sous un seul toit, des services en français de trois hôpitaux et de quatre fournisseurs de services communautaires.

Qui plus est, il y a à peine deux mois, j'ai eu le privilège d'annoncer la création de l'équipe Santé Ontario de la région de l'est d'Ottawa, qui jouera très rapidement un rôle essentiel pour les francophones de la région.

Les services en français comprennent aussi l'accès à la justice. Le projet de loi 161, dit Loi de 2020 pour un système judiciaire plus efficace et plus solide, prévoit d'obliger, entre autres, Aide juridique Ontario à rendre systématique l'offre active des services en français. En outre, il exigerait que les avis de recours collectifs soient publiés dans les deux langues officielles.

L'accès à la justice est essentiel pour la communauté francophone de l'Ontario, et le succès de l'initiative au palais de justice à Sudbury est un grand pas en avant à cet égard. Ce projet pilote est maintenant complet, et la majorité des actions et des processus nouvellement mis en oeuvre visant à améliorer l'accès à la justice en français sont permanents.

Vous le voyez, monsieur le Président, le gouvernement agit de manière concertée sur plusieurs fronts, gardant

toujours à l'esprit la volonté de renforcer le développement de la communauté franco-ontarienne, ce qui comprend aussi, en priorité, le soutien à la communauté d'affaires francophone de la province.

En ce qui a trait à la modernisation de la Loi sur les services en français, sachez que la crise de la COVID-19 ne change rien à notre détermination. Nous avons l'intention de poursuivre cette démarche en collaboration avec la communauté francophone.

En conclusion, prenons le temps aujourd'hui, chers collègues, d'apprécier pleinement ce que signifie notre francophonie ontarienne, et profitons tous ensemble des richesses qu'elle nous offre et des horizons qu'elle nous ouvre. C'est un atout formidable pour notre province que de pouvoir compter sur une communauté francophone forte, engagée et entreprenante. Par conséquent, je vous invite à vous joindre à moi pour souhaiter à tous les francophones et francophiles de l'Ontario un mémorable Jour des Franco-Ontariens et des Franco-Ontariennes ce vendredi 25 septembre.

Merci, monsieur le Président, chers collègues et membres de l'Assemblée.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

M. Guy Bourgoin: C'est avec grande fierté que je prends la parole aujourd'hui dans cette Assemblée pour parler de la communauté franco-ontarienne, ma communauté.

Le 25 septembre 1975, le drapeau vert et blanc a ressenti le vent pour la première fois à Sudbury. Le lys et le trille nous rappellent les 400 ans d'héritage francophone en Ontario. Mais Gaétan Gervais, avec Michel Dupuis, ont créé bien plus qu'un drapeau. Il est une déclaration de principe, une annonce à toutes et à tous : on est là, nous, les Ontariens de langue française. Il nous rappelle aussi que nous sommes chez nous, que la francophonie fait bel et bien partie du tissu de la vie sociale, culturelle, économique et politique de l'Ontario.

Oui, le drapeau est un symbole d'appartenance, mais il est aussi un symbole de bataille. On a vu le drapeau franco-ontarien flotter lors de la manifestation du SOS Montfort, quand le gouvernement conservateur de Mike Harris a osé fermer les portes du seul hôpital francophone de la province. On l'a vu flotter lors des manifs du 1^{er} décembre 2008, quand ce gouvernement conservateur nous a donné une grosse claque dans la face en nous enlevant le Commissariat aux services en français, notre chien de garde, en coupant un projet universitaire concret pour ensuite faire volte-face, sans même dépenser un sou. Ils doivent dire merci au fédéral.

Encore pire, l'université reste les bras croisés en attendant que le gouvernement approuve les programmes pour septembre 2021.

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Mais ce beau drapeau rassembleur nous rappelle que la communauté francophone s'est étendue. On a une communauté pleines d'accents, de racines, d'histoires, de musiques, et on peut dire avec fierté que la communauté franco-ontarienne est plus multiculturelle que jamais.

Mais nous continuons à avoir les mêmes obstacles depuis des décennies. Juste cette semaine, on a débattu un

projet de loi visant à inclure le drapeau dans le panthéon d'emblèmes de la province. Pendant ce débat, j'ai dit qu'un geste symbolique ne garantit pas une audience en français pour demander de l'aide sociale. Un geste symbolique n'améliore pas les services 911 en français. J'aurais dû ajouter qu'il est temps que les bottines de ce gouvernement suivent les babines.

Ce gouvernement croit qu'en lançant des miettes par terre, notre communauté va s'en contenter. Si le gouvernement et la ministre des Affaires francophones veulent améliorer les services en français, encourager l'éducation, la culture et l'immigration francophone, ils devraient une fois pour toutes avancer avec la refonte de la Loi sur les services en français.

On ne veut plus d'un gouvernement qui lance des coups d'épée dans l'eau, monsieur le Président. On veut de l'action.

On ne veut plus des tables de concertation, des consultations, des projets pilotes, des plateformes numériques—on n'en veut plus. Nous voulons des politiques beaucoup plus significatives et concrètes, comme une réforme de la Loi sur les services en français, une loi moderne avec une mise en oeuvre de l'offre active des services en français.

On veut que les services en français soient offerts partout en province. On veut un programme d'enseignement adapté aux besoins des conseils scolaires francophones. On veut également un gouvernement qui respecte les droits linguistiques garantis par la section 23 de la Charte. On veut des politiques en matière d'immigration à la hauteur du déclin démographique dans le Nord. Et on veut par-dessus tout le retour de notre commissaire en français indépendant, avec des ressources, avec sa propre équipe et avec un mandat clair.

Je vais conclure en saluant la famille de Gaétan Gervais, qui nous a quitté le 20 octobre 2018, et en disant aux Franco-Ontariens : on ne lâche pas. Ce drapeau est un symbole de fierté, mais il est aussi un symbole de lutte constante pour assurer l'accès aux services qu'on mérite et pour garantir un avenir en français à nos enfants.

Nous sommes, nous serons.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: I'll be splitting my short time with my colleague the great member for Ottawa–Vanier.

C'est un honneur pour moi de prendre la parole aujourd'hui en tant que fière députée franco-ontarienne et de souligner le 10^e anniversaire de la journée des Franco-Ontariens.

Monsieur le Président, être députée n'était certainement pas dans mes plans, mais aujourd'hui je suis tellement fière de pouvoir protéger et de faire avancer les droits et services de ma communauté franco-ontarienne. C'est un privilège et une responsabilité qui, comme vous le savez, me tiennent profondément à coeur.

Le 25 septembre 2018, deux ans passés, la ministre déclarait en cette Chambre moderniser la Loi sur les services en français, le processus de désignation et l'immigration francophone comme priorités. Ça fait maintenant deux ans et cinq mois que le gouvernement est en poste, et aucune avancée dans chacun de ces dossiers.

Si on n'avance pas, on recule, alors c'est le temps de s'embrayer. De ce côté-ci de la Chambre, nous allons continuer à lutter pour l'accès à des services de qualité égale, à une éducation de qualité égale et le respect. Puisque, n'oublions jamais, l'avenir est à ceux qui luttent.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Ottawa–Vanier.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Les Franco-Ontariens et Franco-Ontariennes constituent une communauté avec plus de 400 ans d'histoire dans cette province—une histoire parsemée de luttes, de mobilisations et de succès; une histoire dont nous sommes fiers.

La francophonie nous permet de nous rassembler, à travers nos différences, autour de la langue qui nous unit. Cette union se réalise à travers les arts et la culture, à travers toutes ces formes d'arts qui colorent et embellissent notre quotidien et qu'il est si important de supporter et promouvoir.

Je suis fière d'être francophone et d'avoir élevé mes enfants avec une fierté pour leur patrimoine francophone, un patrimoine qu'ils ont déjà commencé à défendre parce que ça définit qui ils sont.

J'aimerais saluer l'annonce du financement pour soutenir les entrepreneurs et entreprises franco-ontariens qui contribuent de façon importante à la relance de l'économie de l'Ontario.

Malgré la pandémie, la communauté franco-ontarienne s'est assurée de demeurer en contact et de se soutenir mutuellement pendant cette période difficile. Elle a fait preuve d'innovation et de résilience, comme toujours. D'un bout à l'autre de la province, la communauté est forte, dynamique et florissante. Prenons cette opportunité pour célébrer la culture, le patrimoine et la langue française en Ontario, et n'oublions jamais l'importance de promouvoir et protéger ces aspects chaque jour.

À tous les francophones et les francophiles, je vous souhaite de belles célébrations pour souligner la fierté et la force des Franco-Ontariens.

PETITIONS

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, I am presenting a petition: "For a Meaningful Climate Action Plan."

"Whereas our planet is undergoing significant warming with adverse consequences for health, for agriculture, for infrastructure and for our children's future;

"Whereas the costs of inaction are severe, such as extreme weather events causing flooding and drought;

"Whereas Canada has signed the Paris accord which commits us to acting to keep temperature rise under 1.5 degrees Celsius;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the government of Ontario to develop GHG reduction targets based on science that will meet our Paris commitment, an action plan to meet those targets and annual reporting on progress

on meeting the targets. We call on the government to commit to providing funding through carbon pricing mechanisms for actions that must be taken to meet these targets.”

Speaker, I agree with the petition. I have signed it and I will provide it to the Clerk.

CLIMATE CHANGE

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I am presenting a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

“For a Meaningful Climate Action Plan.

“Whereas our planet is undergoing significant warming with adverse consequences for health, for agriculture, for infrastructure and for our children’s future;

“Whereas the costs of inaction are severe, such as extreme weather events causing flooding and drought;

“Whereas Canada has signed the Paris accord which commits us to acting to keep temperature rise under 1.5 degrees Celsius;

“We, the undersigned, call upon the government of Ontario to develop GHG reduction targets based on science that will meet our Paris commitment, an action plan to meet those targets and annual reporting on progress on meeting the targets. We call on the government to commit to providing funding through carbon pricing mechanisms for actions that must be taken to meet these targets.”

I am happy to support this petition by signing it and handing it over to the page for the table.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: I am pleased to present this petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly on behalf of Serena Blair of Toronto who presented it to me. It’s entitled “Do Not Cut Education Funding. Fully Fund the Equitable Education System Children, Families, and Education Workers Deserve.” It reads as follows:

“Whereas since July 2018 the Ontario provincial government has cut millions of dollars from public education funding...; and

“Whereas the Ontario provincial government has announced a hiring freeze and significant class size increases from grades 4 to 12, mandatory e-learning and other detrimental changes to our public education system;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to oppose these damaging cuts and implement:

“—a fully funded public education system that includes low class caps, excellent needs support, no mandatory e-learning and well-maintained buildings;

“—funding that provides equitable enrichment opportunities across the system and reduces the burden on school-based fundraising;

“—an inclusive curriculum and respect for the diversity of our students and educators.”

I’m very pleased to affix my signature to this petition, and I’ll be handing over to the Clerks for tabling.

1530

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Suze Morrison: I have a petition today from CERA, which is the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation. I want to thank them for sharing this with me. It’s entitled “Support the St. James Town Act.” It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas some landlords are negligent in maintaining their properties in a reasonable state of repair;

“Whereas tenants pay for maintenance as part of their rent;

“Whereas failure to adequately maintain rental properties exposes tenants to risk of displacement, personal injury, and property loss;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: To require that landlords set aside a portion of each month’s rent for the purpose of maintaining their rental units, and require that landlords provide a partial refund of rent when they fail to meet their maintenance obligations to their tenants.”

I fully endorse this petition, will affix my signature to it and provide it to the Clerks at the table.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: The petition I would like to read into the register today is entitled “Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. Do Not Cut Education Funding. Fully Fund the Equitable Education System Children, Families and Education Workers Deserve.

“Whereas since July 2018, the Ontario provincial government has cut millions of dollars from public education funding...; and

“Whereas the Ontario provincial government has announced a hiring freeze and significant class size increases from grades 4 to 12, mandatory e-learning and other detrimental changes to our public education system;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to oppose these damaging cuts and implement:

“—a fully funded public education system that includes low class caps, excellent needs support, no mandatory e-learning and well-maintained buildings;

“—funding that provides equitable enrichment opportunities across the system and reduces the burden on school-based fundraising;” and lastly,

“—an inclusive curriculum and respect for the diversity of our students and educators.”

I fully support this petition, will be affixing my signature and passing it to the Clerks.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to thank Amanda Hudswell from Toronto for sending me these petitions.

“Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

“Do not cut education funding. Fully fund the equitable education system children, families and education workers deserve.

“Whereas since July 2018, the Ontario provincial government has cut millions of dollars from public education...; and

“Whereas the Ontario provincial government has announced a hiring freeze and significant class size increases from grades 4 to 12, mandatory e-learning and other detrimental changes to our public education system;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to oppose these damaging cuts and implement:

“—a fully funded public education system that includes low class caps, excellent needs support, no mandatory e-learning and well-maintained buildings;

“—funding that provides equitable enrichment opportunities across the system and reduces the burden on school-based fundraising;” as well as

“—an inclusive curriculum and respect for the diversity of our students and educators.”

I agree with this petition, sign it and deliver it to the table.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I have another petition from Bob Clarkson of Brantford. He has asked the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas quality care for the 78,000 residents of (LTC) homes is a priority for many Ontario families; and

“Whereas the provincial government does not provide adequate funding to ensure care and staffing levels in LTC homes to keep pace with residents’ increasing needs and the growing number of residents with complex behaviours; and

“Whereas several Ontario coroner’s inquests into LTC homes deaths have recommended an increase in direct hands-on care for residents and staffing levels and the most reputable studies on this topic recommend 4.1 hours of direct care per day;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the LTC Homes Act (2007) for a legislated minimum care standard to provide an average of four hours per resident per day, adjusted for acuity level and case mix.”

I fully support this petition, as I have the Time to Care Act bill, and will deliver it to the table.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Peggy Sattler: This is a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly about education funding. It reads as follows:

“Whereas since July 2018, the Ontario provincial government has cut millions of dollars from public education funding...; and

“Whereas the Ontario provincial government has announced a hiring freeze and significant class size increases from grades 4 to 12, mandatory e-learning and other detrimental changes to our public education system;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to oppose these damaging cuts and implement:

“—a fully funded public education system that includes low class caps, excellent needs support, no mandatory e-learning and well-maintained buildings;

“—funding that provides equitable enrichment opportunities across the system and reduces the burden on school-based fundraising;

“—an inclusive curriculum and respect for the diversity of our students and educators.”

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

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas personal protective equipment (known colloquially as PPE) is integral to the ability of the province to collectively curb the spread against the COVID-19 virus and all future viral pandemics;

“PPE is particularly important for ensuring a greater degree of health and safety for front-line workers, who are routinely at greater risk of being exposed to COVID-19. Front-line workers are less able to practise social distancing and other public health measures, and thus must rely more heavily on PPE than Ontarians who do not work on the front lines;

“Whereas personal protective equipment has typically been sourced via international supply chains where production is centred in volatile and unstable countries, leaving provincial supply in jeopardy during the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of international instability and geopolitical maneuvering;

“A similar scenario to the one Ontario found itself in at the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic must not be allowed to happen again.

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

“To immediately, through all means at the disposal of the government, work toward making the province of Ontario self-sufficient with regards to the production and sourcing of all necessary personal protective equipment for use in the fight against COVID-19 and all future pandemics this province may come to experience;

“To continue building upon the actions undertaken by the government early in this pandemic, in order to continue positive trends taking place. Building upon the success of countless Ontario manufacturers from a number of diverse industries shifting production configurations in order to produce much-needed PPE for front-line workers will ensure that Ontario is more self-reliant in being able to protect itself in case of emergency;

“To continue to support manufacturers to address pitfalls in PPE supply in a centralized approach, as has been done by the government of Ontario under the Ontario Made/Fabriqu  en Ontario campaign. Through undoubtedly much good will come out of this initiative, more work and collaboration between the government and industry partners will be crucial in ensuring the worrying shortages experienced at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic will be avoided in future emergency scenarios.”

I fully endorse this petition and affix my signature to it.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It gives me great pleasure to present this petition on behalf of the Family Council Network 4 Advocacy. It is entitled, “Time to Care Act—Bill 13.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas quality care for the 78,000 residents of (LTC) homes is a priority for many Ontario families; and

“Whereas the provincial government does not provide adequate funding to ensure care and staffing levels in LTC homes to keep pace with residents’ increasing needs and the growing number of residents with complex behaviours; and

“Whereas several Ontario coroner’s inquests into LTC homes deaths have recommended an increase in direct hands-on care for residents and staffing levels and the most reputable studies on this topic recommends 4.1 hours of direct care per day;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the LTC Homes Act (2007) for a legislated minimum care standard to provide an average of four hours per resident per day, adjusted for acuity level and case mix.”

I fully support this petition, will be affixing my signature and delivering it to the Clerks.

1540

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I have a petition from Dorothy Gifford. She is wanting me to read this petition. It’s very important.

“Temperatures in LTC Homes.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the province of Ontario requires a minimum but no maximum temperature in long-term-care homes;

“Whereas temperatures that are too hot can cause emotional and physical distress that may contribute to a decline in a frail senior’s health;

“Whereas front-line staff in long-term-care homes also suffer when trying to provide care under these conditions with headaches, tiredness, signs of hyperthermia, which directly impacts resident/patient care;

“Whereas Ontario’s bill of rights for residents of Ontario nursing homes states ‘every resident has the right to be properly sheltered ... in a manner consistent with his or her needs’;

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

“Direct the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations amending O. Reg. 79/10 in the Long-Term Care Homes Act to establish a maximum temperature in Ontario’s long-term-care homes.”

I fully support this petition, sign it, and give it to the table.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: I’m pleased to present this petition, as follows:

“Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

“Don’t Increase Class Sizes in Our Public Schools.

“Whereas the vast majority of parents, students, and educators support smaller class sizes and the current model of full-day kindergarten and want the best education possible for the students of Ontario; and

“Whereas larger class sizes negatively impacts the quality of education; reduces access to teaching resources and significantly diminishes teacher-student interactions; and

“Whereas the impact of larger class sizes will be particularly detrimental to students who need additional support; and

“Whereas Ontario has an internationally recognized public education system that requires careful attention and the investment to ensure all of our students can succeed;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to commit to reducing class sizes, maintain the current model of full-day kindergarten, and make the necessary investments in public education to build the schools our students deserve.”

I’m pleased to present this on behalf of Dianna McGregor of Mississauga. I’m going to affix my signature and hand it to the Clerks.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HELPING TENANTS AND SMALL BUSINESSES ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 VISANT   SOUTENIR LES LOCATAIRES ET LES PETITES ENTREPRISES

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 23, 2020, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 204, An Act to amend various Acts respecting municipal elections, to amend the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020 and to provide for a temporary residential rent freeze and specified temporary protections for certain commercial tenants / Projet de loi 204, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui a trait aux  lections municipales, modifiant la Loi de 2020 sur la r ouverture de l’Ontario (mesures adaptables en r ponse   la COVID-19) et pr voyant un gel

des locataires d'habitations temporaire et des protections temporaires précisées pour certains locataires commerciaux.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It is my pleasure, indeed, to start a one-hour lead on Bill 204, the Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act. This is a piece of legislation that deals with four major issues that are facing the province of Ontario right now: the rent freeze for 2021; a commercial evictions ban extension—but only until October 30, which is in 37 days; emerging provincial and municipal enumeration lists under the municipal voter lists; and the increased consequences for hosting overcrowded events during a pandemic. I'm going to speak to all four of those issues at length, with a focus, of course, on the commercial component.

I will say, though, before I begin my comments, I do want to give some context as to what we are facing right now as a province. Over the weekend, there was an article published in the *Globe and Mail*. It was entitled, "Past Due: How Crushing Household and Business Debt Is Pushing Our Economy to a Tipping Point." It was written by a tax and fiscal policy reporter, Patrick Brethour, and James Bradshaw. I'm going to read just a small component of it, because it gives context as to why this piece of legislation before us is so insufficient for the times that we face.

It begins by saying:

"The summer of economic recovery is fading away, replaced by a season of growing uncertainty as the weight of tens of billions of dollars in deferred debts bears down on consumers and businesses.

"For months, the economy has been pulled along by two lifelines: the unprecedented intervention by Ottawa to prop up households and businesses with income supports and subsidies, and an equally unprecedented move to allow individuals and companies to put off paying their mortgages and taxes. Add to that the uncounted debts amassed by tenants and by businesses that have run up tabs with suppliers."

Now, of course, the tide is turning somewhat:

"Now, Ottawa is starting to pare back the supports and subsidies, and those tens of billions of deferred debts are coming due, diverting household dollars from being sent to patronize struggling businesses. The banking industry's rough estimate indicates as much as \$6 billion in mortgage payments were deferred over the past six months. By the end of September, \$55 billion in individual and business income taxes uncollected since mid-March will need to be paid.

"Many businesses have built up their own massive debts"—and I believe that all of us in the Legislature have heard from the business community around the financial stress and strain that they have faced during COVID-19—"that, in normal times, would have already forced them to close or into receivership....

"And that means the relatively sunny economic news of the summer could quickly turn dark...."

The president and chief executive of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp., Evan Siddall, says, in general, the banks are going to be fine. So don't worry, the banks are going to be okay. I would say that the banks are usually okay.

"It's more about the prospects for the country which we are very worried about," Mr. Siddall says. "Emergency benefits and other federal spending"—federal spending—"have cushioned the economy over the past six months.

"Looking ahead, Mr. Siddall sees a two-fold risk at play here. First there is growing household debt"—which was growing prior to COVID, but obviously accelerated during the pandemic. "The CMHC still believes it will rise to a record high in 2021, and a dip in the second quarter will prove to be temporary. Any economic recovery will fizzle without robust consumer spending, which accounts for three-fifths of gross domestic product.

"Then there is the risk of a wider downturn as the full effects of the coronavirus ripple through the economy. One quarter of the work force is still receiving some kind of income support"—one quarter of the workforce is still receiving some kind of financial support—"Mr. Siddall says. 'At some point this ends, and there are some businesses that are going to have to adjust, and there will be unemployment that results.'

"Harsh decisions that have been postponed will have to be made, and the hardship will no longer be hypothetical. 'It's an unemployment and people-getting-thrown-out-of-their-home problem,' he says."

That sets the tone, Mr. Speaker, for what many of us—if you pay attention to economics, if you pay attention to the finances of this province and of other provinces, if you watch other jurisdictions on an international and global state, you can see what is before us. I believe very strongly, as do we as New Democrats, that the time to act was some time ago, but it's never too late to do the right thing.

So what Bill 204 does present to us is an opportunity to hopefully amend some pieces of this legislation and also to propose solutions, from an economic perspective, which would signal job creation and economic confidence in the province of Ontario.

Now, the rent freeze is very interesting. Three of the government members spoke to this piece of legislation this morning. Unfortunately, I was in public accounts. We had our first meeting. I do like to follow the money in this province, and I was happy to be back at public accounts and chairing there. But what Bill 204 does around rent freezes is that it amends the Residential Tenancies Act to set the guideline rent increase for residential tenants at 0% for 2021 instead of the 1.5% increase that would have otherwise applied.

The rent freeze does not apply to residences that are exempt from the Residential Tenancies Act under sections 5, 5.1 and 5.2, such as long-term-care homes, student residences and land-lease homes. The rent freeze also does not apply to group homes or supportive housing, which have always been exempt from the act's rent increase guidelines.

I do want to say a special thank you to the critic on this file, the member from Toronto Centre, who lives and breathes the tenant file and is a tenant, so she has first-hand experience in that regard. We also reached out, with the help of her office, to the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario, and this is what they have to say around the rent freeze for 2021: It will “temporarily freeze rent increases between January 1, 2021 and December 31, 2021, with some major exceptions that will continue to allow landlords to raise rents next year.”

1550

We need to fix this. If the goal and the intention, as the minister stood in his place today, is that rents will not be increased for tenants in the province of Ontario in 2021, then this piece of legislation needs to be fixed.

After months of pressuring the province to introduce policies that will support tenants during the pandemic crisis, this bill is a minor step forward, but Bill 204 does not go nearly far enough in protecting tenants with the immediate issues that they are facing and to keep them housed. I hope that in this Legislature we can agree that keeping people housed in a pandemic is actually not only an economic imperative but a health imperative so that people can actually stay safe. That is why we need to get this component of this piece of legislation right.

The title of this piece—and this actually just came out today; we can share it with the minister, if he wishes—is “The Good, the Bad, The Missing,” quite honestly. The good part—and I do want to say it. I mean, we’re encouraged that the government is willing to freeze rent for 2021; it just needs to be actionable. You know that we did fight any increase in rent because we have a serious affordable housing issue in Toronto, in Waterloo, in Ottawa, in Kingston and across this province—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And in London West—yes, okay. And in London.

What this legislation does is that if you were paying \$1,000 in rent for your apartment, your rent for 2021, under the old rules, would have increased to \$1,015. The proposed legislation will not allow the landlord to raise your rent by \$15 a month in 2021. Bill 204 will also temporarily freeze rents for units first occupied after November 15, 2018. Not all sitting tenants in Ontario are protected by the annual rent increase guideline after this government, as one of its first acts, removed rent increase protection for tenants who moved into a rental housing unit that was first occupied as a residential unit after November 15, 2018. This means the landlord could raise the rent annually for this tenant by as much as they wanted. For instance, if you paid \$1,000 in rent for a new affordable basement apartment, your rent could be raised by \$300 instead of the \$15 under rent control, and instantly become unaffordable. Many tenants facing these unlimited rent increases are forced to move in what is called an economic eviction.

The other group of tenants that will benefit from this bill are those living in social and non-profit housing, including tenants who pay rent-geared-to-income rent.

The RGI rent will be capped for 2021 even if their income increases. But, by law, the landlord must wait 12 months between rent increases. Since an annual rent increase can happen throughout the year, the rent freeze will benefit tenants whose annual rent increases happen at the beginning of the year, but if your rent increase happens at the end of the year, this will hardly be a benefit.

So one of the recommendations of this group is that they “urge the government to amend Bill 204 to have the rent freeze become effective one year after the tenant’s last annual increase and to extend the freeze for 24 months.”

Now, onto the bad: Above-guideline rent increases are allowed. One of the major shortcomings of Bill 204 is that it allows landlords to apply and collect above-guideline increases, otherwise known as AGIs. An AGI is a rent increase that is more than the permitted annual guideline increase, which the landlord must apply for at the Landlord and Tenant Board. AGIs are to pay for capital expenses, like major repairs, renovations, replacements or additions that are not part of the normal ongoing maintenance. Other reasons why AGIs may be permitted is to pay for an unusually high increase in municipal taxes and charges or for the cost of security services. Low-income tenants living in apartment towers are disproportionately impacted by AGI rent increases, like seniors living on fixed-pension incomes. This is clearly a loophole that will allow rent to increase and that still is allowed under Bill 204.

This significant exemption to the proposed rent freeze overwhelmingly benefits large corporate landlords with financial resources to weather the storm. Some of these corporate landlords have already received approvals for their AGI rent increases from the Landlord and Tenant Board and will be allowed to apply for more rent increases.

The advocacy centre proposes that the government revise Bill 204 to include a freeze on all rent increases, including those permitted through AGIs. This seems very reasonable if, as I mentioned, the intent is to freeze the rent.

What is missing—and they call this a major flaw and short-sightedness of Bill 204—is its inability to help tenants through the inadequate response to the root cause of tenants’ rental housing issues, allowing for vacancy decontrol to continue, where landlords rent-gouge on tenant turnover. Ontario landlords are incentivized to kick out their sitting tenants to reap increased profits from a new tenant. This group urges the government to “revise the bill to eliminate rent-gouging laws and to provide meaningful support to tenants in these unprecedented times.”

We have heard this from constituents across the province. People have lost their jobs. They’ve lost their incomes. They’ve spent all their savings. They do not have money for rent. So tenants experiencing financial difficulties during the pandemic crisis should not be forced out of their homes. Surely we can come to some agreement that this is realized.

We also call on the Ontario government to reinstate the eviction moratorium. While Bill 204 prohibits evictions

for commercial properties—well, that did happen—it continues to allow the LTB to churn out eviction orders and for the sheriff's office to continue kicking people out of their homes. The pandemic is far from over, and tenants need to know that they have a stable home as we move into the colder months.

Those are some reasonable suggestions, if the government is serious about ensuring that people can stay in their homes and not have rent increases.

We don't know if this bill will actually go to committee. If it goes to committee, we're going to put forward some progressive amendments in the interests of the people of this province.

Finally, on the rent freeze, I have to say that, as an MPP, one of the worst calls that we get in Waterloo—like my colleague MPP Lindo in Kitchener Centre—is a housing crisis call, because there is nowhere to refer people to. The only place that you refer people to is a wait-list. These are sometimes women fleeing domestic violence. These are folks who have fallen on very financial economic hard times. These are also people saying, "This housing option is no longer healthy."

And for those of us who have universities and colleges in our ridings, these are students who have landlords who are going into their apartments unannounced, not returning their key deposits. These are students who are not familiar with how to navigate tenancy issues. These folks need support.

So I have to say that there's lots of work to be done on the rent freeze. People out there will hear "rent freeze" and will be relieved because they are stressed. But, as we said, it needs to be stronger.

The commercial evictions ban extension: This is interesting. I literally feel like a broken record on this issue. I've been consistent, if nothing else, because I've reflected what the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Black Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, downtown BIAs have said to us—that we need a ban on evictions for commercial businesses. The fact that the government finally did this but tied it to the federal CECRA program, which is a flawed program—we should be able to agree that setting the threshold at 70% revenue loss and only directing the landlords as the applicant for financial funding to save a business—I don't know who came up with it. Perhaps it's the same people who came up with the WE Charity plan, because it does not work. So businesses may not be able to be evicted if their landlord doesn't apply for this—but even applying for this, the threshold is set so high that many businesses don't qualify.

I have a business in my riding that lost 65% of their revenue and they didn't qualify for any rent support—and we've seen now, we're up to 22 businesses that have shut down in K-W. Remember, this is one of the economic engines of this province, with the IT and tech sector and advanced manufacturing.

1600

The commercial evictions ban extension is only effective until October 30. Thankfully, it is retroactive, but

it literally is such a bureaucratically heavy administrative process that many landlords just said, "You know what? I'm just not even going to apply for it." Not only that, but there was a lack of transparency. Some landlords did apply for the money, some landlords did get it, but it didn't translate into saving the business because it was never transferred to the tenants. If we are actually concerned about following the money and ensuring that businesses can stay open during very difficult financial times, then let's build a program that works for businesses.

The Saskatchewan finance minister wrote way back in May asking for the funding that had been contributed in part to this plan at the federal level to be released and have a provincial, made-in-Saskatchewan commercial rent relief program. That is what we need in the province of Ontario. We do. Unless you have some faith that the Prime Minister, after six months now, is going to do an about-face and change the program, knowing full well that of the \$3 billion that was released, only \$1 billion has flowed across this country.

Bill 204's provisions banning commercial evictions for rent arrears are pretty much identical to the provisions in Bill 192, so you've just extended it to October 30. Now, listen: We know, based on the lines out at Women's College Hospital or the lines at Grand River Hospital or the lines at the London Health Sciences Centre, the pandemic is not going to be over by October 30. The economic stress is not going to be magically alleviated in the month of October. So why tie the eviction ban to October 30? That doesn't make a lot of sense.

Unlike Bill 192, there is no automatic provision for repeal either, so I feel like this component of Bill 204 is the government just going through the motions to say that they did something. I have serious concerns about that as the critic for economic development, because we need to make sure that businesses stay open. They need to have confidence that the government of the day has their back, and that will inspire them to actually innovate and adapt to these changing times.

The government also heard very clearly in our Save Main Street strategy that the government can and should be supporting businesses with subsidies so that they can pivot. That's the word. You can only pivot so far. But businesses can and should, if they're able to, and if they receive funding from the government, adapt to this new economy where possible.

We also heard from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business that we're expecting 60% of the restaurants in this country to close—60%. The patios have kept some along, but obviously Canada is not a place where you traditionally have a dinner out on a patio in December; although I know that some businesses are actually trying to figure that out.

The other issue, with regard to commercial rent relief, is that it defies logic, really, that after sitting from June, July, August and even into September, a piece of legislation can come to the floor of this Legislature and not reflect what we heard from businesses. I have to say, I feel like it's a new level of disrespect, because those businesses

were stressed. These are obviously taxing times. The government had provided some deferrals around taxes and around some fees. And they came, and those were emotional hearings. To listen to someone whose dream—they have mortgaged their home, they have employed all their family members, they have done angel investing and they have secured funding. To see them come to committee and basically beg for help from the government in direct financial support, I think it was hard for them to do. I know it was hard for us to hear. But it must be very difficult for government members who actually heard this testimony to see a piece of legislation that does not reflect what actually needs to happen to keep businesses open in Ontario.

I feel it's important to bring some of those voices to the floor of the Legislature from the committee. Some of this is from Hansard; some of this is from my notes. But I want people to understand that this is what's at stake.

This is one business that said, "We were forced to lay off nine of our 11 employees ... we are still sick over losing the people who were the core of our business...."

"Those first few weeks are a blur of decision fatigue, guilt over losing our team, and just the uncertainty of everything."

Another company said to us that extending the moratorium is "a solution that does not cost taxpayers money and helps level the playing field between landlords and small businesses. I'm pleading out here: Please, we have about two weeks to go. After 16 years of operation, it appears that my business may actually be closed down on me against my will."

Another business said to us, "My wife and I stand to lose everything we have worked for in the last 25 years. We will lose our house, and it will push us into personal bankruptcy." This is what is at stake, Mr. Speaker.

I have a local organization from my area; this is around tourism and entertainment. The Cambridge Butterfly Conservatory had this to say about the CECRA program, which Bill 204 is continually tied to: "I cannot understand how it was ever in the best interests of any small business that the government handed over full control of our futures to our landlords...."

"I spent countless nights worrying about my family's business while waiting to see if my three landlords would participate."

Why this government continues to double down on a failed plan that actually gives all the control to the landlord over the small business owner defies all logic. It counters all the rhetoric. If you had told me six months ago that I would still be arguing this point in the Legislature, I would say, "No, this is a government that says that Ontario is open for business." Ontario will not be open for business if businesses close. It just will not happen. Our economic recovery will not happen if businesses close, so we have a duty and a responsibility to consider rent support, rent abatement as an investment in our economy and not as an expenditure, not as something that you can't afford to do. We can't afford not to support businesses in Ontario. I'm sure there are members on the other side who understand this. I'm sure there are.

The Stratford Festival said to us at committee, "We beseech you"—because it is Stratford—"allow us a voice in the development of such re-opening plans. Lives depend on getting it right; so do livelihoods." This is the Stratford Festival, a major economic driver for the city of Stratford, and in fact, the entire area, basically saying, "Include us. Please include us in your plans. Don't leave us on the sidelines. Listen to us."

With the best of intentions, they came to these committees. Some of them came multiple times, because there were five sectors that we heard from. We didn't hear from the agriculture sector, but I'm going to leave that to our critic.

Several organizations and businesses also urged the government to be more consistent in their approach to reopening and business supports. This is also a common theme.

But think about what happens here: You've brought a piece of legislation here and you've called it supporting businesses or helping small businesses act, and yet it doesn't reflect what actually needs to happen to support small businesses.

This is from my community of Waterloo; this is what Mark Bingeman had to say: "The province needs to understand that how it has handled this situation has substantially inappropriately branded this ... industry's reputation with consumers."

An Ottawa business called Party Mart—and this is a common concern that we also heard: "Allowing big box stores to monopolize this pandemic and grow stronger over independent small business cannot be tolerated ever again." I hope somebody on that side is listening to that, because there was a reason why everybody was lined up at Walmart and not down on main street looking to buy some milk and bread. There was essential and non-essential, so people were shopping during a pandemic for clothes, Mr. Speaker.

1610

So let's be cognizant. Let's be very careful and cautious in the way we make decisions on a go-forward basis, because, as our medical officer of health has already declared, we are in the second phase of COVID-19 in Waterloo region. She declared this yesterday.

On the business support piece, and this is something that we will never give up on this side of the House, there has been very little acknowledgment of women in our economy. We've spoken about this in the House before, about the difficulties that women entrepreneurs, in particular, are facing during the pandemic. And it cannot be said enough: There will be no economic recovery without a she-covery.

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks for that.

There was one group at the finance committee hearings that exemplify the unique problems faced by women. It was two women and, I'm going to tell you, it was pretty emotional to listen to the dreams of these young entrepreneurs. They could watch them disappear. This is from Hansard, and the organization is called Beauty United. It reads as follows:

“Some 80% of our members identify as female, and on average, just 15% of Canadian small businesses are majority female-owned. About 20% of our members identify as members of a visible minority, which is also higher than the national average. Please take a look at us. We are the face of the pandemic’s ‘she-cession’ in Ontario.”

Those are just some of the—I mean, I could just spend the entire afternoon talking about the voices of businesses who thought they were entering into a legitimate and genuine process that the government had initiated to listen to five sectors over the course of the summer, and they thought that their reflections would be realized in legislation or regulation. The final report with its recommendations is not set to come before this House until, I think, October 8. Mr. Speaker, by October 8, we will see more and more businesses—many of the businesses that came before us, they will not be in business on October 8. That’s why I started my comments about where we are as a country from an economic perspective, from a debt-ratio perspective and also our GDP. There is an urgency here, and if you hear frustration, it’s frustration that I’m transferring from the communities where we have gathered voices.

One of those organizations is Little Portugal on Dundas BIA. This is an organization that decided—and they just sent this September 18. I know the minister for small business received a copy of this, and the Prime Minister, the new finance minister, the Premier and the member from Davenport, Ms. Stiles. These are small and medium-sized businesses. They cover 80 BIAs across the GTA. They have joined forces. They need to be heard. They need to be listened to. And they say, “Through independent surveys and third-party research, we know that our SMEs continue to be under severe pressure as a result of COVID-19.” They’ve identified some key areas, and they want to share those key areas with the government.

The number one issue, Mr. Speaker, is rent abatement. It goes on to say that the CECRA program needs to be retired and a new, improved rent abatement scheme needs to replace it, one that is more equitable and does not put landlords against tenants and leave the success of a tenant up to the goodwill of a landlord. The application process should instead have the tenant applying, and not to the landlord. They recommend that the qualifying criteria for loss of revenue be lowered to 40% instead of 70%.

So here you have a group of businesses that have come together for their very survival, the Little Portugal on Dundas BIA. They go on to say that they will require loans for small and medium-sized businesses, but the ones that are currently at play have already sort of run their course, and it needs to be expanded but with more forgivable options and longer timelines for repayment. This was also part of our Save Main Street plan, with \$10,000 for rent. At the time, it was up to three months. It obviously needs to be extended.

I have to say that tax deferrals are not altogether the best solution. A tax deferral pushes the debt down the road, when you are even more in debt. So the concept of repaying that kind of debt is a huge barrier.

The Little Portugal on Dundas BIA also goes on to say that a grant program for business pivoting—“Reward SMEs with grant opportunities, to those who pivot their business model to strengthen their brick and mortar/physical locations to diversify their products or services to be more resilient during COVID-19 and beyond.” Do you know what I hear when a business says that to us—“Provide a grant program”? I hear, “We want to be part of the solution. We want to be a player in the economic recovery, but we’re going to need some help.” That requires leadership on the economic file from the Treasury Board, from the finance minister. That’s what needs to happen. They need money on the table so that they can pivot in this COVID-19 economic crisis. They want to be part of the solution.

They also say that they need a grant program for health protocols. “SMEs can no longer bear the burden of putting health protocols in place which include: extra staff to implement cleaning requirements and purchasing expensive PPE supplies. Grants should be expanded to ease this burden and help businesses.”

We also heard this at committee. We heard the businesses, particularly in tourism—what tourism could happen—that they require some financial assistance to help keep consumers safe. That leads to consumer confidence, and that leads to economic recovery. Confidence is the key piece here.

Finally, on insurance: Insurance was a consistent thing that we heard about. Does Bill 204 address insurance? No, it doesn’t. “In addition to the above recommendations, it has come to our attention that many of our SMEs, particularly in the hospitality and music venue industries, are experiencing significant hardship in terms of obtaining insurance, at fair cost, and in many cases, obtaining insurance at all.

“There is concrete evidence that these businesses have been told their premiums are doubling or tripling, or in some cases, they simply cannot find a provider who will insure them at all. This must be addressed, and quickly.”

We share these concerns with the Little Portugal on Dundas BIA, and the 80 BIA associations. “We believe that now is an important opportunity to take bold steps....” That’s what they say. They want bold steps. They want courage. They want creativity. But they also want to be part of the solution.

They go on to say that we need to “change underlying systems to allow for a solid foundation for small and medium-sized businesses to be resilient and supported for the longer term.”

This is from Cathy Quinton, who is the BIA coordinator with Little Portugal on Dundas BIA.

These are very good recommendations. We take them to heart. We take them seriously. And the calls for courage and bold solutions—we echo that, as well. This is not a time for a very timid government to look at low-hanging-fruit solutions. We are not going to red tape our way out of this impending economic recession and, as you’ve heard earlier, potential depression. So it is a now-or-never kind of moment for the government. But what do we have?

We have Bill 204, which ties a ban on commercial evictions to October 30, as I said, 37 days away, and really does not meet the test of what a government should be doing.

I want to bring the voice of one Peterborough business on insurance, because it has not resonated. The Premier went out, when a grocery store was charging \$32 for Lysol wipes, and was up and down that owner of that business, saying that was price gouging. Well, you have tangible examples of price gouging on insurance, which is preventing businesses from opening, staying open or staying viable, and the government is just like “No, we’re not going to do anything about this.” This was one of my first questions to the finance minister when he came before the finance and economic affairs committee back in June. We are now almost at the end of September—no action whatsoever.

1620

So this owner from Peterborough—her name is Kerri Niemi. She’s the owner of the Garnet and the Sapphire Room in Peterborough. She owns two bars in downtown Peterborough. One is a live music venue: the Garnet. She has owned it for six years. She has struggled to find insurance. She can’t get full coverage; she can only get liability. She does not now include contents if something were to happen. She says, “So, we were able to open, at least outside for now.” So this is another business that’s relying on the outdoor model around patios, which we supported. We supported extending the patios and extending those timelines.

With the other bar, things have gotten much worse. At the Sapphire Room which she has owned for 23 years, she’s unable to get reasonable coverage. She says they were hoping to be able to limp back into service, and the best quote she could get was \$10,000, and that was just business only. She makes the point, Mr. Speaker—and this is important—they’ve never had a claim at either location, so they are good businesses. They’re honest businesses. Last year, all in, and with the building, it was \$10,000. She says, “I understand that I need insurance no matter what. But this jump is not manageable.” As for changing her business model, she’s going to see what she can do. “It just seems a little outrageous that after 23 years in the same location that I can’t open because I can’t get insurance. It is heartbreaking, honestly, for most of the hospitality sector”—and I’ve heard this as well from an entertainment place in Waterloo, Maxwell’s, one of the best live music venues in Waterloo; to see them struggle and then to have to fight in the insurance sector to survive really does prove that we actually are not all in this together.

I have one more. This was in the Toronto Star just on Monday. This Toronto restaurant owner’s insurance jumped from \$9,000 to almost \$30,000 during COVID-19, and he’s not alone.

If you turn away from this issue, if you ignore this issue, you do so at the peril of the businesses that have come before us. As I’ve said, our economy will not, cannot recover if the businesses close. We need them to employ people. We need them to be part of the economic engine

of this province. What’s most frustrating is that I found my notes from back in May and essentially people were asking for the exact same things.

So, as we debate Bill 204—and it has a nice title because they’re helping tenants. What’s wrong with that? The Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act—but if it doesn’t do what it says it should do, then you are actually missing the point.

The third part of Bill 204 is a strange thing to have been included in this piece of legislation. It’s merging provincial and municipal enumeration, and it amends some statutes: the Municipal Elections Act—I’m not saying it’s not important because I think that clarity around municipal voters lists is important. I just don’t know what it’s doing in this piece of legislation. It’s like somebody forgot about it.

In fact, it’s funny because the government did not mention the changes to municipal enumeration when it announced Bill 204. Even though these changes represent three fifths of a bill purporting to be about helping tenants and small business, and the government previously demonstrated, honestly, contempt for local democracy when it suddenly cancelled regional chair elections and cut Toronto council seats in half with the 2018 election already under way, and then just for good measure the Premier threatened to use the notwithstanding clause when a court ruled that its actions violated the charter rights—despite this problematic background, for some reason, it’s in this legislation. I don’t know who’s running the show over there. We don’t have many plans, or well-constructed plans, coming out from that side.

The fourth part of Bill 204 has to do with increased consequences for hosting overcrowded events during a pandemic. I do want to say that the fines are big, Mr. Speaker. Hosting or organizing such an event or gathering at a residence or a prescribed premises is an offence, carrying the same penalties for other offences under Bill 195. So it goes, for example, from \$10,000 to \$100,000 for an individual, and from \$10,000 to \$10 million for a corporation.

I do want to point out that these fees are actually higher than those for for-profit long-term-care homes who clearly violated their oath around taking care of the 1,854 seniors who died in long-term care. And who knows if we’re ever going to see justice from the long-term-care commission, because it’s all happening behind closed doors. The Premier has already said on the record in a media scrum that taking legal action against these homes, where people died and were neglected in a horrible state of affairs—he doesn’t feel that going the legal route is the proper route.

Fortunately, there are a number of class action suits that have been filed on behalf of parents, on behalf of the grandparents and family members and even friends, and one hopes that justice will be served to those families. Because as my colleague said the other day, when you were prevented from seeing and helping, and being apart from a loved one in a long-term-care home, and then you read that Canadian Armed Forces report—I think that it gave a lot of people nightmares. In fact, I am still

approached by one woman in Kitchener-Waterloo who basically said her grief has no place to go, because there is no public process for her to air her grievances or even to find out exactly what happened to her loved one.

When you counter that with a \$10-million fine for a corporation for hosting a party, I think there is a serious disconnect here in this Legislature. That said, these fees, these fines, may deter people from partying. Homecoming is fast approaching in Waterloo. I think that our police chief and our regional government is on that, as they were prior to the full-blown pandemic.

But there's an important point to be made here, Mr. Speaker. It depends on which epidemiologist you read these days—six months ago I wasn't reading epidemiologists' reports. But the interesting part about this strategy is that, in truth, we really don't know where the virus outbreaks are happening. This is a complication to addressing them, because if you don't have targeted testing and you don't have targeted tracing, then you really are out in the dark on this one. Obviously, the threat of these happening, because people think that it's already passed because the Premier said so—these are probably going to be in play. We don't want people congregating in large groups. Everybody agrees on that. I think people were very surprised that this was effective immediately on the weekend, in an unprecedented press conference that the Premier had.

I want to say the testing situation in the province of Ontario is very stressful for us. There has to be a way. If the Premier can say overnight that we're down to 10 people indoors and 25 people outdoors, why is the government side not responding to the call for additional resources to public health? We need to make sure that testing is timely.

In Waterloo region, I have to say, it takes six days to get an appointment for a test. As I said this morning, people went at 2 o'clock in the morning to a testing site in Waterloo, and it was shut down at 7:15 a.m. Fear is the predominant emotion. The police were called. There was aggressive action towards front-line health care workers. Hopefully, somebody is doing a better job on the testing file than they are on the supporting-small-business file, I have to say.

1630

So what is missing from Bill 204? I just want to quickly get this on the record:

Number one, Bill 204's rent freeze and commercial eviction ban are better than nothing. The bill misses opportunities to provide real help for tenants of small businesses during the pandemic. I think I made a compelling case for that.

The bill does nothing to stop residential evictions that are due to the pandemic, despite the tough talk from the Premier. Tough talk doesn't work. And the more the Premier does this, play the angry father figure, it actually loses whatever effect it had at the beginning of the pandemic. But he did say in March, "No one will be kicked out of their home or their rental apartments based on not being able to pay the rent—it's just not going to happen, we won't allow it to happen."

The previous court-ordered residential eviction ban was lifted on August 1. So you know what happened? People got evicted in August. They did. They got evicted at the beginning of September as well. As I mentioned, the MPP from Kitchener Centre, MPP Lindo, and I feel great empathy for the members in Toronto because the wait-lists in Toronto are way longer than in Waterloo, but in Waterloo and Kitchener, those wait-lists are still upwards of two years, so as an MPP, there are very few options when you get to that state of affairs.

The third thing that's missing: The government actually made pandemic-related evictions easier for landlords when it jammed through Bill 184. This past summer, government MPPs voted down NDP amendments to Bill 184 that would have frozen rents during the pandemic and banned pandemic-related evictions. Let's not let people get evicted in the province of Ontario in a pandemic. For the life of me, I don't understand what the resistance is to this.

Then, number 4: Given that the economy is struggling during the pandemic and the inflation rate is already currently 0%, a rent freeze is the absolute least the government can do, especially since the 2.2% guideline increase allowed in 2020 is the highest it has been since 2013.

Fifth, the bill includes no provisions to provide rent relief to residential tenants struggling during the pandemic, as we have repeatedly called for, as advocacy groups have repeatedly called for. People who have lost their incomes need direct rent support to stay in their homes.

Sixth, the residential rent freeze applies only to the 2021 calendar year. Rent increases of up to 2.2% may still be imposed in 2020 despite the pandemic, and the deadline giving the required 90 days' notice of a rent increase applying in 2020 was September 2. The minister announced the rent freeze on August 28, prior to this deadline. It is unknown how many landlords rushed to give notice before the deadline after learning about the rent freeze. This is a very real issue for people who really are just going month to month. In some instances, it's literally week to week.

The pandemic will almost certainly continue past the arbitrary October 30 date, and there is reason to fear that a second wave of infections may require further business closures. This is to be avoided, which is why investing in an appropriate testing strategy was needed, which is why investing in social distancing and our education system was needed. In fact, businesses came to our committee during the summer and said, "Listen, I need my employees to come back to work. They can't come back to work if the school reopening plan is weak and if they need to close down the schools and the classrooms."

The Financial Accountability Officer released his report two and a half weeks ago and said, "Listen, there's still \$6.7 billion that the government has not released." Releasing it later, when we're back in a shutdown, will defeat the whole purpose of emergency funding. The time to spend is right now. Invest right now in the health and

safety of Ontarians so that we can keep our schools open, so that we can keep our businesses open.

Also, we heard at committee that there are actually opportunities here for us as a province. For instance, the infrastructure in our schools, the last figure I saw is that we're at an \$18-billion infrastructure investment, and I think that was from Fix Our Schools in 2018—

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Deficit.

Ms. Catherine Fife: What is it?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Deficit.

Ms. Catherine Fife: What did I say?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Investment.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, no—deficit. We are \$18 billion behind in maintaining the infrastructure of our schools.

You want to create some good jobs? Let's get these HVAC systems into all of our schools and make sure that the quality of the air in our schools is high, is effective, is efficient. You can save money by lowering energy costs. You get tradespeople into the schools, creating good jobs, and you're signalling to the people of this province that you actually get how important education is. I mean, it literally is a win-win-win situation.

The procurement piece came up as a consistent theme as well. The government should partner with innovative companies in this province that are currently commercializing their research, creating health and safety products which are going elsewhere. The government should be the number one customer of innovation in Ontario. It has been said many, many times, but in a pandemic it should have greater weight.

I'm part of the all-party caucus with OBIO, the Ontario Bioscience Innovation Organization, and for so many years—eight years now—we've been on that, myself and the member from London West. We do great things in this province. In fact, the government often invests in innovation around health and safety, but we don't capitalize on the commercialization of that research. In fact, we actually outsource those final products to the benefit of other jurisdictions. We can't even get some of the products down the street in the hospitals on University. It's a missed opportunity if we don't capitalize from a procurement perspective and, quite honestly, some businesses just asked us to pay the bills: Would the government please pay their bills in a prompt matter? They actually asked for prompt payment.

So here we are. We have a piece of legislation. I suspect that it will be fast-tracked, which is interesting, because quick passage is needed for the freeze on rent and even tying it to 37 days around the ban on evictions, but there's probably other parts that actually need to be explored. So it's a strange bill, which indicates to me that there is a fairly serious disconnect that this government has been facing when it comes to facing the reality of what's actually happening in Ontario.

I want to go back to the point particularly on the rent freeze, because it will not be a good look for anybody to have whole families out on the street on Dundas, on Yonge or on Bloor. I just watched a video of this happening in the

United States, of sheriffs coming and removing families and people having no place to go. Having a home is the base on which you build a strong economy because people can't recover, can't work without a home.

There have been great lessons learned in this pandemic. The House of Friendship and the Inner City Health Alliance in Kitchener-Waterloo partnered with the Radisson. The Radisson said, "We've got these rooms. We don't want an outbreak happening in our community. It's inhumane and, also, it's bad for business, and we want to partner with you." So John Neufeld and his team accelerated this 24/7 shelter.

And I'm going to tell you, some of the men who have been—one of them particularly has been sleeping rough for five years; he hasn't slept in a bed for five years. He wakes up every day and has a shower. He started to think about his life. He's getting mental health supports. He's getting health care supports. He's getting addictions support. And 18 of those clients have been successfully housed permanently, so they haven't come back.

Because that's the problem: You think that you can just plop people back into a home, if you can actually find a space, but they actually need support, because living rough for five years is very different than trying to enter mainstream society as well.

1640

On the testing, on the education and the transparency of reporting, I just read something very quickly before I got up here, and it's from commentator Tom Parkin, and I follow him. This is on the importance of testing on the economy, and since this is a small business bill, I thought I would introduce this concept here. He says, "We have seen, for example, new reports of outbreaks at strip clubs"—Mr. Speaker, of all places. "It is, of course, a sign ... that opening strip clubs"—for some reason—"was a higher priority than opening schools...." The government actually did give an exemption to a general ban on dancing. You're not supposed to dance in social settings, but you can dance if you're in a strip club, so don't worry about that. But now there are some hot spots in strip clubs.

"But the broader point is that when any kind of workplace, social situation or environment is a hot spot for transmission, we need public health to target it." And that's the important piece about tracing this virus.

"When we know the workplaces, conditions or environment in which this virus spreads, the right action could be targeted shutdowns." So not a wholesale shutdown, a targeted shutdown. That's the important part of tracking the virus.

"But it could also mean improving safety protocols to help workers keep working safely—obviously the preferred option. But we don't see that targeted plan, and we don't see the track-and-trace information." And this is a key piece, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 204 does not address. I really don't know.

Yesterday, the Premier said that he's got a massive, massive plan. It's so big, we can't handle getting all of it at one time. I'd like to remind the Premier that we can handle a plan. We need to see the plan. There needs to be

confidence in the plan. Small businesses are counting on a plan, and there needs to be transparency, because transparency builds trust. I think there's a trust issue on the tenancy file, and now, because of this piece of legislation, which really does not meet the mark, there's a trust issue with small businesses. I thank you for your time today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Mr. Deepak Anand: I would like to say thank you to the member for Waterloo. That was a marathon speech.

The Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario—you know them; their head office is in the wonderful riding of Mississauga–Malton. They have repeatedly said, “The voters list in Ontario is plagued by inaccuracies, and despite previous promises of reform, has remained a thorn in the side of elections administrators across the province and a constant source of frustration for voters.”

I would like to ask the member: The proposed changes to the municipal voters list is a response to the request of these municipalities and these organizations. The change will deliver better lists for Ontarians and improve election services. Given that the change is widely supported, what would you like to say to that?

Ms. Catherine Fife: We have no problem whatsoever with this component of the bill. We just don't know why it's in this bill. Do you know what I mean? But it probably deserves some scrutiny.

Municipal managers have been asking for various statutes, including the Municipal Elections Act, to transfer responsibility for preparing and maintaining municipal voters lists. Fine, that's great. But it is not tied to a pandemic. I think that everything that is coming before this House during this time period should be laser-focused on strengthening the health and safety of Ontarians, strengthening our economy and ensuring that our education system is safe.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Waterloo for her very comprehensive and astute analysis of Bill 204. It was interesting to hear her strike an optimistic tone, given what we've seen recently from this government, when she said that it's never too late to do the right thing. She also mentioned how the subsidies from Ottawa are drying up. We saw the CEWS, the CEBA, the CECRA. We take a look and there are so many problems, as the member has pointed out, with these different subsidies.

My question for the member, through you, Speaker, is: Why has the province been sitting on its hands, sitting on the sidelines and ignoring all of the small businesses that have been struggling during COVID-19?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much for the question. This is the question, actually, as to—and I think the Financial Accountability Officer's report highlighted this. So little provincial dollars have gone to the province of Ontario by way of assistance. Why the Premier of this province continues to rely on the federal government to do its job for it—I cannot explain that.

I do want to say, though, that there was this quick analogy of the province of Ontario being the caboose in Justin Trudeau's train. The commentator even said that he messed that up, too.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Members of the opposition have repeatedly called for a rent freeze, and that is exactly what this government has been doing and that it has proposed to do. We're working to provide stability to Ontario's 1.7 million retail renters at a time of uncertainty. This legislation also stops evictions of small businesses and responds to a request from the Chief Electoral Officer.

Could the member explain why these measures—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. To the member from Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much to the member from Richmond Hill for that question. We have called for a rent freeze, but we want a rent freeze that actually works.

When we look at the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario—and they say what's wrong with Bill 204. They say, “One of the major shortcomings of Bill 204 is it allows landlords to apply and collect above-guideline increases (AGIs). An AGI is a rent increase that is more than the permitted annual guideline increase, which the landlord must apply for at the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB).”

The reason why we're so concerned by this is that this disproportionately affects low-income tenants living in apartment towers. It disproportionately affects them around AGI rent increases. This is a loophole. I'm trying to bring that to your attention. If you really do want to listen to us and freeze the rent, then make the loophole not effective.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions.

Mr. Jeff Burch: First of all, I want to thank my colleague from Waterloo and my colleague from Toronto Centre for all the great work they've done in committee. A big part of our job is listening to people, and they've put in countless hours listening to both commercial and residential tenants.

My question is on the commercial evictions ban extension. I know the member from Waterloo has talked a lot about why it's not working, why it's not being transferred to tenants. If you were the minister—and I hope one day you will be—what would you do to incentivize those applications?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I like your optimism.

I would listen to the voices that came before the committee. I would not design a rent relief program that is driven by the landlord. It would be tenant-driven, so if tenants wanted to apply for the money, they could. I would lower the threshold—not have 70% of your revenue need to disappear in order for you to qualify. And I think that we would certainly come to the table, as we proposed, with a grant program to incentivize the pivoting of businesses to adapt to COVID-19. This is something that the government should seriously consider.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank the member from Waterloo for her comments. We certainly sat in the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs together and heard from many, many individuals from small businesses about the support that they need from government. What's really amazing about small businesses is that they don't mince words. They are very clear about the type of support that they need and the help that they need from government. They actually don't want government to do everything for them; they are willing to work hard and they really put everything on the line.

1650

The member from the government side said, "Well, you've called for a rent freeze," and yes, we've called for a rent freeze; the members of the Liberal caucus have called for a rent freeze; I've written to the government calling for a rent freeze. But it was meant to be immediate, not next year sometime down the road, because the interventions need to happen, and they need to happen now. The urgency is right there.

I'm just wondering if the member from Waterloo can talk about why she believes this government is so sluggish in its response to the needs of small businesses.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you for the question. Indeed, we did serve on the committee all summer and, as mentioned, some of those delegations were incredibly emotional, because they were desperate for help.

But to the point that you've made, they weren't asking for handouts; they were asking for an investment. It was very clear. They said, "If you invest in us, we will rally because we want the economy to come back." The downtown BIAs of Ontario said, "Just buy us some time to see us through this." That investment has not been forthcoming. I don't know exactly why that's happening and I think businesses in the province are asking themselves the same thing.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Our government has been working hard from day one to increase housing supply and it has been working—even a few weeks ago, the Minister of Housing had been to Mississauga to announce a new affordable housing project with my colleague from Mississauga–Lakeshore, which is something to be celebrated for all Mississauga residents. We are seeing record highs for new rental starts, applications and completions.

We have a housing supply problem in Ontario. Why can't the opposition admit that our plan is working to create more much-needed housing in our province?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Because it's not working. If it was working, we would support it. There are two things here: (1) We're trying to keep people housed during a pandemic; Bill 204 with the rent freeze may help some people do that; but (2) the investment in housing in partnership with the not-for-profit sector needs to be accelerated. Those are truly affordable housing options. When you think of the people who live on ODSP in this province, they have been

left behind. They need housing that is quality, that is affordable and that is put as a primary economic driver in this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The time for questions has expired.

Therefore, further debate? I recognize the member from Niagara West.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to rise today in the chamber and speak to the legislation that is before the House.

I want to begin, of course, by thanking the good people of Niagara West for sending me to this place to speak on their behalf to the issues that arise before the Legislature. I want to acknowledge the honour that that is to speak to a great deal of different things that have crossed the floor of this Legislature, not just in the past few months but over the past couple of years. We've seen a lot of different pieces come before us as members here in this House and, of course, speaking to those issues, we represent a wide variety of different perspectives and a number of different communities across this province, as a province that encapsulates over 40% of the population of Canada, as an economic driver, as a societal and cultural driver of this country. Ontario is a beautiful province and one that I'm very, very honoured to live in. All of us here are, I'm sure, moved by a great deal of love for our communities and a love for the province as a whole and the people of this province.

So it's an honour to be able to stand this afternoon and speak to a piece of legislation that's been brought forward after a great deal of work by a lot of individuals. I want to acknowledge the sometimes overlooked and under-appreciated staff at the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing who, I know for a fact, have always been very, very eager to provide information about my local community, whether it's about the official plan, any concerns that my local officials might have had with A Place to Grow or particular designations, questions from people about those designations, and, of course, responding very rapidly to me about issues that have crossed the desk.

So I want to just acknowledge the hard work of the sometimes nameless and faceless people behind a lot of the work that goes on in this chamber, because at the end of the day, although I'm going to speak in a couple of minutes about the work that's been done by my colleagues in this House, I also want to acknowledge that work because without that functioning bureaucracy, it would be extremely difficult to be able to bring forward good ideas and to action those good ideas in a way that benefits the people of Ontario.

I know we have all, in our various ministries, worked with our ministry staff exceptionally hard over the last half a year or so to deliver results for the people of our ridings and to ensure that we have a steady hand on the tiller of the good ship Ontario as we make our way through this pandemic. I just want to acknowledge that.

I also want to thank the members who are in this chamber and who have put so much work into this legislation, particularly the member for Stormont–Dundas–

South Glengarry, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, as well as the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore—almost my seat mate, I guess, one seat over—for the work that you’ve both put into this.

I know, going through some of the briefings on this document, the amount of stakeholder engagement that was put into the legislation before the House—technical stakeholder engagements with tenant and landlord groups; associations representing retirement homes; land-lease tenants; operators; municipal service managers; community housing providers, including Indigenous community partners; small business; stakeholders that we’ve been working with throughout this pandemic; and our municipal partners, of course, groups such as the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario, who have for several years been working very closely with us.

But this legislation, also, is a direct result of a lot of that work that I know my colleagues have done—also, seeing that virtually at AMO, when we had the opportunity to meet with many of our municipalities.

I represent five and a half municipalities. I always say St. Catharines is actually the one part of our region, our beautiful region, with 12 municipalities that actually has three MPPs. Not a lot of people know that. But I do represent a good chunk of St. Catharines, the rural, western part of St. Catharines, including the hospital. Of course, my colleague the member for St. Catharines, Jennie Stevens, represents more the urban core, and additionally the south part of St. Catharines goes to the member for Niagara Centre, who is also living, I understand, in that part of that riding and does fantastic work. I want to just thank them for working with me when it comes to issues in St. Catharines.

Of course, as well, the other parts of my riding, the ones that everyone perhaps knows a little bit more about: Wainfleet and Pelham, West Lincoln, Grimsby and Lincoln. I have a very close relationship with the councils and mayors of these municipalities. Being the only government member from the region, I take it as exceptionally important to be in constant communication with mayors across the region, and of course the chair and regional councillors as well. So over the weekend, I did speak with the six mayors from the municipalities that I represent.

The legislation that we have before the chamber today is also a direct result of those types of conversations that I know the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing—and again, kudos to the parliamentary assistants, who I know do an excellent job. I actually had the mayor of Welland just on last Friday, I believe it was, comment on the ease with which mayors are able to speak to members of the government, the level of access and the responsiveness of this government. He was commenting he had never seen such responsiveness, so I just want to mention that. But I especially want to mention the member for Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, whom I had the opportunity to host in Niagara earlier this summer, back in the beginning of August, when we announced

millions of dollars in funding for affordable housing in Niagara, a number of different units, Indigenous units, as well as broader community housing, affordable housing, rent-gear-to-income, done in collaboration with the federal government.

I want to acknowledge his work, because when I look at this legislation today, the Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act, and speak to it at its second reading, this type of legislation doesn’t just come out of a void. It doesn’t come out of the minister sitting there, twiddling his thumbs, thinking, “What should I bring forward to the Legislature today?” No, this comes about as a result of significant collaboration and conversations that have been ongoing for quite some time.

1700

To perhaps illustrate that—and again, I know my colleagues on both sides of the aisles have spent a significant amount of time discussing some of the components of it around the rent freeze portion and additional pieces—I want to spend just a little bit of time talking about two of the pieces that I think are exceptionally important.

One of those is the municipal registry and ensuring that the voters list for municipalities is being unified and being cleaned up by working through Elections Ontario. I know that’s something that has actually been raised in my riding recently. Earlier this week, I heard from someone asking about how that process worked, because they had concerns about the speed with which new addresses were being loaded into the system and then also being passed along to police, fire and ambulance services. This was in connection to concern about, if there were a fire, would they be able to be accessed?

Niagara West, as I’m sure you know, Speaker, has seen an enormous amount of growth across the northern part of the riding, especially over the last several years, and it’s no surprise; it’s a beautiful place, fairly affordable and definitely an area that people are moving into—as I know also my colleagues from other parts of Niagara can testify to, just a significant amount of growth in the Niagara region. But one of the pieces that comes along with that, of course, and a very, very important piece, is the desire of these new citizens to be able to be actively engaged in their local democracy, in their local government, and that’s something we all take for—not for granted, sorry, Speaker. It’s something we should never take for granted, because at the end of the day, so many of the policies that we pass here in this chamber, so many of the funds that are allocated through the provincial taxes, as well as so many of the actions that are initiated through the municipal service managers—so many of those things actually end up rolling through the local municipality.

At the end of the of the day, we need to make sure that those who are campaigning, those who are speaking to voters in those municipalities, also the clerks and treasurers of those municipalities whose job it is to ensure that they run smoothly, that the electoral process runs smoothly, that those are being updated, that those are being held to a high standard, that we can ensure that that information on the registry is accurate. Of course, that’s

something that ensures we can have a fulsome debate, that we could have a fulsome electoral process and allow candidates to have access to the people in the riding and in the wards that they're running to represent.

I have a great deal of local municipal politicians in my riding who have worked exceptionally hard to be able to reach out and speak to those people in their communities. So knowing who the voters are for the clerks and being able to ensure that that is run smoothly by essential bodies such as Elections Ontario, and working with Elections Ontario to make sure that those registries are updated quickly, is something that municipalities have been asking for for quite some time now, as well as, of course, clerks and treasurers.

So I'm glad to see that we're taking action, that we're listening, and I think this government has demonstrated, both the Premier and the minister—and many others—that the important relationship we emphasize with our municipal partners bears fruit when we see people at the local level having that local decision-making capacity.

Of course, the very first motion that I brought before this chamber was with regard to municipal approvals for significant projects, such as industrial wind turbines; in my riding of Niagara West, there is a significant amount. I'm sure other members in this chamber can speak to some of the consternation that that caused when those went forward. I know you, Speaker, perhaps uniquely, can also speak to that reality. I know the big piece there is not necessarily the commentary on renewable energies but the commentary on the importance of local buy-in and local consideration and local approvals for these types of massive projects which are put in place.

We saw the former Liberal government ram these projects down the throats of municipalities across rural Ontario, and perhaps not coincidentally—although I guess we'll never know—I think they intentionally put them in many PC ridings, where they didn't have to worry about people being vocal or being engaged. I know that was a fight you, Speaker, and many others in opposition brought forward, and our government has taken action to address many of those grievances because—again, going back to the legislation—we recognize the importance of that local buy-in. We recognize the importance of having local communities that are engaged, that can participate. Key to that is, of course, the voters roll. Without that voters roll, without that registry, we can't see people who are able to show up and vote. If their names are not on that registry, they might not know about the electoral probabilities before them when it comes to the candidates who are running in their local area or in their ward. So I think that's just a testimony to the ability of the minister and others to listen, and I want to commend them on that.

The other piece that I want to talk about, of course, is the extraordinary cost of operating small businesses during the pandemic and some of the actions that this legislation continues. This proposed legislation will help commercial tenants as well as residential tenants, and it will help our municipal partners. One of the ways it does that is by extending the temporary ban that was put in place on many

commercial evictions from June 17 to August 31 of this year. At that time, it was a necessary step. Small businesses form the backbone of our communities, and we wanted to ensure that this extended ban is helping give them more time to recover from the impacts of COVID-19.

Speaker, we know that when small businesses suffer, the economy as a whole suffers and families suffer. Coming from a large family—and I have an extended, extended family. My father is a small business owner, as a farmer. My father-in-law is a small business owner. Many of my siblings are small business owners. The reality is, small business owners take a great deal of risks. Although many of the ones in my particular family don't have rental facilities—they live in the country and have country properties and are using those—many, many of the people I have heard from in this pandemic, and especially those small business owners who are renting spaces in some of the commercial lots in the ridings—for example, in Grimsby and in Beamsville—have a great deal of concern about the impacts.

I personally know people who have gone out of business—people who took huge risks at the beginning of this year, who tapped into their RRSPs, who tapped into their life savings to be able to start a venture and to be able to invest in their community and provide a better life for themselves and their families, to hire people, to bring jobs and to provide important services.

So I'm very glad that the government has stepped forward with a ban on these evictions, because I think we've seen the damage already that it caused earlier in the year. I'm grateful that Minister Clark has heard some of those concerns.

One of the pieces there, too, is that when it comes to small businesses—and I do want to acknowledge the collaboration of the federal government in this regard. I do want to acknowledge that they came to the table when our minister and our Premier went to Ottawa and advocated for these funds. They did step up. But still, the attitude that the Liberal government has, federally, calling small business owners tax cheats and trying to change the structures around taxation so that people like my brother, who hopes to take over the family farm, are going to get dinged extremely hard because of the reality that they have thrown these rules out without proper consideration—calling small business owners tax cheats is so demoralizing, when we see the amount of jobs that are created by SMEs in Ontario and across Canada. I think it's extremely unhelpful.

But with that, I do want to acknowledge that this program that has been brought forward through the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance—Ontario committed up to \$241.2 million as its share of this federal-provincial program, working in tandem with the commercial eviction ban. I recognize that this hasn't worked for everyone. I think we've all heard from people in our constituencies that it hasn't been a cure-all. Frankly, it would be extremely difficult to come up with a solution that would be a cure-all, when we see the amount of

concerns that there are out there when it comes to funding rental obligations, and we recognize that.

But again, Ontarian taxpayers have stepped up to the plate with almost a quarter of a million dollars in support in this federal-provincial program. That's because we believe that small businesses should not be alone in taking on the financial costs of the COVID-19 outbreak. The reality is, the government was the one that put in place particular measures to protect the health and safety of people across Ontario, and the government also should be bearing some of the costs and recognizing that we have to make sure that we always do so in a responsible manner and are able to take that into consideration.

1710

Under that program as well, of course, in turn we expect that commercial tenants will still pay rent, but their financial burden is greatly reduced, down to just 25% of what they would normally pay. Ensuring that our small businesses, our friends and our neighbours, places like Iggy's in Fonthill, places like Teddy's in Grimsby, the dry cleaner in Beamsville—we need to ensure they're able to stay open and that we can recognize how much they contribute to our neighbourhoods' unique character and how much they support local jobs. It's worth the investment, Speaker, and that's why I'm very proud to be able to speak to this legislation.

We're also proposing to extend the moratoriums. The federal government had been ready to end the program at the end of August, and yet they did step forward again in September, sort of at the eleventh hour, and they announced their decision to extend the program for the month of September as well. The amendments that we are proposing mirror those that we implemented in June through the Protecting Small Business Act, and these are extending the changes to align with the CECRA for small business.

This is a temporary measure. It extends the ban on commercial evictions and gives small businesses a longer runway to return to normal, to create jobs and to help rebuild the economy, but we must be under no illusion, Speaker. Ultimately, the government can't save everyone. The government isn't going to be able to give everyone jobs. The government isn't going to be able to fix all the problems in our society. We need to see partners.

We've seen small businesses and small community organizations, whether that's food banks or community groups, whether it's the Lions over the weekend holding a food drive—these are the types of organizations that we need to continue working with. As we're speaking about all these types of issues that are coming forward, I believe very much in the ability of our government to work with partners and create solutions and find ways that we can work together. But I also recognize that we, as a government, can't be—and neither can the federal government, even though the throne speech seems to think that they can be—a knight on a white horse coming in and thinking we can solve all the problems on our own. The reality is, it takes collaboration. It takes partnership. It takes teamwork. It takes neighbours, friends and family coming together to create solutions in their local community.

I've seen so much of that Ontario spirit in my riding, whether it's Dillon's distillery donating thousands of litres of hand sanitizer, whether it's the Ontario Together Fund coming to support protective equipment manufacturing in my riding at Clean Works, whether it's seeing groups that do things behind the scenes. I think of the firefighters in West Lincoln, the volunteer firefighters who are going and dropping off meals.

In conclusion, I want to acknowledge that this legislation before the House today is a result of collaboration and it's a result of teamwork. I want to encourage and thank the people in my riding of Niagara West for that work and thank the people of Ontario for their work and also thank the minister, because we can't do it alone, but he's shown that we can be a partner with that multitude of what I call intermediary institutions between the state and the individual who together work to create a strong and healthy society.

With that in mind, I would end my remarks and pass the floor on to those who would ask questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: The member for Niagara West talked about the importance of small business and how they're job creators—and truly they are—in our neighbourhoods. We really feel that they're the nuts and bolts that keep neighbourhoods together and communities solid, because they do create jobs and they're there for the long haul. They're not going to pick up their big corporation, big box stores, and move to the States and pay people less money etc.

In London just this afternoon, at 2 o'clock, our local business owners got together and they held a news conference. And really, London business owners have been exemplary and the small business owners have been exemplary in doing their part during this pandemic and trying to stay open and continually provide service. On the heels of the second wave of the pandemic, many of us are wondering what the colder months will bring as people go inside. Patios are not going to be open in the wintertime.

My question is, how does the government see supporting small businesses further? Would they consider the grants, not loans, proposal that was made at committee and also longer times to paying back debt, as well as a freeze on utility payments? Is that something the government would consider under this bill?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My thanks to the member for London—Fanshawe for her advocacy. As we could hear just now listening to her constituents very rapidly bringing their concerns to the House, I want to thank her for that.

I know one of the key pieces when it comes to supporting our local small businesses has been the increasing digitization of accessing the consumer base. We know, especially as we're heading into the second wave and making sure that we're working together to curb that, programs such as Digital Main Street, which the province worked together with the federal government to ensure that we're granting digital access to so many of these small businesses, to ensure that they have the support they needed.

I know the Premier has talked about this, but we need to ensure that our responses here in this Legislature are in fact a living plan. I know we're going to be seeing more and more responses from the government as the situation progresses, because we also know, at the end of the day, whether or not it's these actions taken—rent relief, commercial eviction bans—that's not the end of the story. There are going to be consequences to this pandemic for many years, and we need to work together to find solutions in the long term. So I want to thank the member for her question.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's great to hear the member from Niagara West talk about the issues in his riding and the comments from the mayors that they're very happy with the access that they have to this government, because I think I've heard that message at our AMO meetings right across the province.

There's no question that COVID-19 has affected all people in Ontario, or just about all people—especially when renters make up such a large percentage of our population and we need to protect them, and I think this bill looks at doing this rent freeze for next year.

Talking to the above-guideline increases, they had to be approved before and in agreement with the tenants for major capital.

I just wanted to hear if the member can talk about some of the issues with the renters in his riding and just some of the benefits they see in this.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you. It's always a pleasure to hear from the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. Again, I know he spent a great deal of time working with the minister and the team, as well as the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore on this legislation.

I know that this legislation is just one of a suite of actions that the government has taken in order to ensure that tenants are being assisted, and part of that is that at the onset of COVID-19, the government did introduce the social services relief fund, about which I heard a great deal from my community, which injected much-needed funding into our communities.

The social services relief fund was a \$510-million investment to our Indigenous and municipal partners and it helped to provide relief to our most vulnerable. This funding had been used across Ontario. It was used to expand shelter networks, for example, purchase PPE and create and top up also things such as rent banks and utility banks. This is, of course, to ensure that tenants can stay in their home. Assistance with things like hydro, assistance with things like rent: These are important measures to make sure that people have a roof over their head, which we know is one of the leading social determinants of health. I know that's because of the work of the people at the ministry.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to thank the member from Niagara West. I want to introduce him to Pete

Rodley. Pete Rodley is from Espanola, and he owns Homestyle Foods—26 years in business. I called him just as we're having this debate, and I told him, "Hey, listen, we're talking about the Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act." He says, "Mike, you have my attention." I explained to him what was contained within the bill, and he says, "Okay. You've lost my attention now. This is not going to help me."

He asked about some of the initial steps that we had talked about in early April and May in regard to part of our plan that we had put in regarding the Save Main Street plan. He says, "The rent subsidies would be good. The utilities freeze would be good, not only for business but also for me at home." I said, "I'm sorry, there's none of that in there."

He says, "How about anything in regard to supporting municipalities to support their local businesses through marketing plans, through incentive plans?" I said, "No, there's nothing in here about that."

He says, "Listen, for me to market myself, there's the street permit of about \$175 just to put up a sign on the side of the street. We need help. We've cut as far as we could. I'm only absorbing probably 60% of what my regular business is. I've tightened my belt. I have nothing else to tighten. Mike, I need help. Where is that help?"

1720

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I want to thank the member for his question and for proactively engaging with his constituents and bringing those points to the House.

I think what you've actually done is open a broader conversation where there are a lot of other pieces that come to the front here. We look at things such as removing time-of-use on electricity rates, changing the tax exemptions for the employer portion of the health tax, ensuring that we're also providing supports for businesses that have to rebate provincial taxes and ensuring that that's being held off. That's of course in addition to the CEAP plan, which is ensuring that businesses that do need assistance can access that assistance when it comes to hydro support and, again, providing support to our municipalities and intermediary organizations also through grants such as the Digital Main Street to make sure that he's able to access that type of marketing.

You know, marketing is a key piece. In Niagara, typically, we have a very vibrant tourism sector: 14 million people, typically. I think we're going to maybe hit six million this year—I highly doubt it—mostly in-province, instead of out-of-province, which is normally over half. So I understand the need for that tourism or that destination support. That's why I know the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport brought forward \$13 million in destination funding to assist with bringing people to communities like yours and supporting local businesses like your constituent's.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you very much to our member from Niagara West. This bill, this Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act is really great news. It means a lot

to my riding, in Richmond Hill. I know a lot of our people in Richmond Hill have been struggling to pay rent and they will welcome this legislation.

The move to freeze rent in 2021 is a positive step to protect the 1.7 million Ontarians. Can the member continue to give us a little bit more information about what this government has been doing to support renters during COVID-19?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I want to also acknowledge the work of the member for Richmond Hill in speaking for her constituents and the amount of advocacy that she has brought forward: exceptionally detailed, well researched, has an incredible understanding of the needs of her constituency. So I know she speaks from the heart when she speaks about the value that this brings to her community.

I want to acknowledge also your advocacy in that regard. I'm sure that, as the members and the parliamentary assistants and the ministers could speak to, your contributions helped inform this.

I think one of the big pieces, aside from the rent freeze that has been brought in in this legislation, is understanding that fundamentally, a market is about supply and demand, and we need to ensure that we're seeing new housing come into place in order to be able to bring down the rent. We're seeing rent here in Toronto, for example, decline substantially as a result of people moving into areas like Niagara, people moving outside of the downtown core. What we've seen is a historic level of new housing starts, including new rental stock, come onto the market to ensure that renters have choice, that renters have options and that they're able to get affordable housing when and where they need it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): There's not enough time for further questions, but it's also time for further debate. I will recognize the member from Toronto Centre.

Ms. Suze Morrison: It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to government Bill 204. While I certainly welcome the measures in this bill, I have to say that this bill aims low; it falls far short of what Ontarians, and particularly renters and small businesses in Ontario, really need right now.

For months, my NDP colleagues and I have been trying to raise the alarm bells in this House about tenants who are at risk of losing their housing, and these tenants are at risk through no fault of their own and in the midst of an unprecedented global pandemic.

We've also raised over and over and over again the devastating effects this pandemic has had on the small business community, small businesses who were ordered to shut their doors and then left out in the cold by this government with no real supports to help them weather this storm. Instead, this government has been penny-pinching and shortchanging their response to this pandemic and leaving billions of dollars unspent, unallocated on the table in the process. That's \$6.7 billion of unspent money, to be precise, according to the recently released report from the Financial Accountability Office. What that

means is that Ontarians aren't getting the financial help from this government that they expect and that they need.

While I share with this House that I plan to support this bill, I have to say that people deserve so much better than the bare minimum offering that this bill represents from this government.

I want to focus my remarks today on two sections of the bill. I'm going to speak first about the rent freeze measures for residential tenants, and then I'll speak a little bit about the commercial eviction ban as well.

So I want to start with the rent freeze. I have to say that for the last six months, this bill represents the first bare minimum step that we've seen from this government to ease the burden that tenants are facing and have faced since the beginning of COVID-19. Yes, this bill offers a one-year freeze on rent increases, but it does not ban COVID-related residential evictions, it does not address the dangerous measures put in places through Bill 184 and it doesn't protect tenants from bad actors in the system who will continue to illegally raise rents and will continue to practise illegal evictions.

What we really need from this government is a ban on residential evictions, and one that will actually be enforced. Eviction notices and orders continue to be issued by the Landlord and Tenant Board as we speak. And for tenants who will have fallen behind on their rent after losing their income as a result of COVID-19—again, through no fault of their own—a rent freeze is little comfort for those tenants who are packing their lives into boxes, preparing for their pending evictions, some of them into homelessness.

I recently heard from the Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations about this bill, and they said, "We've got about 400K people a month facing eviction. During a pandemic. The rent freeze is very minor compared to this."

We heard from ACTO, which is the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario, and they're worried that, again, we "cannot simply freeze rents and hope that the private sector will support tenants living on lower incomes. We need investments in social and non-profit housing. Without a significant increase in the supply of social housing, renters in Ontario will remain at the mercy of their profit-seeking landlords."

This bill also does nothing to address the dangerous measures implemented by this government through Bill 184 over the summer months. Bill 184, which was rammed through this House in the midst of a pandemic, made it easier for landlords to quickly evict tenants and gave landlords a get-out-of-jail-free card for collecting illegal rents. So the minister stood in this House this morning to pat himself on the back for the one-year rent freeze in this bill, but just months ago, he stood in this House and passed a bill that says if a tenant unknowingly pays an illegal rent increase for one year, it becomes permanent and legal rent with absolutely no consequence for that landlord who acted in bad faith, and illegally.

So if you're freezing rents with this bill, how is it enforceable? What happens when a tenant unknowingly pays a rent increase this year and the landlord gets away

with it, and in a year that's legal rent anyway? You've legalized illegal rent collection with Bill 184.

So if you're freezing rents this year, Minister, what is your plan to actually enforce it? What is your plan to deter the bad actors in the system from raising the rents on tenants that don't know about this change? What is your plan to communicate this rent freeze to every single tenant in this province so that they actually know their rights? What resources are you putting into legal aid so that tenants can defend themselves? But you're not putting resources into legal aid, and in fact, last year, you cut the legal aid system by over 30%, and you've spent the last two years systematically gutting legal aid and tenants' rights in the province.

I heard from Alexander, a tenant in my riding, who recently experienced the disastrous potential side effects of this very bill. Last month, after the rent freeze measure was announced—just announced in the newspaper, before Bill 204 was even tabled—Alexander's landlord tried to illegally increase his rent above the guideline without making an application to the Landlord and Tenant Board. When Alexander raised the concerns about the dramatic rent increase, his landlord actually told him that the increase was to make up for next year's rent freeze.

So while Alexander knew that what his landlord was doing was illegal, many tenants don't. They don't know their rights. They don't have access to education. If they have poor English, they can't read the news in the newspaper. They don't know about this change. They could be susceptible to illegal rent increases, and it's crucial that we do more to protect tenants from profit-seeking landlords who are willing to illegally hike up rents and evict tenants, again, through no fault of their own and in a pandemic. If Alexander hadn't reached out to my office to learn about his rights and had paid that illegal rent increase for a full year, his landlord, under Bill 184, which this Conservative government passed over the summer months, would be legally entitled to keep that illegally obtained rent.

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Speaker, what good is a rent freeze if landlords know they can break the rules without any consequences? There is zero accountability from this government in our system. Bill 184 took away a tenant's right to get back illegally collected rents that they've unknowingly paid. How does the minister and any member of this government bench reconcile that with what you've proposed in this bill? What good is a rent freeze if there's no enforcement and no accountability?

This bill also does not address the issue of vacancy decontrol, which is the real culprit behind skyrocketing rents and illegal evictions in Ontario. Vacancy decontrol means that when a tenancy turns over, I move out of my apartment, the next tenant moves in, and the landlord can charge whatever they want to the new tenant. There's no expectation that the rent stays the same between tenancies. There's no restriction. The sky is the limit for what the landlord can charge when a tenant turns over.

We have large corporate landlords in our system who are looking to maximize their profits and will actually be further incentivized by this bill to illegally evict their tenants. If they can successfully kick out a long-term tenant who is in a rent-controlled unit, they can charge whatever they would like.

Again, what good is a rent freeze if it doesn't come with enforcement and protection against illegal evictions and real rent control, including rent control between vacancies?

This bill also specifically excludes the rent freeze from applying to the notoriously over-abused practice of above-guideline rent increases. These increases will continue this year despite the freeze, and tenants simply can't afford them.

Speaker, I heard from the local legal aid clinic in my riding, Neighbourhood Legal Services. They have raised concerns that, "The biggest omission on the face of the bill is that it exempts above-guideline rent increases or AGIs for capital repairs—the main reason for AGIs, which leads to the highest rent increases."

The Park Vista Tenants' Association from Beaches—East York recently wrote to me. They shared an example of a huge corporate landlord, one with record-breaking profits, which has been off-loading repair costs to tenants during the COVID-19 pandemic. On July 9 of this year, their landlord, CAPREIT, applied for an above-guideline rent increase on their tenants of 4.7%. That's effective this upcoming October 1. And this is despite the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. CAPREIT has somehow, in the last year, managed to rake in more money than they did in the same first quarter of 2019.

This is the second above-guideline rent increase that CAPREIT has applied for at 2 Park Vista since 2015. The first one resulted in three years of extra increases on top of the annual guideline amount. As a result of that, the average increase of the 121 units at 2 Park Vista was 28% in the five years between 2015 and 2020. Twenty-three of those units had increases of more than 50% in that same five-year period, and the highest increase was a whopping 94%. Speaker, I don't know about you, but I don't know a single tenant in a pandemic who can afford a 94% rent increase over a five-year period. That's actually insane. This is all happening in a building that should be theoretically protected by rent control.

The tenants' association warned us that if Ontario's 2021 rent freeze does not prevent above-guideline rent increases, it will be a huge loophole for landlords to exploit. If CAPREIT had been required instead to set aside 10% of the operating revenue that they collect for capital repairs, that would have resulted in access to more than \$78 million in funding for capital repairs in 2019 alone. This is big business money in these large, corporate buildings. Instead of paying for their own repairs with their record-breaking profits, they're downloading this cost on to the tenants, and this Conservative government has absolutely no problem with that. The amount of money that setting aside 10% of their revenues would have allowed them—the amount of repairs they could do for

that \$78 million—would have been enough to cover more than the capital repair backlog in 140 of their buildings, similar to 2 Park Vista.

CAPREIT is turning around and actually boasting to their investors about the high percentage of rents and the low level of leniency that they're offering their tenants. It is shameless profiteering during a pandemic, and this provincial government is doing nothing to stop it. You are expressly allowing the AGI loophole to continue in this rent freeze.

A senior in my riding reached out to my office because he has been experiencing stacked AGIs, one on top of the other, year after year. Over the last 10 years, he's now up to a 30% increase on his rent on his downtown Toronto apartment. Almost every year, like clockwork, on top of the regular annual increase, his landlord applies for an above-the-guideline rent increase at the Landlord and Tenant Board. And while his landlord hasn't been successful every single time, the board has allowed the rent to increase well above the guideline. This is a senior on a fixed income who is now paying 75% of his income on rent, and he has to now rely on local food programs for seniors just to get by. He's lived in his unit for 12 years. This is his home. He can't afford to move anywhere else. And tenants, like seniors, will continue to be pushed out of their homes even with this rent freeze.

You aren't addressing the upstream issues that you—alongside 15 years of the Liberals, let's not forget—that have allowed our housing crisis to become what it is. A one-year rent freeze isn't going to undo 15 years of neglect and damage to our housing systems.

Today I'm calling on this government: You need to be doing so much more. This bill is the absolute bare minimum threshold you could possibly be doing to help tenants and to help communities.

Speaker, I want to speak a little bit in my remaining time about the commercial eviction ban. I have to say this also falls short of what businesses in my riding need to stay afloat. Since the very beginning of this pandemic, when businesses were required to close for public safety reasons, they have been begging this government for help. In my riding, where commercial rents are some of the highest in the country, our local businesses are struggling. Many have gone months without any revenue whatsoever while still incurring tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars in fixed costs. Now, as they begin to reopen, business isn't what it used to be. Small operations shouldn't have to choose between closing up shop entirely or sinking into a deep debt that they will never, ever climb out of.

It's been six months since the beginning of the pandemic, and these businesses are still fighting to keep their heads above water. They need a lifeline from this government to help pay their staff, keep the lights on and cover their rent. But instead of taking action to address their concerns, the provincial government has ignored their calls for help.

This weak commercial eviction ban in this bill doesn't go far enough. It's too little, too late for so many businesses. As my colleague from Waterloo stated earlier,

many of the businesses in her community have started to close, and we're seeing the same thing in downtown Toronto as well.

I spoke to a business owner, Ahmed from Regent Park, recently. Ahmed owns a small international money transfer business. In the spring he caught COVID-19 and spent two months in the hospital. The pandemic has been incredibly difficult for Ahmed and his family. His brother, who lived in the UK, passed away from COVID-19 this past spring, so it's an incredibly challenging time for their family. But because Ahmed had to close his business for several months without warning while he was in the hospital, he has struggled to bring back customers that had to switch providers in his absence. His business has slowed down, and he's struggling. Ahmed was able to pay his rent out of his savings until this month, but now he's out of money. His landlord is calling him for the rent and he refuses to apply for the federal rent subsidy program.

Even with an eviction ban, Ahmed worries about how he's going to make up for the lost revenue and pay the rent in the months ahead. An eviction ban alone isn't going to help businesses like Ahmed's. Ahmed and other business owners in my riding need more support from this government to stay in business.

This spring I actually held a town hall with community leaders from the Church and Wellesley Village as well. I know I've spoken in this House a number of times about the issues that we're seeing with small businesses in the Village. I've said it before and I'll say it again: The Village is more than a collection of shops and stores. It's a cultural main street. It's a safe haven for the 2SLGBTQ+ communities. The queer and trans-owned businesses there are in deep need of help from this government, and they're not seeing it.

Even before the pandemic started, our local businesses were being pushed out of our community by skyrocketing rents and condo developments. This was causing many of our beloved businesses to close their doors. Crews and Tangos is currently under threat of eviction to make way for a new condo development. Club 120 recently closed their doors, and I'm deeply concerned about many of the businesses on Church Street who likely will not survive a second shutdown.

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And it's not just the businesses we're at risk of losing there, but the livelihoods of predominantly queer and trans artists and gig workers and tip workers and sex workers. We know the risk of losing the very culture of our cultural main streets. It's not just businesses. What happens to these culturally significant communities when all of the businesses board up their shops? Where do those communities go?

Many of these businesses are more than just bars and restaurants and shops; they're places where people can be themselves. They're gathering places to build community. In the Church and Wellesley Village, many have deep roots and deep histories in queer and trans organizing and protests that we can't forget. It's vital that we protect communities like the Church and Wellesley Village.

The commercial eviction ban in this bill doesn't fix any of that. It's a temporary stopgap that you're only pushing out until, what, the end of October? It doesn't solve the problem of a small business that's staring down \$100,000 in back rent. They're not any more able to pay \$100,000 in back rent at the end of October than they are today. It also doesn't address the constant displacement that we're seeing in our community by predatory development, or to ensure the security of the small businesses in our communities.

Speaker, what we need from this government is real and significant action. We need investments, we need relief for tenants, and we need relief for small businesses. Our NDP team has been in this Legislature fighting for months for residential rent subsidies. We've proposed a subsidy of 80% of a household's rent, up to \$2,500 a month, for families that have been impacted by COVID-19.

We've also called for a ban on residential evictions—again, something that's missing from this bill. No one should be kicked out of their home as a direct result of this pandemic. It's appalling that this government has actually reopened the Landlord and Tenant Board this past August and are allowing evictions to proceed even now as we speak. As we enter a second wave of COVID-19, it's absolutely vital to the health and safety of our communities that folks are able to stay in their homes. Now more than ever, we need to keep people housed if we're going to get through this together.

Speaker, we've also been fighting for small businesses. As a part of the NDP's Save Main Street plan, we've been calling on this Conservative government for six months of commercial rent subsidies. These subsidies are solutions that will work for both tenants and landlords. Tenants will be able to pay their rent. Landlords will get the rent paid. It's a win-win. There's literally no one that loses in this scenario. We've also proposed things like a utility payment freeze, a remote-work set-up fund and a designated emergency fund for businesses that have faced historic barriers in accessing capital, which was recommended by the Canadian Black Chamber of Commerce.

We need action from this government: commercial rent subsidies, residential rent subsidies and, quite frankly, we need you to walk back Bill 184. That was an absolutely disastrous attack on tenants' rights and a shameful, shameful move by this government, to pass an eviction bill in the middle of a pandemic. We need this government to invest in solutions that will truly help Ontarians recover from this pandemic and help our communities thrive.

Again, I'd like to just quickly close by saying that I will be supporting this bill, but I'm calling on the Premier and on the minister today to do better. Bring back a bill that will really make a difference, and let's get to work helping our communities get through this crisis together. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Mr. Jim McDonnell: It's interesting to hear the member opposite from Toronto Centre talking about the bill before us. She has asked for commercial rent subsidies, and of course, this program we've put in place really looks at the

landlords being given 75% of the commercial rent, and of course the tenants are getting 75% relief. That's a pretty good deal. We've heard that some of the commercial landlords weren't interested, so this eviction bill was put out. It matches the federal grant program and really encourages the commercial landlords to accept this by putting these eviction notices in and—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Question?

Mr. Jim McDonnell: So I'm just wanting to ask the member opposite what is wrong with the plan here that gives 75% relief to both sides. What are they looking for?

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you to the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry for the question, and, in answer, what's wrong with the federal rent relief program? Landlords aren't opting into it. No one is taking advantage of it, and it is made entirely optional for the landlords. In my riding, I can only think of a handful of businesses that have been able to access that program. It is absolutely useless. They might as well not have bothered at all.

I can tell you that in the early weeks of this pandemic when that program was announced, my time was spent exclusively on the phone with commercial landlords, trying to shame them and begging them into opting into that program, listening to them refuse so they could still post profits to their shareholders because our landlords in downtown Toronto aren't small mom-and-pop ventures. These are large international real estate holding and development groups, and there is no space for compassion in the landlords I have had to deal with in downtown Toronto. Rent relief should never have been optional based on the commercial landlords opting in. That was the failing of that program.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to start by thanking the member for Waterloo and also the member from Toronto Centre for their really hard work on this bill on behalf of their communities and, particularly, of course, on tenant issues and small business issues. I want to just focus in, if I may, and ask the member for Toronto Centre if she could talk a little bit about this bill and why it fails to address renovations, because in my community, that's really a very significant issue.

I think, for example, of the tenants at 394 Dovercourt, who are trying so desperately not to be evicted from their homes, and the way that landlords do it is through these above-guideline increases, through vacancy decontrol, and it's resulting in these massive renovations of people who have no other options, no other affordable housing options in Toronto. I wonder if the member would care to comment a little bit more on how this bill falls short.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you so much to my colleague from Davenport for the question. You've really hit the nail on the head. The problem here is that when rent control is done piecemeal, when we have just for this one year a one-year rent freeze, but you haven't addressed the uproot issue of vacancy decontrol in rental, it creates a flawed system that incentivizes landlords to force out

long-term tenants because that is the best opportunity they have to jack up the rents as high as they possibly can.

You have absolutely nothing in this bill to address vacancy decontrol and the perverse incentive in our housing system to force out long-paying tenants from rent-controlled units, and the way that's done is through abuses of things like above-guideline increases, through renovations, through illegal evictions, forcing tenants out. As I said earlier in my remarks, there is no plan for enforcement or accountability of this rent freeze to actually protect tenants from these bad actors in the system.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Jim McDonell: Our government has been taking decisive action to help tenants while balancing the interests of everyone in Ontario's rental market. We've invested \$510 million into our communities as a direct response to COVID-19 to build innovative housing solutions for the long term. At every step along the way, the opposition has opposed the measures. Why do the members opposite continue to oppose measures that will help tenants, including significant investments in affordable housing and ensuring tenants don't see a rent increase in 2021?

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you again to the member for the question. I'm here to tell you, we're not opposing the measures in this bill. We're telling you that you've missed the mark on putting anything of substance in it that's actually going to work. You're doing the bare minimum threshold.

Sure, a few million dollars for one program over here or over there—no one's knocking that and saying that's a bad idea, but how about the \$2-billion capital repair backlog in community housing? How about funding for the 15-year wait-list for community housing? How about the fact that the average price of rent in my riding is higher than the CERB amount?

You've got a system that's completely out of whack here. You're not making the investments that you need and, quite frankly, the backlog in investments that we've seen falls on the shoulders of the Liberals—15 years of Liberal mismanagement and neglect in our community housing sector has led us to have a \$2-billion repair backlog in community housing, and it's shameful. We're not opposed to your measures. I said I would support the bill, but you need to do more. You need to step up your game, and, like I said, rent subsidies are a great way to start.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Jeff Burch: As I mentioned before, I'd like to thank the member from Toronto Centre for all the time she spent. I got to spend a little time with her listening to Zoom presentations. Of course, it's really important.

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I want to ask her—she mentioned she's been crusading for a ban on residential evictions and a rent freeze, and she also brought up the prospect of hundreds of thousands of people a month facing evictions. We understand the

ethical and moral issues, but just the economics of it, what are the experts saying to her—there are obviously costs to banning residential evictions and to the rent freeze—about the cost of hundreds of thousands of people every month being evicted?

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you so much for the question. Honestly, my answer is that we can't afford not to address the homelessness and housing crisis that we're in and that we are about to see get exponentially worse. There's an outrageous cost to homelessness through impact on our social services systems, but also in terms of our public health response. How are we supposed to manage the outbreak of this pandemic if people aren't able to isolate in their homes?

As we see our cases going up through the roof, as we see the testing lineups—here at Women's College Hospital, it's around the block. As we heard from the member from Waterloo, folks are getting turned away by 7 o'clock in the morning who have been in line since 3 o'clock in the morning trying to get their tests in. We're seeing a very dangerous trend right now in terms of our numbers. As we look at a potential second wave here, how are we going to protect our communities and what is the public health cost going to be when people are displaced from their homes and pushed out onto the streets? We can't afford not to act.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I listened to some of the points that the member opposite is making. Testing: We're doing over half of the testing in this country. We're the highest per capita by far. We've ramped up that high, and we're taking steps to go higher, no question. But what do you expect from this government? We've gone from not having a requirement to test to being the highest in the country.

We've taken over a government that, frankly, didn't spend money on social housing for years. This year alone we put in \$520 million. She talks about a few dollars here and there—\$520 million to the service managers to help with rent and social housing. So we've taken some steps. Social housing—we've invested in many projects.

So I'm thinking, we haven't seen the support from this member when we've issued these programs. What are you expecting from this government that's spending a record amount of money, higher than any government has in history in Ontario?

Ms. Suze Morrison: The answer to the question is—what do I expect from this government?—I clearly have to honestly say that I don't expect a whole lot. You have spent the last two years setting the bar so low, I think I trip on it every morning walking into this building. I expect nothing, but I demand more. And you lived up to your low expectations in this bill.

Again, you have set the bar so low, we trip on it walking into the building. A one-year rent freeze isn't going to address the fact that tenants are at risk of homelessness. We need a residential eviction ban. We need residential rent subsidies to keep people housed. Like I said, your

investments into community and social housing are far short of what we—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Earlier today and throughout the day, we've heard the government, through the Minister of Municipal Affairs and his parliamentary assistants, try to sell Bill 204 as a porterhouse steak, and I think we can all agree it's closer to a baloney sandwich. It might get you through the day, but it's not going to give you that *je ne sais quoi* of relief and satisfaction.

The reality is that COVID cases in Ontario are on the rise, and they've been on the rise for several weeks. The government is taking no action. We're on the brink of a second wave and tenants, small business owners and small landlords are all worried about what might come next. In the spring, small business owners were begging for support, and while the government lollygagged, entrepreneurs went out of business and were evicted. Those businesses aren't likely to open up ever again.

Of course, we support the extension of the commercial rent eviction ban, but for this government to think that an extension to October 30—to think that the COVID crisis will be over by Halloween, Mr. Speaker, is nothing short of laughable.

Small business owners need more than a short-term eviction prohibition. They need a rent support program that will actually work. Small business owners need a comprehensive package to help them get through and recover from this first wave, but also to survive the second.

That's why we've proposed a three-month provincial sales tax holiday, to encourage spending at small businesses by exempting the provincial portion of the HST for up to three months. This would encourage customers to come back to our small businesses and give them a competitive advantage. It would help jump-start the economy. It would help open Ontario for business, Mr. Speaker. And of course, on this, the government has taken no action.

We've proposed waiving the collection of payroll premiums, and we proposed ensuring that Ontario small businesses have access to PPE for little or no cost by coordinating purchasing. Of course, Mr. Speaker, the government on these items has taken no action either. Even on the verge of a second wave, the government is failing to ensure that small businesses can access PPE at a reasonable price.

And it's not just small business owners that the government has failed. Renters and small landlords have really been hit hard by COVID these last number of months because of government inaction. When the government instituted the eviction freeze for renters, it looked like they might finally get it: They might finally understand what the problem is. But, unfortunately, it

turns out that they just added a delay to the inevitability of the policies the government has chosen to implement. Instead of offering a rent support program to tenants, a program that would help tenants unable to pay their rent as a result of lost work during COVID, they decided to take no action. This, of course, would have also helped small landlords.

The government lauded Bill 184 as a means to improve the efficiency of the LTB and to help small landlords manage the process. What they've done is, they made it easier for large, corporate landlords, for real estate income trusts, to evict tenants. Their changes have simply built up a tsunami of evictions that is going to swamp the LTB, that already is swamping the LTB, and threatens to push those hardest hit by COVID-19 into homelessness.

They didn't help tenants stay in their homes, their efforts haven't helped young people find a place to rent at a reasonable price, and they haven't helped small landlords cover their mortgages or operating costs because of delays in payments as a result of COVID-19.

I remember during the debate of Bill 184, the member from Mississauga–Malton told us a very compelling story about a resident of his, a gentleman named Raj. He described Raj as an independent, small landlord. I'm going to quote from Hansard, Mr. Speaker: "Raj in my riding, after his retirement, got some money. He invested that money into a condominium near Square One. During COVID-19, he got a tenant, but the tenant is not paying the rent. Raj is always worried. He calls me and calls me and says, 'I still have to pay the mortgage. What should I do? I invested my savings into it and I am at a loss right now.'"

Well, Mr. Speaker, the government has done nothing to help Raj, the small business owner from Mississauga, because they haven't helped tenants. A rent support program to tenants would have directly helped small landlords like Raj and all those other small, independent, family-owned businesses who chose to invest in real estate instead of investing in the stock market. And of course, it would have helped tenants avoid being evicted from their homes. But instead of doing that, the government has decided to take no action—so little action, Mr. Speaker, that it's only three cents on the dollar for all of COVID-19 supports.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. To the member from Orléans, when this bill is debated again in the Legislature, you will have an opportunity to complete your debate and to answer questions from the floor.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It is now 6 o'clock. This House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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John Fraser, France Gélinas
Christine Hogarth, Daryl Kramp
Michael Parsa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Deepak Anand
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Will Bouma
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett
Stephen Blais, Will Bouma
Stephen Crawford, Laura Mae Lindo
Gila Martow, Paul Miller
Billy Pang, Dave Smith
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Présidente: Natalia Kusendova
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian
Aris Babikian, Jeff Burch
Amy Fee, Michael Gravelle
Joel Harden, Mike Harris
Christine Hogarth, Belinda C. Karahalios
Terence Kernaghan, Natalia Kusendova
Robin Martin
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

**Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight /
Comité spécial de la surveillance de la gestion des situations
d'urgence**

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Tom Rakocevic
Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
John Fraser, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Robin Martin
Sam Oosterhoff, Lindsey Park
Tom Rakocevic, Sara Singh
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell