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Mardi
24 novembre 2020

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Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 24 November 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 24 novembre 2020

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I move that, pursuant to standing order 50 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 213, An Act to reduce burdens on people and businesses by enacting, amending and repealing various Acts and revoking a regulation;

That the Standing Committee on General Government be authorized to meet on Friday, November 27, 2020, from 9 a.m. until 10 a.m. to receive a 15-minute opening statement on the bill by the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction, followed by 45 minutes of question and answer divided into three rounds of six minutes for the government members, three rounds of six minutes for the official opposition members and two rounds of 4.5 minutes for the independent member of the committee; and

That the committee be authorized to meet at the following times, for the purpose of public hearings:

—on Friday, November 27, 2020, from 10 a.m. until 12 noon and from 1 p.m. until 6 p.m.; and

—on Monday, November 30, 2020, from 9 a.m. until 10 a.m. and from 1 p.m. until 6 p.m.; and

That the Clerk of the Standing Committee on General Government, in consultation with the committee Chair, be authorized to arrange the following with regard to the bill:

—That the deadline for requests to appear be 5 p.m. on Wednesday, November 25, 2020; and

—That the Clerk of the Committee provide a list of all interested presenters to each member of the subcommittee and their designate following the deadline for requests to appear; and

—That each member of the subcommittee or their designate provide the Clerk of the Committee with a prioritized list of presenters to be scheduled, chosen from the list of all interested presenters, by 9 a.m. on Thursday, November 26, 2020; and

—That witnesses shall be scheduled in groups of three for each one-hour time slot, with each presenter allotted seven minutes for an opening statement followed by 39 minutes of questioning for all three witnesses, divided into

two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the government members, two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the official opposition members and two rounds—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): For some reason, the member for London West has stood on a point of order. I recognize the member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I believe that order number 98 is out of order, because it refers to sending a bill to the standing committee that has not yet passed second reading, so it's referring to a process that would only kick into place once the bill has passed second reading.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you for raising the point. I've been advised by the table that, indeed, the motion is in order, because if the bill that she's referring to doesn't get approved to go to the committee, then it's null and void. But she is in order for introducing the motion at this time.

I'd ask the member from Barrie–Innisfil to continue, please.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you.

I'll start with: with each presenter allotted seven minutes for an opening statement followed by 39 minutes of questioning for all three witnesses, divided into two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the government members, two rounds of 7.5 minutes for the official opposition members and two rounds of 4.5 minutes for the independent member of the committee; and

—That the deadline for written submissions be 7 p.m. on Monday, November 30, 2020; and

—That the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the Clerk of the Committee shall be 5 p.m. on Tuesday, December 1, 2020; and

That the committee be authorized to meet on Wednesday, December 2, 2020, from 9 a.m. until 10:15 a.m. and from 1 p.m. until 6 p.m., for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill; and

That on Wednesday, December 2, 2020, at 4 p.m., those amendments which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto; and at this time, the Chair shall allow one 20-minute waiting period, if requested by a member of the committee, pursuant to standing order 132(a); and

That the committee shall report the bill to the House no later than Thursday, December 3, 2020, and if the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed passed by the committee and shall be deemed reported to and received by the House; and

That upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on General Government, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading, which order may be called the same day; and

That, when the order for third reading of Bill 213 is called, two hours of debate shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill with 50 minutes allotted to the government members, 50 minutes allotted to the official opposition members and 20 minutes allotted to the independent members as a group; and, at the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): To the member from Barrie–Innisfil to lead off the debate.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: No further debate on my part.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Over here to debate what you just heard.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I rise today to speak to this time allocation motion dealing with Bill 213, which the government euphemistically calls the Better for People, Smarter for Business Act.

Speaker, we had a very emotional, heavy debate in this place yesterday that referred specifically to schedule 2 of Bill 213, and that is the schedule, as everyone in this chamber knows, as I'm sure the people of this province know, that legislates degree-granting authority to an institution that was founded and is led by one of the most controversial and notorious homophobes, transphobes and Islamophobes. That is why, when we have stood to speak to this bill, we have continued to focus on schedule 2 as a poison pill that really makes this bill unsupportable, regardless of what else is in here.

0910

The schedule deals with a process that circumvents the normal process that an institution would go through in order to get that degree-granting power, and it does so to reward a donor to the Premier's party. That, Speaker, is something that we must not support. We must not support a bill that allows a backroom process to provide an institution with degree-granting authority—an institution, as I said, that is well known because of the comments that have been made by its founder and its current president.

There is a lot in this bill. It is a grab bag omnibus bill—29 schedules. It deals with many different ministries across those schedules. It deals with the Business Corporations Act; as I said, the Canada Christian College, which is the institution that is the subject of schedule 2 that would be allowed to award university degrees; it deals with the Change of Name Act; it deals with the Family Responsibility and Support Arrears Enforcement Act; it deals with the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, the Forfeited Corporate Property Act, the Insurance Act, the Marriage Act, the Mining Act—there are many different schedules in this bill that address a gamut of issues.

When you have omnibus bills such as this one, it's important that there be as much time as possible for deputants to come and speak to MPPs about the contents. When there

are 29 schedules, it's quite likely that you will only be able to have one stakeholder per schedule, and, actually, probably, many fewer stakeholders than the 29 schedules would allow. That, Speaker, is a problem. When you're looking to get the best kind of feedback possible, when you're looking for opportunities to strengthen and improve legislation, you want to hear from more than one stakeholder per sector. This is the problem with a bill such as this one that is so broad: It deals with so many different legislative issues that it would be hard to get the kind of feedback that would be helpful to improve the schedules of the bill.

The bill also addresses intercity transit. My colleague the member for Toronto Centre spoke at great length about the transit implications of this bill. That was a very interesting debate that she had, and it reflects the kind of feedback that might be gathered if there was sufficient time for people to come to the committee and to talk about all of the schedules of the bill, because what I envision is that most of the deputations that come before the Standing Committee on General Government, as set out in this motion, will want to speak to schedule 2, because that is the schedule that is so abhorrent, that has generated so much controversy, because it is completely opposite to the kinds of legislative initiatives that we should be talking about in this House.

That schedule dealing with Canada Christian College has many, many people upset. In particular, members of our Muslim communities across this province, members of the LGBTQ community, trans folk across Ontario are all very, very concerned about this schedule, and we know what happens when a bill that has a controversial schedule goes forward to committee: almost all of the deputants only want to discuss the one schedule, because it merits such deep discussion and debate.

We saw that on a bill that this government passed recently dealing with long-term-care-home liability protection for for-profit operators who had residents die in their care. Families wanted to have the ability to pursue legal action against a for-profit long-term-care-home operator when they had lost a loved one. It is an important part of dealing with the grief that families have experienced across this province—2,000 families who have lost a loved one in long-term care—and want the ability to pursue legal action against the government.

There was another schedule in that bill dealing with ranked ballots and the ability of municipalities to conduct ranked ballot voting. What happened when that bill went to committee is all but one of the committee spots were taken up by stakeholders who wanted to address one schedule of the bill. For the ranked ballot schedule of the bill, there was only the opportunity for a single stakeholder to come and speak to that bill, and that was the mayor of London, Mayor Ed Holder.

One of the things he said to that committee is that London should at the very least be exempted from that legislation because London had already made an investment of \$515,000 to implement a highly successful ranked ballot election in 2018, and this particular legislation, when it

went to committee, took away that right and would require London to invest another \$51,000 to revert back to first past the post. That is an example of a committee process that does not allow enough time for stakeholders to come forward and speak to the very different sections of the bill.

The bill that I was just using as an example was a bill with only two schedules, but they dealt with completely different issues. This bill, Bill 213, as I mentioned, has 29 schedules, and I gave you a sense earlier of the breadth of those schedules, and, in some ways, the importance of the issues that they address.

I want to get back to the whole schedule about intercity transit. This schedule gives the Lieutenant Governor in Council broad regulatory authority over passenger transportation vehicles under changes to the Highway Traffic Act enacted with schedule 24. The significance of that is that it eliminates opportunities for intercity buses. I think, Speaker, that your community, Windsor, is probably similar to my community of London: We have a network of transit options within the city, but really struggle with that intercity connection. That has been one of the ongoing discussions about the southwestern Ontario transportation strategy, because a transportation strategy that doesn't include a robust network to link cities between each other is not a regional strategy.

We saw this government bring forward a southwestern Ontario transportation plan that was really little more than a vision. It was not the kind of plan that your community needs to see, my community needs to see or other communities across our region. It did not include the detailed outline of how we're going to get to a truly interlinked regional transportation system. That is something that stakeholders may want to come to the Standing Committee on General Government to talk about, to raise concerns about this deregulation of intercity bus services, and what the impact of that will be on our community in particular in southwestern Ontario.

0920

I know that there are concerns among other communities, similar concerns about the lack of a networked transit plan. Certainly this was raised in a recent public survey dealing with the greater Golden Horseshoe area, and that is something that we know we hear often from our colleagues in northern Ontario, about the lack of connection between communities in the north. This is an issue that is important to many different regions in the province, and it's something that people will want to provide input to the government about when this bill goes to committee.

As I said, the fact that this bill includes schedule 2, the highly controversial schedule that was, in fact, condemned by this Legislature in a motion that was debated and passed here yesterday, that makes me believe that there are going to be even more voices who want to be heard, even more people who will want to go and appear before this committee and let this government know how that action, that legislative measure that's included in schedule 2, how that makes them feel in terms of their rights as citizens of this province.

We know from many people in our communities that what it does is it has actually made people feel even more

under threat in the midst of a pandemic which has seen troubling, disturbing increases in incidents of Islamophobia. The last thing that this government should be doing is legislating hate and legitimizing hate. I suspect a lot of people are going to want to come to appear before the Standing Committee on General Government to speak specifically to that section of the bill.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I'm rising again this morning to raise concerns with Bill 213 as it currently stands and speak about the lack of oversight, transparency and due process engendered in this bill that has become typical behaviour from this government.

Schedule 2, particularly, has been the focus of a lot of concerns in this House so many times, even ad nauseam, I would say. For those who didn't know Charles McVety, I would say that it certainly raised his profile, but I don't think in a positive way. It's surprising and disappointing that this government has not yet backed down from supporting this special deal. The impression that it leaves on Ontarians is a sentiment of betrayal. I guess the government will have to live with this, and it should weigh on every member of the government's conscience.

Beyond schedule 2, this bill contains several problematic shifts of power away from the elected Legislature and towards cabinet and ministerial discretion. Bill 213 contains a series of concerning trends that we've seen from this government. It replaces important legislative oversight with ministerial discretion in several important areas relating to the environment and the disposal of public lands, and appears to grant valuable concessions to public friends of the Premier and this government. Both of these trends fly in the face of our legislative tradition. They reduce transparency by preventing legislative scrutiny and public participation in decision-making. They reduce due process by empowering cabinet with the ability to make discretionary decisions on matters that can seriously impact Ontarians. Finally, when we rush legislation through the House without proper time to examine its implications and to consult with the public, we contribute to the impression that due process and consultation are formalities, and real influence instead comes from the interests of cabinet and favoured friends and stakeholders. This trend also pushes important decisions behind closed doors where scrutiny and public participation become more difficult.

We've seen these efforts to centralize critical decision-making powers under cabinet before, such as with the COVID-19 emergency orders and the direction of community legal aid clinics and, just this week, with conservation authorities, taking away their authority and giving the minister the power to ignore their advice for the protection of the environment. These actions by the government reduce transparency, accountability and public participation in important decisions that affect them. We must be particularly concerned about these proposed changes and the broader trends of lowering accountability and due process in favour of ministerial discretion behind closed doors. It signals to both industry and the broader public a really negative trend.

Firstly, it is worth noting that this bill is being tabled by the ministry of small business and red tape reduction and is nominally about improving Ontario's economy during a pandemic. How is accrediting private colleges to offer various degrees at all related to this objective? How is the public, as well as our democratic ideals of accountability and due process, better served by these sections being buried in an unrelated bill where they can't receive dedicated scrutiny, rather than being tabled as a separate act?

Secondly, what are Ontarians supposed to take away from decisions that grant ministers the ability to remove obligations on industry to conduct environmental conservation work or to properly consult with Indigenous communities? At best, this is exchanging minor conveniences for the creation of significant potential for abuse and a signal to the public that when environmental and Indigenous matters conflict with the business interests of industry, business interests take priority. This is not responsible corporate citizenship, it's not sustainable and it's not just.

We members in opposition are here to hold the government accountable, but government isn't listening. Yet again, this government has tabled a bill under the guise of supporting the province through this pandemic when it really seeks to achieve the government's misplaced priorities. We should all be concerned and we should all vote against this bill.

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

Ms. Suze Morrison: I'm only going to take a few minutes. I want to leave some time on the clock for my colleagues, but I did want to speak a little bit today to time allocation and a little bit about the good process of committee.

We have a committee process so that members of our communities—the stakeholders, the organizations, the individuals who are affected by the issues that we're here debating and legislating—can come into this space, although virtually right now, and tell us what's good about a bill, what's bad about a bill. But those folks are not full-time legislators. It's not their full-time job to do that work in most cases, and the general public needs time to even know that a bill is before the House, right?

They rely on newspaper articles, they rely on communications coming out of this place to even know what's before this House. Then they have to do the work of going through a bill. They don't have staff like we have staff to help us understand the legalese and the research. They have to understand how it impacts their area of expertise, the area of the world that they occupy. They have to understand how it's going to affect their lives and their communities, and then think about whether that's good or bad, and any changes or things that they want to see or any priorities that they want to refocus the government towards.

With a time allocation motion like this, you're effectively saying to the public, "We don't care what you have to say or what you think. We're not even going to give you time to find out that this budget bill is even going to committee." The way you've structured this motion—and,

as my colleague said earlier, there are 29 schedules in this bill; there's quite a lot here that we could discuss in a lot of different areas, but the deadline to appear before this committee is tomorrow. We're debating the motion today, and the deadline to appear is tomorrow. How is anyone who is not a legislator in this building ever supposed to find out in time that this is even an opportunity that they have, and then get their submissions in by tomorrow? And then they've only got one day after that to figure out what they want to say to you. You're only giving them two days at committee. The committee is going to meet Friday and then this coming Monday, and if they don't have time to get their things in order, appreciating—we're in a global pandemic, guys. People are working from home. They are exhausted. If you are in Toronto or Peel, you're in a lockdown. You've got your kids at home. And you're giving people 24 hours' notice to get their documentation together to go through a bill with 29 schedules and to develop thoughtful commentary on it to bring to you?

0930

What you're saying to the public is, "We don't care what you're going through. We don't want to give you an opportunity to come and give input on this bill, and we're going to make it as hard as possible for you to even know what's going on in this place," hoping that you can, what, skate by under the radar so the public won't know what you're really doing? I would suggest, through you, Speaker, that that's exactly what this government is doing. They don't want the public knowing what they're doing in this budget bill because it's shameful.

I want to take the government back a few months earlier in the pandemic to the one time you did spend a moderate amount of time talking to the public. We went through this dog-and-pony show of a select committee on COVID recovery with all the different sectors. We had them with small businesses, the arts and culture sector, developers and municipal partners, things like that. We had all those folks come to this dog-and-pony show of a consultation, and you sat there all rosy-eyed and sympathetic to the public, asking, "What can we do for you, public? What kind of COVID response do you need?"

I think that those stakeholders and the public thought that what they told you in those committee hearings was going to be reflected in this budget bill, and it's not. Instead, you've come back with schedules like schedule 3, the name change piece. You're making it harder for married people to assume their spouse's last name. You are legislating hate through Canada Christian College. Charles McVety, the Premier's very good, close personal friend, known homophobe, transphobe, Islamophobe: You're giving him the power to grant university degrees in this province through legislation in this bill, but you didn't listen to anything that anyone had to say about what they actually need for COVID relief.

So you spent all of those weeks listening to the public. Where's anything that anyone told you? Where did any of that end up in this bill? Speaker, it didn't. There's no commercial rent relief for small businesses, there's no commercial eviction protection for small businesses. Over

and over and over again, we heard small businesses say, “We need help. We cannot go this alone. You are asking us to close our doors to the public to get through a pandemic together, and we need help shouldering that burden.” You have not delivered anything in terms of tangible financial supports or protections for small businesses.

When we look at renters, renters have been saying, “I can’t isolate from a pandemic in my home if I don’t have a home.” Over and over again in those committee hearings, we heard from tenants, tenant activists and legal aid workers, “We need an eviction ban. We need a residential eviction ban. Just put everything on pause and we’ll sort it out afterwards.” What about rent relief for renters, any sort of financial support? None of that is in here. You did not listen.

Speaker, I am not surprised today that this government is trying to fly under the cover of the pandemic and ram their budget bill through, because they know that if the public found out what they were really doing in this bill, they would know just how backwards this government’s priorities are. I think they’re hoping to pull a fast one on the people of Ontario and don’t want to get caught with their priorities completely backwards.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I rise to speak on the time allocation motion on Bill 213.

This time allocation motion—like most time allocation motions, but this one especially—raises some serious questions about the government’s commitment to democratic and citizen engagement. The people of this province need time to comment on this bill—29 schedules, Speaker. If this time allocation motion passes, people have until tomorrow afternoon at 5 p.m. to sign up and speak to committee, and then we only have two days of public hearings. I ask, what message does that send to the people of Ontario about whether their government actually wants to hear from them, wants their input on some really important pieces of this legislation?

Now, I understand why the government might want to really fast-track this through without any public engagement, because schedule 2 is a schedule that essentially legislates hate. I’d understand why the government doesn’t want to hear from the Canadian Muslim society, from LGBTQ2+ rights organizations, from Haitian organizations, from many organizations that I’m sure want to speak—even Christian organizations. I mean, Charles McVety was kicked off the Christian Television Network for spewing hate. So I would understand why the government would not want to hear from people around schedule 2, because I think they’re going to get an earful, because there’s a lot of pain in this province right now, a lot of people feeling pain that Charles McVety would be getting the kind of special treatment that he’s receiving in this legislation, especially when—if the government wants to hide behind this independent PEQAB process, they could put it in a bill after the process takes place. They don’t have to pre-empt the process by having it in a bill. So I understand why they would not want to hear from people on that.

But let’s think about a few other schedules in this bill that I think we really need to hear from the people of Ontario on. Schedule 3 is about changing your name. I’ve had constituents reach out with concerns around that schedule, and I think they would like to come to committee, and I’d like to hear at committee the concerns that people have. Maybe we need to amend the bill or make some adjustments to the bill to address those concerns, but will people have time, especially given there are 29 schedules?

Schedule 7 talks about the Insurance Act. I know they’re cosmetic changes, but I can tell you that there are so many small businesses in this province right now that are deeply upset about the fact that their insurance companies are not honouring business interruption insurance and, in some cases, aren’t even insuring them. So when we talk about the Insurance Act and have a conversation at committee, I would think there would be a lot of small businesses, especially in a bill that says “smarter for business,” that would like to come to committee and talk about how insurance isn’t working for small businesses, when we talk about schedule 7.

Schedule 16 makes changes with the Ontario Highway Transport Board Repeal Act. I would think, particularly, rural communities that are underserved when it comes to intercity bus transportation would like to talk about this. There might be some good and bad things that the government is proposing here. We certainly need to come up with some innovative and smart ways to improve intercity bus transit in this province, but with two days of public hearings, are we going to have the opportunity to really have a fulsome conversation about schedule 16? Probably not, Speaker.

That’s an important conversation I want to have. I can’t tell you how many people in my region of the province are asking why we don’t have direct intercity bus connections between Guelph and K-W or Guelph and Hamilton etc. I’d love to have the opportunity to talk about it, but it’s going to be hard with two days of public hearings.

Schedule 18—and I’m not going to go through all 29 schedules, but I want to speak a bit about schedule 18. I want to compliment the government on one part of schedule 18. I think it’s good that the government is giving municipalities the right to say no to new water-bottling operations. But, First Nations, in their treaty territories, are asking for the same right. Will we have an opportunity to hear from Six Nations, for example, who have raised concerns about their treaty rights to say no to new water-bottling operations? Will we hear from other First Nations who would like to have maybe the same rights that municipalities are going to be granted under schedule 18?

I can tell you, and this relates specifically to my own municipality, that the riding I represent wants to talk about: What about adjacent municipalities? The proposal may not be specifically in that municipality, but the proposal directly affects the municipality’s water-taking wells. That’s exactly what’s happening in Guelph. Most of our wells are outside the city limits and would be directly impacted by proposals for new water-taking permits, but

because it's not specifically in the municipal boundary, that new right for municipalities won't be available.

0940

I'd like to hear from municipalities directly affected by this who want to say good things about what the government is doing, but also maybe want to propose some changes to make it available to some others. But, Speaker, we're probably not going to have time for it because the government is rushing this through. So I'm encouraging all MPPs to vote against this time allocation motion. Let's give us some time to have a conversation. Let's give small businesses an opportunity to come and talk about how this pandemic is affecting them, and the supports they need in a bill that says it's the "smarter for business" act. Let's give people time to participate in their democracy.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: Here we are once again debating another time allocation motion, and one that strictly affects so many people in our province, unfortunately negatively.

They're not the bills that the people of Ontario expected to see coming forward during the COVID pandemic, but, unfortunately, the government has found a way to slip poison pills into bills that have great titles, that people are counting on. I mean, when you have a bill named smarter for business and better for people, and then you legislate hate within this same bill, that's a serious problem.

My colleagues have had the opportunity to lay out exactly how this time allocation motion is written, and the tight deadlines and the lack of ability for people to understand and to know exactly what it is that's coming forward. They have until I believe it's tomorrow to be able to request the ability to speak at committee, and then it will go through two days of presentations. But then you have to have your written submissions in by the same—so the public has to have them in by 7 p.m. on Monday, and then we have file our amendments by 5 o'clock on the Tuesday. It doesn't give the public, or quite frankly us as legislators, the proper opportunity to listen to all the submissions, read all the written submissions—which we should all be doing—and then have legal counsel prepare amendments to go before.

The other concern that I have is if the amendments have not been moved by 4 p.m. on the Wednesday when they're doing the clause-by-clause, then they'll be deemed to have been moved by the Chair and will be voted on without debate. That is a problem, Speaker. That is a problem that we're seeing time and time again with these time allocation bills that come before us, and this bill is contentious.

Yesterday, we debated the opposition day motion to condemn the hate that has been brought forward in this bill with Charles McVety and the repertoire that he has within the province when it comes to Islamophobia and transphobia—just hate speech all the way. We have shown example after example, and the government wasn't even able to defeat us. They were not able to defeat us because they weren't able to get enough of their members into the chamber to vote. That says a lot, when they don't even

have the nerve to come and vote, because they had to vote in the negative as per their House requirement, as per their House leader and their Premier. So they weren't even able to beat us in that motion. That says a lot. That says that they still have a lot of learning to do, that they need time to be able to get up the nerve to be able to speak against their government, against this hateful legislation.

Due to that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my time and call adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Miss Taylor moves the adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of adjourning the debate, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

A recorded vote being required, the bells will ring for 30 minutes. Prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 0948 to 1015.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 49(a), it being 10:15 a.m., I deem the debate on government notice of motion 98 to be adjourned.

Debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I stand today to share my deep concern about the proposed changes to the Conservation Authorities Act and the Planning Act in schedule 6 of Bill 229. I have heard from many people and neighbourhood organizations in my riding of York South–Weston raising the same alarm that these changes will weaken and reduce the powers of conservation authorities.

Here in York South–Weston, I have been urging all three levels of government for action around the persistent and devastating flooding we have had to endure for years. Last year, during the peak of spring flooding, this government cut funding for flood protection, and now conservation authorities are being sidelined, with the potential result of development on wetlands and flood plains. Residents seeking flood mitigation relief in the Black Creek/Rockcliffe area of York South–Weston are rightfully concerned that those sensitive flood plains and wetlands will not be respected.

Removing the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority from the planning process is a reckless and short-sighted recipe for disaster. Mr. Speaker, I condemn this government's priorities that, time and again, put developers' interests over a community's environmental interests.

RUSS AND JANET ARTHURS

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: It is my pleasure to rise today to recognize two individuals, two small business owners, who have made countless contributions to our community.

Russ and Janet Arthurs have been successful small business owners in Ottawa since 2005. They have been proud owners of a number of Trade Secrets stores, including in my riding, and they recently became partners at a Boston Pizza in Nepean.

Despite getting into the restaurant business right at the start of the COVID pandemic, they have managed to increase sales and have continued to give back to their community. Perhaps most notable are their pizza donations to front-line health care workers at the Queensway Carleton intensive care unit as well as the Revera Longfields Manor long-term-care home.

Their Trade Secrets stores have sponsored numerous events, like the Barrhaven Santa Claus Parade, the run for Roger's House, and have collected and distributed over 6,000 gently used hair appliances to Ottawa-area women's shelters under the Eastern Ottawa Resource Centre. Trade Secrets has also sponsored a number of sports teams across Ottawa. Beyond this, the Arthurs family has personally donated fresh farm produce from their farm over the years to numerous food cupboards.

I could go on, Mr. Speaker, for many minutes listing all of their contributions, but all this to say thank you to Russ and Janet Arthurs for everything you do to make Ottawa a better place. I encourage everyone to go out and support local small businesses like these.

DENNIS FAIRALL

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I'm sad to report we just lost a legendary track and field coach. Dennis Fairall was only 67. He was the coach of the track and field teams at the University of Windsor for nearly 30 years. He turned those Windsor Lancers into a track and field powerhouse. They won 25 Canadian championships and 46 Ontario conference titles.

Dennis Fairall was named as either a Canadian or a conference coach of the year 65 times. He was the head coach of Canada's World University Games in 1989 and was a team coach on four other occasions.

In 2005, Dennis was the head coach of Canada's Pan American Junior team, and they won the highest medal count in the event's history.

Twice, he served as the head coach of Canada's Maccabiah Games team. He has been named to the Tillsonburg sports wall of fame. He's enshrined in the Windsor/Essex County Sports Hall of Fame, and he has been inducted into the Athletics Ontario Hall of Fame. His nickname was Big Dawg, and he has received a Petro-Canada Coaching Excellence Award and has been awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal. The University of Windsor renamed our indoor sports facility as Fairall Fieldhouse.

1020

Speaker, we once were neighbours. Our kids went to grade school together when the Fairalls moved to Windsor from Tillsonburg. He had suffered with a rare degenerative brain disease for the past several years.

Dennis Fairall was a humble man, despite his many accomplishments, and he certainly left his mark on

university athletics in Ontario, Canada and beyond, and our community will miss him greatly.

VOLUNTEERS

Ms. Jane McKenna: Volunteers are the heart of our communities. Throughout the global pandemic, volunteers in Burlington and all across Ontario are making a difference by providing support and relief.

There are so many people in Burlington and Halton region who are coming together to do extraordinary things to ensure no one is left behind, like Christen McIntosh, a volunteer with the African Caribbean Council of Halton, and Karen Hill and Cherie Wickens Jones who volunteer with the Compassion Society.

The Joseph Brant Hospital Foundation certainly appreciates the efforts of Ann and Ethan Kurucz and Angelo Paletta.

Using the power of the Internet to bring people together are Rene Schuster who started the Burlington Dads group and Don MacEachern who started Project Kindness.

Bob Morley drives the Food for Life van and Beverly Taylor does so many things at the Burlington Food Bank.

At the Halton Children's Aid Society, Joan Lewis, Cathy Evans and James Houghton are helping children and youth—just to name a few.

"We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give"—from Winston Churchill. Thank you to all the Burlington volunteers who are stepping up and making a difference.

TREATIES RECOGNITION

Ms. Suze Morrison: I rise today in support of the Haudenosaunee of Six Nations. The Haudenosaunee people of Six Nations live within the Haldimand tract, six miles from either side of the Grand River. This land was granted to them as thanks for siding with the British during the American Revolution. Canada and Ontario would not exist as we are today without the allyship of the Haudenosaunee.

Less than 5% of the Haldimand tract now remains for the use and enjoyment of the Haudenosaunee. Now, as Haudenosaunee land defenders occupy a construction site on their own lands, this government is allowing the OPP to threaten, criminalize and forcibly remove Indigenous people who are simply exerting their treaty rights. Thirty-six people, including journalists, activists, artists and community members, have been arrested in connection to 1492.

The police interventions at 1492 Land Back Lane camp have seen Haudenosaunee people forcibly removed from their homelands, shot with rubber bullets, tasered, criminalized and litigated with civil suits alleging damages of \$20 million.

Speaker, these arrests must stop. Criminalizing Indigenous people for this government's failure to adequately address the long-standing concerns of the

Haudenosaunee is not just. In a province and a country that says it is committed to reconciliation, this is shameful.

I echo the calls of the land defenders at the 1492 Land Back Lane camp, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs Council and the Six Nations Elected Council for a moratorium on development and an end to police violence to allow for a respectful nation-to-nation approach to resolving this historic land claim.

HINDU HERITAGE MONTH

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: This past weekend, I had the pleasure of joining friends at the Vaishno Devi Temple in my community of Oakville North–Burlington for a celebration of Hindu Heritage Month. With the COVID-19 pandemic, this year, the event was held virtually and included a wonderful performance by dancers as part of our virtual celebration.

In Ontario, Hindu Heritage Month was unanimously passed into law by the Legislature four years ago, and it recognizes the contributions of our Hindu Ontario community. November is also the month in which we celebrate Diwali, the festival celebrating the triumph of good over evil and light over darkness.

Hindu Canadians began to settle in Ontario more than 100 years ago, originating from many countries around the world, and the community is part of the rich tapestry of cultures that make up our great province. They have excelled in every field in our province: science, medicine, business, law, education, politics and so many more. I am also proud to serve with Hindu members of this Legislature, which are part of a diverse government caucus, and others at Queen's Park.

This month is a time for Hindu Ontarians, and all of us, to remember their culture and traditions and to mark their significant contributions to our province. I'd also like to thank Snehal and Mansi Katarey and all of the volunteers, members and friends who organized this wonderful celebration.

SEASON'S GREETINGS

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: This is the last opportunity I'll have to make a member's statement before the holiday season and, although it's early, I want to take a moment to wish the people of Don Valley West and the people of Ontario all the very best in this difficult time.

COVID has changed so much about our lives. It has changed our relationship to each other and to our family members. It has changed our interactions with our communities. It has changed our ability to celebrate, mourn and comfort one another. It continues to challenge us to be patient, to listen to the leaders and experts who are themselves struggling to find the best paths forward.

What COVID has not changed is our need for light in darkness. In fact, it has heightened our need to find rays of hope and optimism on an otherwise pretty bleak horizon.

The stories behind Kwanza, Hanukkah, Diwali and Christmas are all celebrations of victory, thanksgiving

harvest and literally the birth of hope in the form of a baby. We celebrate these milestones at the darkest time of our year, in the cold, when we're most in need of warmth. This time of year, more than any other, we crave cozy moments and the people we love. We try to reach out to people in need at a time when loneliness and need are an even greater burden. And, this year, we have to find ways to do all of that and be separate from one another.

We can put this in context and we can remember that, in comparison with so many others in the world, we're blessed to live in this country—and that context is important, but it can't completely take away the sadness of missing our family and friends. Loving each other this year is different, and still, I wish each and every one of you all the warmth and joy that you can find.

RETIREMENT HOMES

Mrs. Daisy Wai: My mother-in-law was admitted into a retirement home last April. My husband took early retirement to take care of her, visiting her every day, until COVID hit. We cannot visit her, which is challenging for us, but we understand. We cannot spread the virus to anyone in the building. The nurses, caregivers and PSWs are very patient and caring to all the seniors, and they arrange Skype calls for us to meet with our mother virtually. They also arranged window visits and even organized a special birthday celebration for us to surprise her.

Recently, they have arranged weekly, on-site COVID tests and full-gear PPE for us to visit her in person. I cannot thank enough each of the front-line workers, admin staff, PSWs and the hospital team for taking such great care of our seniors. The retirement home she is staying in is very proud to announce their home is COVID-free. In fact, many retirement homes are like this one, clean and well-managed.

Let's encourage them and show our appreciation while working on others that need support. Let's continue to be careful and keep COVID out of our long-term-care homes.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Doly Begum: Back in March, I joined tenants who were struggling to pay their rent, calling on this government for rent relief. I joined small landlords who were struggling with their mortgages, asking this Premier for support. But, instead, this government rammed through a harmful piece of legislation, Bill 184, which not only ignored the plea from tenants and small landlords, but rather made it easier for big, corporate landlords to evict people out of their homes.

Throughout the months, we saw as the Premier stood in front of cameras and told people to just stay home, yet did nothing to support people who lost their income and were falling behind on their rent. Residents in apartment buildings like Teesdale and Barnhill apartments in my riding of Scarborough Southwest have been fighting for their homes for months. Now, after nine months—almost a year, really—we're in the middle of yet another lockdown in Ontario with Ontarians who have lost their

income and are on the brink of losing their home, and this Premier, once again, stood in front of cameras and told people to just stay home.

1030

Mr. Speaker, tenants across this province are being dragged to court for what is being called an eviction blitz, online hearings riddled with technological and accessibility challenges. There are about 50 evictions scheduled this week. How can this government in good conscience think it is enough to tell people to just stay home, with zero regard for the people who lost their income and now risk losing their homes in the middle of a lockdown? It is out of touch, and it is cruel.

Yesterday at Dentonia Park, I stood with residents who are facing the threat of eviction, calling on this government to end this cruelty. We're watching the very heart of this province, its people and businesses, perish during the course of a pandemic because this government felt it was more important to protect the interests of big corporate landlords than to prevent mass homelessness.

The Ford government needs to act right now. Their lack of action in the beginning of the pandemic has put people in a desperate state, but it's never too late to do the right thing. I'm begging this government to step up and provide relief for the people who desperately need it.

DIABETES

Miss Christina Maria Mitas: November is Diabetes Awareness Month. Over 1.5 million people here in Ontario are living with diabetes, a number that is fully expected to continue to rise. A 20-year-old in Canada now has a 50% chance of being diagnosed with diabetes in their lifetime.

People living with diabetes must make changes every day in order to manage their condition. They must do things like watching what they eat, monitoring their blood sugar, pricking their fingers and taking insulin injections. Luckily, over the years, research and technology has made their lives a little bit easier.

Last year, Ontario started providing a flash glucose monitoring system, FreeStyle Libre, for insulin-using patients. This system is a game-changer. It allows patients to scan their glucose levels with a swipe of their phone rather than a finger prick. Its ease of use has many benefits for both patients and our health care system. Easier and more frequent testing enables better self-management, improved quality of life, reduced hospitalizations and fewer health complications overall.

Speaker, there will always be more we can do to bolster better patient outcomes, particularly as more Ontarians are diagnosed with diabetes, but today I stand in this House proud of the important investments our government has made in order to help patients better manage their condition.

Ontario has proven to be a leader in diabetes care in Canada. Next year marks the 100th anniversary of the discovery of insulin by Sir Frederick Banting right here in Ontario. Last year, our government supported flash

glucose monitoring systems in order to make life easier for Ontarians with diabetes. And this year, during the very challenging times that COVID-19 has brought us, access to these monitoring systems has proven to be critical as it has enabled virtual care for those living with diabetes.

Research and technology in Ontario has always been on the cutting edge. For Diabetes Awareness Month, let's celebrate these breakthroughs and continue supporting everyone in Ontario living with diabetes.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Sara Singh: My first question is for the Premier. Yesterday, the Premier insisted that his government should not be criticized for their underfunded, inadequate COVID-19 response because other jurisdictions have it worse, yet there are neighbourhoods in Brampton that have a COVID-19 positivity rate of nearly 20%. One doctor describes this as a "staggering number [that] suggests that there is a huge problem."

There are now 165 patients in the ICU. That is one out of every 10 ICU beds in this province. When is the Premier going to stop justifying his inaction and start supporting people living in these hard-hit communities and the hospitals that serve them?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, we are supporting Peel and the entire area since they have, unfortunately, needed to go into lockdown, as with the city of Toronto. We recognize that they need additional supports in order to deal with the rapidly increasing number of cases they're seeing.

What we have done is sent more case and contact managers into the area to assist with helping to identify people who have COVID-19 and their contacts. We're also expanding the hospital facilities for people who need to be in the hospital, and we're making sure that we have received help from some of the other public health units that don't have as high a number of cases in order to help by telephone support with case and contact management.

We recognize that Peel is going through a very difficult time. We want to help Peel get out of the lockdown as soon as possible, and we are providing the necessary resources in order to help Peel to get there.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: Every day, the Ford government downplays the impact of this pandemic. Peel Public Health data shows that essential workers on the front lines in manufacturing, transportation and health care have been exponentially more likely to be infected. They are not doing well, as the Premier likes to pretend. These people are facing a crisis, and facing it without help from this government.

When will this government stop trying to protect itself and its bottom line and start taking real action to protect and support the people in this province who need it most?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Just to indicate the support that we are providing to Peel, we have established three new community-based testing centres, we have implemented mobile testing sites, we are opening limited walk-in availability at assessment centres for those people who are not able to either book online or make telephone appointments and we are implementing up to seven pharmacies as specimen collection centres in the next several weeks. We also have invested \$42 million for up to 234 new beds at three hospitals, including alternate health facilities, in Peel region to support hospital capacity pressures and the continuation of surgeries and procedures. So we are providing both health supports, in terms of hospital beds and supports, as well as contact managing, testing and tracing.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: Speaker, through you to the minister: Help in a few weeks is not going to help us today. Working people in these communities hit hardest by COVID-19 don't need the Premier to continue to tell them that the pandemic could be worse. They need this government to actually step up with dedicated resources for testing and contact tracing through this pandemic, culturally specific COVID-19 outreach, urgent and direct support for small businesses and direct support for those people who work with them, starting with a guarantee that they can leave work when sick without losing a day's pay. When will we see any of this?

Hon. Christine Elliott: The supports have been provided in the health care field, as well as in the economic field; I believe that is what you are also referring to. We're doubling the amount of emergency management assistance that we're providing, from \$300 million to \$600 million, recognizing that there are many economic disadvantages that come from a lockdown in both Peel and Toronto.

But from the health side, we're also adding to the number of beds. William Osler Health System is receiving up to 87 total beds: 41 beds at Brampton Civic and 46 beds at Etobicoke General. Trillium Health Partners will be receiving up to 141 total new beds: 99 beds at Mississauga Hospital, 23 acute beds—70 beds as part of the pandemic response unit, and the list goes on.

We are dealing with both the economic as well as the health effects, recognizing that Peel is in a difficult situation right now, and we will be there to assist them.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Sara Singh: My question, again, is to the Premier. Yesterday, another nine residents died from COVID-19 in Ontario's long-term-care homes. For months, the Ford government has insisted that the growing spread of COVID-19 in long-term care was not a cause for concern. But Dr. Amit Arya, director of the Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians, disagreed yesterday, saying, "We had months in the summer to prepare for this.... So as

cases and mortality start to accelerate in long-term care, it's absolutely devastating."

Why does the Ford government continue to deny the reality of our long-term-care homes?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Long-Term Care to reply.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you for the question. Our government has acted swiftly and decisively since the beginning. I reject the premise of that question regarding the seriousness with which our government has taken the concerns of COVID-19 in long-term-care homes. It has been absolutely consistent that our number one concern is the residents and staff safety in long-term-care homes. They are our priority, and there is no doubt.

1040

We have taken measures all along: the \$243 million put up immediately to support our staffing in our long-term-care homes; \$405 million to support more staffing supports, just a few weeks ago; \$61.4 million to help our homes with repairs and renovations that would better prepare them for COVID-19 and to deal with it; \$30 million for more infection prevention and control; \$10 million for training; \$26.3 million for future support for PSWs; \$14 million for PSW training—and the list goes on and on. We have never stopped and we will continue—

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

The supplementary question.

Ms. Sara Singh: The Canadian Association of Retired Persons has joined the chorus of voices expressing their concern about the government's failure to address the crisis in long-term care:

"We can't afford to wait any longer in protecting vulnerable residents in Ontario's outbreak-stricken long-term-care homes.

"The time for change is now, and it starts at the top.

"Remove the Ontario Minister of Long-Term Care so that we, as a province, have a fighting chance to fix the system before we suffer another uncontrollable wave of deaths."

Will the Premier listen to the growing concerns of people demanding urgent action and do that?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: I recognize the challenges faced by countries around the world pushing back against COVID-19. Ontario has consistently worked with its medical experts, as the science evolved on COVID-19, to add more layers. The whole world was affected by wave 1. Lessons have been learned from wave 1, and we're using the expertise through our medical experts, our public health tables—hundreds of experts who are providing support and information. This has never stopped. It's ongoing.

The rapid testing that we'll be able to get out to our homes soon—again, many reasons why that has not been able to be more expedient, and we work with our federal partners to be able to have access to those rapid tests.

The world has been affected by COVID-19; Ontario has not been alone in that. We are continuing to make sure that our homes have all the PPE and the staffing that is

necessary. There's no home right now with a critical shortage of staff or PPE. Our homes are doing much better. Some 92% of our homes—

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

The final supplementary.

Ms. Sara Singh: After the first wave of the pandemic, the Ford government promised residents in long-term-care homes and their families that lessons had been learned and change was coming. They are now watching in horror as the virus once again spreads through facilities that are understaffed, underprepared and unchanged.

Instead of taking action to protect our seniors from COVID-19, this government decided to protect long-term-care operators from legal liability.

Why is the Premier protecting his minister instead of protecting vulnerable seniors?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant and member for Durham.

Ms. Lindsey Park: Let me be absolutely clear. Individuals and organizations that ignore public health guidance and act with gross negligence or intentional misconduct will not be protected by our legislation. The narrow, targeted civil liability protection in this legislation has only to do with the inadvertent transmission of COVID-19 and nothing else. This legislation does not protect any other type of negligence that we hear from the opposition in this House or that we heard at committee, like if a resident is not given proper medication or a long-term-care home fails to properly communicate with families or patients.

Ontarians will continue to be able to file claims and seek justice for all these claims, including any criminal charges under any circumstance.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier. With parts of the GTA now in lockdown and potentially more regions to follow, businesses are sounding the alarm over this government's refusal to provide clear direction over who can and can't stay open. Ontarians are used to a lack of clarity from this government, but even still, we are very concerned about the Premier's decision that small mom-and-pop shops will close down—all the while telling folks that it's A-okay to still shop till you drop at big box stores like Walmart and Costco.

So we looked a little closer and—surprise, surprise—guess who's currently registered to lobby the Premier on Walmart's behalf? Why, it's Melissa Lantsman, the Premier's former war room director. Now this all makes sense.

Why is the Premier willing to let small main street businesses go under just because they couldn't afford to hire his friends?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: We are doing everything we possibly can, and have been since the onset of this

pandemic, to make sure that we focus on the health and safety of the people of the province of Ontario. As the minister for small business mentioned just yesterday, these are very difficult and challenging decisions that we are making in co-operation with not only the Chief Medical Officer of Health but with the medical officers of health in the regions across the province of Ontario.

There are a significant number of resources in place for small businesses to assist them during this very, very difficult and challenging time, but as we've said from the beginning, as the Premier has clearly stated, it is our objective to make sure that, first and foremost, the health and safety of the people of the province of Ontario is assured, and that will lead to a strong, vibrant economic recovery.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: The Premier has said before no one can influence him or his decision-making, but it turns out that there actually are a few people who the Premier does listen to. They just all happen to be former PC Party staffers currently registered as lobbyists.

Along with Ms. Lantsman, Walmart has also hired David Tarrant, the Premier's former executive director of strategic communications, to lobby on their behalf. Together, these two PC Party insiders set up a meeting with the Premier and the Walmart CEO where the CEO convinced the Premier that they had no choice but to stay open, even though their small competitors, their small main street competitors, all had to shut down.

What does the Premier have to say to the small businesses that can't afford to hire PC insiders to arrange meetings with the Premier of Ontario?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing will come to order. Maybe you didn't hear me.

Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I mean, truly that is—what a remarkable question to be asking. I need to remind the members of the opposition that these are the same orders that were put in place back in March, orders that were unanimously supported by members of this Legislature—unanimously supported by the members opposite, by the independents. These are the same orders that were put in place to fight the pandemic in the early stages and these are the orders that have been asked for by not only the Chief Medical Officer of Health but by the medical officers of health in the two regions that are unfortunately on lockdown.

If the members opposite are suggesting that we forget about the health and safety of the people of the province of Ontario and put our focus somewhere else, I can assure the member opposite that, on this side of the House, that's just not going to happen. We know full well that the sooner we can flatten this curve, the sooner we'll have a more

robust economic recovery, and that's exactly what we're going to do, despite the opposition from the NDP.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My question is for the minister responsible for small business and red tape reduction.

Small businesses have always been at the heart of Ontario's economy in Niagara West and across the province. They represent jobs, hope and opportunity for the people of this province. Due to the pandemic, thousands of small businesses across the province had to close their doors to help contain the spread of COVID-19. I know this has been exceptionally difficult. Unfortunately, many small businesses in Ontario do not have an online presence, which makes it hard for them to deal with the loss of physical sales.

I'm wondering if the minister could please tell the House what the government's response has been to helping small businesses adapt to the digital marketplace in Niagara West and across the province.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you to the member for Niagara West for that question. There's no sugar-coating it, as we said yesterday. These are difficult times unlike anything we have ever seen before in this province, and our government understands that small businesses have been forced to adapt very quickly. That's why we responded through the \$57-million commitment to Digital Main Street, the largest investment by any government in the history of this country to help businesses go digital.

Growing a business online and expanding into e-commerce has become a huge priority for many business owners. Through our investment, small businesses can now receive grants of up to \$2,500 to help launch their business online. The program is going to help up to almost 23,000 businesses create and enhance their online presence and generate jobs for more than 1,400 students across the program. Thanks to this program, main street businesses will be able to expand their offerings and seize opportunities online.

1050

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My thanks to the minister for this response. I know that this investment is incredibly important for many small business owners in my community and right across Ontario.

When the pandemic began, many small businesses and businesses across the province were preparing to shut down, but supports like these have helped to bolster many of these businesses.

Speaker, could the minister please update the House on the result of the Digital Main Street grant program over the last few months?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you to the member for that question. I would be happy to update the House on the progress of the Digital Main Street program.

Over the first five months, we received 7,900 applications and businesses that signed up for the Digital Main Street shopHERE program, and almost 2,500 just in the last month. I am proud to say that approximately 45% of these businesses are from outside the GTA, while 45% of the applications identify as female entrepreneurs.

We have also established 79 digital service squads across Ontario to provide support for website set-up, marketing strategies and point-of-sale software to more than 13,500 businesses. Some 131 municipalities across Ontario now have access to a Digital Main Street squad.

Digital Main Street has been vital to many businesses and this has helped increase consumer confidence and make things easier for business owners.

COLLEGE STANDARDS AND ACCREDITATION

Ms. Jill Andrew: My question today is for the Premier. Yesterday, this Legislature passed a motion condemning the extreme and hateful invective of Charles McVety and to oppose any efforts to make Canada Christian College into an accredited university. The Legislature has spoken. Even the Premier's own MPPs can't defend this decision.

Will the government listen to the will of the Legislature, stop defending the indefensible and pull the bill rewarding Charles McVety today, yes or no?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond, the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Ross Romano: As I spoke about in this House on a number of occasions—and I will continue to stand and rise in this House and defend the process that our government has, a government process that is important. It's accountable, it's transparent and it is what we are called upon as legislators to do. So I will continue to speak about the process, Mr. Speaker.

The process is this: There is an independent PEQAB process. A party can apply directly to an independent body; that is PEQAB. There is absolutely no way to stop that process from occurring, Mr. Speaker, and no way to interfere with that process from happening. That independent body will review the particular application. They will report back to the ministry, and subject to results of that PEQAB review, the legislation would then be proclaimed into force.

The opposition continues to play politics with this issue. They continue to play politics—for whatever reason they wish to play politics, Mr. Speaker—but we will defend our democracy as we have continued to do.

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

Ms. Jill Andrew: Speaker, I reject the premise of that answer.

Again, to the Premier: With each passing day it gets harder and harder for the government to defend the Premier's decision to reward his friend and close ally—an unapologetic homophobe and a bigot, Charles McVety—with the right to grant university degrees at his Canada Christian College.

Yesterday, sir, the vast majority of PC members decided not to. But even while the Legislature says “Stop,” the Premier has decided to rush this bill forward with almost no opportunity for public scrutiny. How can this government justify plowing ahead with a reward to Charles McVety—the racist, the Islamophobe, the homophobe, the transphobe—when even their own MPPs are too ashamed to defend it?

Hon. Ross Romano: Once again: We have a process we’ve created, as I have referred to in this House many, many, many times.

There is equality in this world, Mr. Speaker. There is equality within our Constitution. There is not only equality in our Constitution, there are fundamental freedoms that we must defend, and these are about procedural safeguards in our laws that must exist.

I have spoken about this many, many times, and I will continue to speak about it because procedural safeguards are what make us a free and democratic society. They are guaranteed under our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and they must be upheld. While I would not ask anybody to agree with any views of any party that they do not agree with—by no means at all do I accept that. By no means at all would we ever suggest that you should accept—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Ross Romano: But what you must respect is that there must be process, and that’s what matters.

Mr. Speaker, I will end, though, with some basic mathematics. There was not a single member on this side of the House that voted in favour of the opposition motion, because the opposition motion is not proper.

COVID-19 RESPONSE IN INDIGENOUS AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: My question is for the Minister of Health. Speaker, the leadership of Nishnawbe Aski Nation is working hard to keep the 49 communities in its territory informed of COVID progress and to keep them safe. They’re providing access to COVID resources and information in Oji-Cree, Ojibwa and Cree, and posting case numbers and data on their website so that their member communities can be informed. The federal Minister of Health is in regular conversation with the Grand Chief of NAN as they work to ensure a coherent response on- and off-reserve. But the same is not happening with the provincial Minister of Health.

The fight against COVID has to be an all-government effort. There really is no room for jurisdictional wrangling. NAN Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler has been attempting to secure a three-way meeting with the federal and provincial Ministers of Health, and the federal Minister of Health, Patty Hajdu, has agreed and is open to setting up a meeting. Will the Minister of Health for Ontario commit to a meeting with the Grand Chief and the federal minister to better coordinate the COVID response?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Yes, of course I would be. Of course I would be, and I have been in regular contact with First Nation leaders, Indigenous leaders throughout this—before the pandemic on a regular basis and through the pandemic on a regular basis. I’ve had a number of conversations already, and I would be more than happy to be involved in a meeting of the three groups, absolutely.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: That’s good news, Mr. Speaker. I spoke with both Grand Chief Fiddler and federal Minister Hajdu yesterday, and that’s great news that you are now willing to have a meeting, because they need that three-way meeting.

The nature of a government-to-government relationship between the Ontario government and Indigenous governments requires respect and open and ongoing communication. Advancing the process of reconciliation as envisioned by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission requires an ongoing, concerted, practical effort in all areas of government, including child welfare, language, culture, education, justice and, indeed, health. It’s broader than one ministry, one issue, and it requires that federal, provincial and Indigenous governments work together collaboratively.

The response to COVID requires that co-operation consistently, so will the Minister of Health—the minister has already said that she is having ongoing conversations with First Nations. Mr. Speaker, I just want to make sure the minister will commit to a collaborative problem-solving effort with Indigenous and federal governments throughout this pandemic, because the needs are very different depending on whether you are in a dense Thunder Bay urban setting or on-reserve.

Hon. Christine Elliott: I absolutely agree with everything that the member has just said. That does need to be an open and collaborative relationship. I have been involved in teleconferences with a group of chiefs led by Regional Chief RoseAnne Archibald, and I remain more than willing to engage in future consultations because I do recognize that there are difference, whether people are living in urban areas or if they’re living in fly-in communities.

I know that there have been many inequities over the years that we are seeking to address, so I would be more than happy to engage in whatever meetings would be requested of me in this respect.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: A little over a year ago, the government introduced the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act. My question is to the Solicitor General. On January 1 of this year, the new provincially run model came into force. Speaker, the world has changed significantly since the rollout of this new animal welfare legislation, with our collective attention focusing on the many challenges that COVID-19 has been presenting. However, critical front-line public safety services, including animal welfare investigation and enforcement, must continue to

operate. It's nothing less than Ontarians expect and Ontarians deserve.

My question is, could the government provide an update on whether Ontario's new provincial animal welfare system is working to ensure that animals are being kept safe?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore and the parliamentary assistant.

1100

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I am very proud to answer this question on behalf of the government. Since establishing Ontario's provincial animal welfare system in January of this year, our dedicated team of animal welfare inspectors has been working tirelessly on the front lines while taking appropriate precautions to protect themselves from COVID-19.

Our government set a goal for this year of having 100 animal welfare inspectors across all corners of the province, and I am proud to share that we have made incredible progress on that front. This includes dedicated inspectors with sector-specific knowledge of agriculture and equine. I'm also pleased to report, and I know my friend Lynn Perrier, who is a dedicated animal advocate out there, will be very pleased to hear, that in the first half of the year Ontario animal welfare inspectors have conducted over 14,000 investigations and laid over 100 charges. Speaker, that's a record, and I know we can all be proud of that.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Speaker, through you, my thanks to the parliamentary assistant for the response on behalf of the government. It's reassuring to hear that Ontario's animal welfare system has been off to a strong start.

I understand that the government recently announced the formation of an advisory table to help inform these strengthened animal protection standards of care and other key regulations under the new PAWS Act. I know that Ontario is full of dedicated and knowledgeable advocates for our animals, including the Lincoln County Humane Society in my riding of Niagara West. As such, could the government please explain how exactly they intend to leverage the knowledge and skills as well as the expertise of these on-the-ground experts that they bring to the table?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I want to thank the member from Niagara West for this great question. I completely agree with the member that leveraging extensive knowledge of Ontario's animal experts is critical in advancing animal welfare across this province. This is a key area that I have been advocating for since before my time in the Ministry of the Solicitor General.

This multi-disciplinary table brings together organizations, including advocates, sheltering agencies, veterinarians, agriculture and industry partners, as well as law enforcement. These leading experts will help inform the work as we move forward in strengthening a wide variety of regulations, most notably the standards of care for our animals. And, Speaker, they've already started working. They held their first meeting last week.

I once again want to remind all Ontarians, particularly as we start in the colder weather as it approaches us, if you see an animal in distress, please call 1-833-9-ANIMAL.

FRONT-LINE WORKERS

Mr. Jeff Burch: Speaker, my question, through you, to the Minister of Health: Health care heroes working in hospitals in Niagara have been reaching out to my office in droves regarding an urgent situation. Under this government's supervision, as the second wave is upon us, the Ministry of Health has issued a directive to hospitals across Ontario to stop paying front-line hospital workers who self-report when they are exposed to COVID-19 and are forced to go into isolation.

This government talks about the hard work done by nurses, doctors, personal support workers and other front-line health care workers, correctly calling them heroes. Yet the actions of this government put them in an impossible situation, having to choose between reporting an exposure and feeding their family.

We are well into the second wave. Will this minister investigate, reverse this disgraceful directive and ensure that front-line health care workers in Ontario's hospitals receive their full pay when they are mandated by the employer to self-isolate due to COVID-19?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I can agree with the member opposite on one part of his question, but not on the second part. First, we do value the incredible contributions being made by our front-line health care workers, who go to work each and every day despite the rising numbers, despite some of the fears that some people have.

Interjection.

Hon. Christine Elliott: We have supplied them with the PPE—I heard that in the background—and they are there to serve. In some situations, though, they become ill or they are exposed to someone with COVID and they have to go into quarantine for 14 days.

What actually happened there was Ontario Health issued a recommendation to hospitals that employees in self-isolation for a possible exposure to COVID-19 continue to be paid. That recommendation was made by Ontario Health only to be implemented if the hospital believed it was necessary. I have certainly heard from others, including the Ontario Nurses' Association, that this is happening, that this is a concern of theirs because their employees aren't being paid for the time that they're being left away, so we are—

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

The supplementary question.

Mr. Jeff Burch: They were paid in the first wave; they're not being paid now. Those are the facts.

I've heard from employees who had to juggle their finances to cover mortgage payments because this government refuses to pay health care workers during a global pandemic. I've heard from other workers that previous sick pay they received was deemed an overpayment and

must be paid back. Local union reps tell me they are seeing a surge in retirements and staff shortages.

Health care workers are risking their safety to care for the people of this province, and it's absolutely shameful that this government will not even compensate them when they are exposed to COVID-19. Cases are rising and the risk is increasing, yet with holidays around the corner, this government has decided to cut corners on the backs of front-line health care workers.

I ask again, will the minister value health care workers in this province, treat them with the respect they deserve and ensure that when they are exposed to COVID-19 in the community or in the line of duty, they will continue to be paid?

Hon. Christine Elliott: We do value the work that's performed by our front-line health care workers. As I indicated, this was raised to me quite recently through the Ontario Nurses' Association, and it's something that we take very seriously. We want people to be paid for the work that they do, and if they're not able to work because of an exposure to someone that they are caring for, then that's a situation that we need to look into. We are working both with our hospital partners and with our nursing partners to find a solution to this, to make sure that people are going to be receiving the pay that they should be receiving except for the fact that they've had this accidental exposure to somebody with COVID-19 and have to be away from work for a period of time.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: My question is for the Premier. "One hundred per cent, it's not fair." That is what the Premier said when asked why big box stores like Walmart are staying open while small, independent businesses are forced to close. The Premier had little to say about health care driving his decision, but he told us about business logistics.

A study just last week from Stanford advised that a possible alternative was capacity limits for small businesses, not an all-or-nothing approach. Instead, the Premier is driving customers into Walmart, where everyone can congregate together in one place. Sounds like a good place to maximize the spread of an airborne virus, if you ask me.

Why is the Premier not treating small businesses fairly and letting them open as he is the big box stores?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Deputy Premier.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member for the question. This is a serious concern, and this was not a decision that was made lightly by any means, to put both Toronto and Peel region into this lockdown.

I know that there are going to be many people that are going to be badly hurt by this, but that's what COVID is doing. That is why we have to have these restrictions, hopefully for a short period of time, to start bending this curve so that they can come back, people can go back into

business again and be open. But this decision had to be made.

Small businesses, I know, are going to suffer considerably for this. That is why we're doubling the amount of economic protection we're bringing in for them from \$300 million to \$600 million. They can still receive online requests, telephone requests. They can still do business even though their stores are closed.

It's necessary in order to prevent further community transmission of this virus. It had to be done.

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

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Speaker, remember when the Premier used to say he was against the elites and for the little guy? Two years later, the elites are running the show as the Premier makes policy based on special advisers and after holding phone calls with the CEO of Walmart, who talked him into letting them open full-service while small business competitors couldn't even open under reduced capacity conditions.

The other advantage Walmart has over Ontario's small businesses is they can afford to hire lobbyists like they did in September, with Walmart hiring the Premier's former executive director David Tarrant and a member of the Premier's advisory council of lobbyists, Melissa Lantsman.

Can the Premier tell us if registered lobbying from big box stores had any impact on his decision to allow them to run full-service while closing down small businesses?

Hon. Christine Elliott: No, it did not, and I would like to say to the member, through you, Mr. Speaker, that is entirely unfair and entirely not the situation.

The situation is this: Some of those big box stores are staying open because they provide essential services, and that is the reason why. Many of them have pharmacies, many of them have food stores, grocery stores in them, whatever. We want people to be able to receive the essential services and keep the supply chain open. Those big box stores will be restricted. They will be operating at 50% capacity. The number of people within those stores is going to be limited. There's going to be the distancing outside as necessary, but it's absolutely essential that they remain open because they have those essential services.

It had nothing to do with anything else. Essential services is what we made those decisions on. Absolutely, those are the facts, and that is how those decisions were made and will continue to be made in the future: on the basis of the best health data that we have available.

1110

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My question is to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. During these challenging times, it has never been more important to encourage new industries to contribute to Ontario's economic recovery. Recent analysis shows that by using more domestic hydrogen, we could import less natural gas from countries such as the United States, which would

help keep energy dollars in our province and lead to spinoff benefits, such as the creation of more jobs.

I recently brought forward a motion calling for more attention to hydrogen technologies here in the province of Ontario.

It has been two years since the government released its Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan, and since then, new opportunities and challenges have emerged, such as the wide-reaching impacts of COVID-19, as well as new innovations and technologies.

I'm wondering if the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks could tell the House if the government is looking at the clean technology and hydrogen sectors and, if so, how this will aid in Ontario's economic recovery and addressing climate change.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Barrie–Innisfil and the parliamentary assistant.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I want to thank the member from Niagara West for his advocacy on the hydrogen sector and the motion he introduced.

Hydrogen is an area that we are actively exploring as a way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve air quality, while creating opportunities for industrial growth. I spoke about this very thing at the CUTRIC conference yesterday, the first one ever. Through, of course, our Ontario Jobs and Recovery Committee, the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks has met with many sectors, including the hydrogen sector, to support recovery efforts and develop a plan to stimulate our economy and growth. Our government sees tremendous potential for this new energy source. From fuelling trucks and ships, low-carbon hydrogen can also be used for industrial processes and energy storage, and it can be blended with the natural gas pipeline to heat and power homes and businesses.

We recently released a discussion paper for consultation about the use of hydrogen and the hydrogen strategy to both reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support the private sector when it comes to innovation in clean technologies across this province.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My thanks to the parliamentary assistant for that response.

As we strive to fully address the impacts of climate change, it is imperative that we also look at reducing emissions in the transportation sector, which generates about one third of Ontario's greenhouse gas emissions.

I find it a bit disconcerting that, on the one hand, the NDP like to talk a lot about the importance of addressing climate change and yet they fail to support any proposal that would put these words into action, as we've seen when they demonstrably voted against supporting public transit, by opposing the Building Transit Faster Act.

We need a government that is committed to supporting innovation and technology while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Could the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks commit today that this government will work to

drive innovative solutions, such as the exploration of options that use low-carbon hydrogen to reduce greenhouse gas emissions?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you to the member for that question.

Although hydrogen is not a new idea, it has re-emerged as an exciting and potential long-term way to address climate change, air quality, while creating opportunities for industrial growth. Our government envisions a hydrogen economy that can create more local jobs and attract investment, while helping us reduce greenhouse gas emissions using low-carbon hydrogen, especially in the transportation sector.

The discussion paper we released is the first step to begin a province-wide conversation on what Ontario's hydrogen economy could look like and the considerations we need to make to develop a practical and actionable strategy.

Speaker, Ontario is well positioned to drive economic growth in a low-carbon hydrogen economy. We look forward to building on existing strengths to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, attract investments and create jobs in different sectors and regions of this province.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Premier. Thirty-nine students and staff members at Begley elementary school in Windsor have tested positive for COVID-19, with an additional two probable cases. The school is closed as a result.

This is the largest school outbreak in Ontario. It's not a distinction that we want. The health and well-being of families and education workers are at risk. This devastating news has disrupted the education of hundreds of students and the livelihoods of their parents, who are now forced to stay home to facilitate their learning. Local teachers report that they are not aware of a single classroom at Begley from grades 4 to 8 that is capped at 15 students. Physical distancing is impossible and cohorting is haphazard.

This Conservative government's refusal to listen to experts is causing serious harm in our schools and our community. Will the Premier admit his plan is a failure and finally put measures in place to protect families?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: To protect our schools, to protect our seniors, to protect our most vulnerable, the Minister of Health and the Premier, just days ago, announced that the province is taking action, moving Toronto and Peel into lockdown-level restrictions, limiting social gatherings, taking action in other regions, moving them to higher levels of restriction.

Why? Why did we do that? We did that to protect what matters most to this province, which are our kids, our seniors and our most vulnerable. We will not apologize for acting in the public interest to limit community transmission, to do everything we possibly can, recognizing, as I

think we all honestly appreciate, the risk within our schools is a reflection of the risk within our community.

It is why we are acting province-wide in the context of our plan, fully endorsed by the Chief Medical Officer of Health and fully funded—\$1.3 billion, the highest in Canada. It is not a coincidence we have 2,700 more teachers. It's not a coincidence we have almost 1,200 net new custodians. We've put a plan in place. We've listened to the science, and we will continue to respond to the risk.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I just want to point out to the minister that I was talking about Windsor, not Toronto or Peel.

There is also an important equity issue here that the government continues to disregard. Windsor's medical officer of health, Dr. Ahmed, has rightly noted that this outbreak and school closure places a huge burden on families, many of whom are low-income and can't afford to miss work, or are newcomers and may not be able to facilitate learning at home.

With the health unit reporting that there have been 10 schools in Windsor-Essex with confirmed cases, I am extremely worried about the implications of further outbreaks for families in our community. Will the Premier finally do what parents, education workers and experts have been pleading for? Will he cap class sizes and implement the screening, testing and tracing needed so that parents can work and children can have a safe learning environment in Windsor and across Ontario?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. I think what should be noted as well, we see increasing rates of community transmission. There has been an incredible resolve and demonstration of collaboration within public health units in Windsor-Essex and the local school boards whom I've personally spoken to both in facilitating dialogue with them to ensure we do everything humanly possible to reduce outbreaks and reduce COVID transmission.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: But you're not.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Speaker, what I can assure the member opposite is, when you look at the actions being taken at the public health unit—they have immediately communicated with parents and they've sent testing into the school to provide that support for the kids and, as per my responsibilities as Minister of Education, those students immediately pivoted to online learning to ensure they continue to learn in a safe environment. We are taking action province-wide to reduce the risk, given that risk is rising in the community. But within our schools, a data point that I think should provide some element of confidence is that, today, 99.94% of students are COVID-free. We realize the risk is rising. We will continue to be there for our schools to keep them safe.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is for the Premier. In the first wave of COVID-19, health care workers showed up to protect all of us, and they're still doing that each and every day, taking personal risk as they face the front line.

And this was acknowledged with a \$4 pandemic pay—a temporary measure. Pandemic pay is long gone, but health care workers are still working diligently on the front lines. Many are exhausted, with the rates of COVID-19 transmission reaching new heights in our province every week, especially in hot spots.

Health care workers haven't gone through a first or a second wave; they've been working non-stop on the front lines since the pandemic began in this province. Instead, the province has insulted nurses and other provincially regulated health care workers by capping pay in increases at 1%, by removing their ability to collectively bargain their contracts.

Speaker, through you to the Premier: Will you show your acknowledgement of the high risks and the value of these exhausted workers who are doing this work in the face of COVID-19 by reintroducing \$4 pandemic pay through the end of the pandemic—

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

The response: the member for Willowdale, the parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Stan Cho: We certainly appreciate the hard work of our front-line workers throughout this pandemic. That's why we introduced measures to enhance pay. The member mentions pandemic pay, but we also need to continue to support those front-line workers who are hard at work out there throughout the second wave. That's why we are providing reasonable wage increases, while respecting taxpayer dollars, and investing in front-line services for the people of Ontario.

We're making sure that any future legislation doesn't impede the collective bargaining process, to make sure fair wages continue for this sector. That's why we responded with a \$45-billion financial package that provided significant support to countless Ontario families and businesses. These supports will continue until COVID-19 is in our rear-view mirror.

1120

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: The member opposite knows very well that this budget did not provide any significant and meaningful increases to our health care system.

After the missteps that Ontarians have experienced with this year's flu vaccine rollout, many will be relieved, seeing the planning that is out of the government's hands is now being overseen by a competent and decorated general. However, rolling out a vaccine doesn't just pose logistical challenges; there are social and economic challenges as well. This is particularly true in communities where there is hesitancy to take transit or to take time off work—they have no ability to take time off work with pay—for fear of losing a paycheque or a job that they can ill afford to lose.

Speaker, through you to the Premier: Does the government have a plan to make sure that vulnerable residents are not prevented from taking this vaccine because of the hurdles that they face due to COVID-19, and will you fund public health—

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

The Minister of Health to reply.

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member very much for the question. This is an important issue because we've been dealing with COVID for months and months now. This is the light at the end of the tunnel, the fact that we do have vaccines coming forward from both Pfizer and Moderna, and now AstraZeneca has one that's also about to come onto the market.

We need to make sure that we deal with this, dealing with all of the issues that are important here. That is why we have General Hillier. We're very proud to have him to lead our COVID vaccine task force. Minister Jones and I are going to be the responsible ministers, and we are going to be working with all of the local medical officers of health, working with all of the communities, to understand what the barriers are to people being able to receive the vaccine. We are going to work out all of those issues so that when the vaccine hits Ontario, we can get it into peoples' arms as quickly as possible and make all those barriers invisible so that people will be able to have access. Whether it's transportation, whether it's hesitation, whatever the issues are, we will work through them.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question this morning is for the Premier. There are over 100 outbreaks in long-term-care homes across the province right now. In my riding of Ancaster, an outbreak at Chartwell Willowgrove is continuing to grow. The cases have climbed to 79, and 15 people have tragically died. We share in the tremendous grief that families are feeling right now in Hamilton. We have enormous respect for everyone who has been working around the clock for months, but they can only do so much. They need help now.

Experts warned for months that without urgent action, the second wave of COVID-19 would be disastrous—but this government continues to dither with task forces and studies that you don't listen to, while the deaths in long-term care are climbing.

Speaker, this is a crisis. Homes have been asking for months for a clear plan from this government. So where is the plan? When will we see the urgent action that this crisis in long-term care demands?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Long-Term Care.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. There is no question that there is a sense of urgency, and there has been a sense of urgency right from the beginning. This is an integrated response by multiple ministries, multiple experts, our scientific and our medical experts.

Specific to Willowgrove, there are currently 15 resident cases there, and it is improving.

I want to correct my record from earlier when I referenced 92%: 92% of our homes have no resident cases. I just hoped to correct that record.

What we know is that we have an invisible invader called COVID-19 that is ravaging the world. Ontario is not unique. We are taking every measure, whether it's looking at the IPAC, the capacity in our homes, the staffing, the stabilization of our staffing, the ward rooms—all of these measures are ongoing to address, and we have not stopped. We've put dollars behind these. Over \$1 billion for our long-term-care homes, and we'll continue to provide the resources that are—

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

And the supplementary question.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I would like to remind the minister that those 15 people aren't cases: Those were 15 deaths—deaths of our loved ones, not cases.

It has been eight months, and homes have been asking for months for a plan, but still nothing from this government.

The two hospitals in Hamilton managed to plan and act on the transformation of a hotel in Hamilton into a satellite facility to treat patients during this second wave of COVID-19, and yet still nothing from this government. There is no new money in your recent budget for long-term care, no plan, and certainly no new money to hire additional staff in long-term care.

It didn't have to be this way. Instead of trying to save money, you could have been saving lives. The Premier's iron ring never happened; we all know that. Staff are exhausted, families are frightened and our seniors are left vulnerable.

My question: Why is this government unable, or apparently unwilling, to urgently do all it takes to save the lives of our loved ones, seniors and residents in long-term care?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Our hearts go out to everyone who has been impacted. As a physician for almost 30 years, dealing with life and death and grief, I fully understand.

Our government is putting every measure in place, including the \$243 million put out to shore up staffing initially, the \$405 million to shore up infection prevention and control and staffing supports, the \$61.4 million in capital repairs, the \$461 million to support our PSWs with improved wages, the \$30 million to train and hire IPAC specialists, the \$14 million for PSW training funds, the \$10.3 million for return of service, the \$26.3 million future support for PSWs, and the monumental four hours of direct care, on average, per day per resident.

Our government is the first government to take long-term care seriously and fix a broken system.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

M^{me} Lucille Collard: My question is for the Minister of Colleges and Universities. Even before the pandemic, more than two thirds of Ontario's post-secondary students had experienced overwhelming anxiety. Over half of students had difficulty functioning due to depression, and 16% of students had seriously considered suicide.

This pandemic has added to the stress and worry of our students, isolating them from their social circles and putting them in difficult financial situations. Speaker, the mental health of our post-secondary students is in a crisis, and students often have difficulty accessing mental health services, having to wait on average three to four weeks to see a councillor. Our post-secondary students need our help.

What is the government doing now to provide post-secondary students with the mental health services that they desperately need?

Hon. Ross Romano: I'm really happy to be able to respond to that question. Our government obviously recognizes the importance of mental health, and we've indicated numerous times that mental health is health. We recognize the importance of so many areas within this, and I am so very terribly concerned when we hear about some of the concerns we see on our campuses. Some of the issues that have arisen over the course of COVID have been really difficult for so many students.

I really want to take an opportunity to say some real positive reinforcement and tip my hat to all of our professors and our faculty across the sector who have done an incredible job. When we first ended up in COVID, so many of them had to work to personalize course content to try to make that easier for students. They had to find ways to connect with students to support mental health. I want to speak in the supplemental more specifically to some of the initiatives of our government, but I really want to take this opportunity to speak about our faculty and our professors who did an amazing job at the outset in order to connect with their students to try to really support them and their mental health throughout the initial stages of COVID.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Speaker, college and university students have also seen their post-graduation job opportunities diminish or even vanish as a result of this pandemic. The government helped to address this issue earlier this year, implementing a six-month moratorium on student loan repayments to give students more time to find a job post-graduation in this tough economic environment.

However, while the pandemic continues to limit job opportunities for new graduates, that moratorium on student loan repayments expired back in September. Last week, I met with student leaders from Ontario's post-secondary institutions and they are asking that the government give graduates more time to find well-paying employment before requiring them to repay their student loans, as well as more mental health services.

1130

Can the minister explain why the moratorium on student-loan repayments has not been extended to support our graduates as they transition to the workforce?

Hon. Ross Romano: Just to continue on to some of the previous comments I was making, with respect to mental health in our institutions: Our government, as you're well aware, made a historic investment into mental health of

\$3.8 billion over the next 10 years. With respect to some of those specific funding amounts as they relate to colleges and universities, we made some direct supports of \$19.25 million this past year, which was an increase of \$3.25 million over last year.

A program I am really excited about is the Good2Talk texting support program, which is a \$5.6-million investment that we provided this year. Good2Talk is one of the most exceptional programs I've been able to see, especially as we've been relating with COVID. For so many individuals, for so many students out there, it's so difficult to make that first connection, especially when students weren't on campuses, and, for a lot, to be able to text for the first time and then get the supports they're after and be connected with a mental health service provider was so exceptional for students.

I think what we really have to stress is we want students to talk more; we want everybody to talk more about their mental health so we can learn more.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Faisal Hassan: As case counts skyrocket in communities across the province, the need for quick and accurate testing is more important than ever. Unfortunately for the people of Ontario, the minister has chosen not to deploy their rapid tests, instead choosing to sit on them for months. Communities like mine in York South-Weston are desperate for resources like these.

Can the minister tell me how many rapid tests the province has in its possession now and why they have not been deployed?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member very much for the question. You're absolutely right, the rapid tests are, as the Premier said, a game-changer, because they're needed in so many different communities and in places like long-term-care homes, in some of the more remote communities in Ontario and in many other locations.

I can advise that we have received 98,000 of the Abbott ID NOW tests, we have 1.2 million of the Panbio tests, and they have been deployed to a number of hospitals, long-term-care homes and other areas of congregate living. They are being deployed now and will be used within the next few days.

I will be having more to say about that at 1 p.m. this afternoon.

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

Mr. Faisal Hassan: It is not acceptable to sit on these tests while people get sick, while communities like mine face devastation. Families, workers and all Ontarians deserve better.

I ask again, Mr. Speaker, why has the government spent one long month sitting on these rapid tests, not using them to identify cases and keep people safe?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I would say to the member opposite, through you, Mr. Speaker, that we have not been sitting on the tests; we have been actively moving them and deploying them to the places where they are needed

the most. We know that we are dealing with situations where people want to visit relatives in long-term-care homes and that the staff need to be tested. The Minister of Long-Term Care has indicated that, in areas of the high-risk zones, people are going to be tested weekly. These rapid tests are going to be greatly helpful for that, as well as for the people who are going to be visiting the homes.

We also need them in our hospitals. That's where they are being deployed right now, and, as soon as we receive more supplies through the federal government, we will be sending them to more hospitals and more long-term-care homes.

The need is urgent, we recognize that, and we are moving these tests very quickly.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa South has a point of order.

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to seek unanimous consent to remove schedule 2 from Bill 213.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa South is seeking unanimous consent of the House to remove schedule 2 from Bill 213. Agreed? I heard some noes.

DEFERRED VOTES

BETTER FOR PEOPLE, SMARTER FOR BUSINESS ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020

POUR MIEUX SERVIR LA POPULATION ET FACILITER LES AFFAIRES

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 213, An Act to reduce burdens on people and businesses by enacting, amending and repealing various Acts and revoking a regulation / *Projet de loi 213, Loi visant à alléger le fardeau administratif qui pèse sur la population et les entreprises en édictant, modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois et en abrogeant un règlement.*

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bells will now ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes. I will ask the Clerks to prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1137 to 1207.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote was held on the motion for second reading of Bill 213, An Act to reduce burdens on people and businesses by enacting, amending and repealing various Acts and revoking a regulation.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 56; the nays are 31.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, referred to the Standing Committee on General Government.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): It's referred to the Standing Committee on General Government.

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

The House recessed from 1207 to 1500.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received a report on intended appointments dated November 24, 2020, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 111(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

62 GRIMSBY PHANTOM SQUADRON SPONSORING COMMITTEE ACT (TAX RELIEF), 2020

Mr. Oosterhoff moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr38, An Act respecting 62 Grimsby Phantom Squadron Sponsoring Committee

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 89, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

2257248 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2020

Ms. Triantafilopoulos moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr35, An Act to revive 2257248 Ontario Inc.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 89, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

PETITIONS

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas optometrists now subsidize the delivery of OHIP-covered eye care by \$173 million a year; and

“Whereas COVID-19 forced optometrists to close their doors, resulting in a 75%-plus drop in revenue; and

“Whereas optometrists will see patient volumes reduced between 40% and 60%, resulting in more than two million comprehensive eye exams being wiped out over the next 12 months; and

“Whereas communities across Ontario are in danger of losing access to optometric care;

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

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately establish a timetable and a process for renewed negotiations concerning optometry fees.”

I sign the petition and I will give it over to one of the ushers.

COMMUNITY PLANNING

Mr. Aris Babikian: Before I read the petition, I would like to recognize or thank the 231 residents of Scarborough–Aincourt who signed today’s petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Green Bud Inc. has applied to the AGCO to obtain a licence to open a cannabis retail store at 63 Silver Star Boulevard, unit C6;

“Whereas the store mentioned above is located at a close proximity to:

“—Yahu Community Association of Canada (dance programs for youth aged five to 12) 63 Silver Star Boulevard, units E2 and E3;

“—Music of May (music lessons for youth aged five to 12) 63 Silver Star Boulevard, unit D3;

“—Toronto Chinese Christian Short Term Mission Training Centre, 63 Silver Star Boulevard, unit D6;

“—Scarborough Community Alliance Church (youth and seniors programs) 139 Silver Star Boulevard;

“—Scarborough Community Alliance Church (youth and seniors programs) 135 Silver Star Boulevard;

“—Scarborough Chinese Baptist Church (youth and seniors program) 3223 Kennedy Road;

“—Sylvan Learning Centre (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3320 Midland Avenue, units 201-203;

“—Brainchild Education Centre (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3320 Midland Avenue, units 205 and 218;

“—Light and Love Home in Toronto (seniors program) 3320 Midland Avenue, units 215-216 and 223-225;

“—Scholars 101 Education Centre (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3320 Midland Avenue, unit 120;

“—Positive Tutorial School (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3300 Midland Avenue, unit 211;

“—Iron Tutor (children and youth programs ages five to 15) 3300 Midland Avenue, suites 208 and 218;

“—Tamarack Day Care Centre, 3315 Midland Avenue;

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

“To disallow the opening of Green Bud Inc. at 63 Silver Star Boulevard, unit C6, due to the potential health and safety risk it poses to youth, children, tenants, and seniors. Furthermore, this location is not in the interest of the public.”

I endorse this petition. I will affix my signature to it.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Jill Andrew: This petition is called “Petition for Eating Disorder Awareness Week in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas as of 2016 there are an estimated one million people suffering from” EDs “in Canada;

“Whereas the mental health system in Ontario is fragmented and is failing to provide the necessary supports to those suffering;

“Whereas eating disorders have the highest mortality rates of any mental illness;

“Whereas an estimated 75% of young people suffering from mental illness in Ontario do not receive treatment...;

“Whereas the 2016 Ontario’s Auditor General reported that the past Liberal government spent \$10 million sending 127 youth to the United States for services not offered in Ontario...;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 61, Eating Disorders Awareness Week Act, 2018, that would make the week beginning February 1 in each year Eating Disorders Awareness Week...”

Thank you very, very much. I fully, fully agree, and I will affix my signature.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: I have a petition to save eye care in Ontario, signed by 200 constituents of mine.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas optometrists now subsidize the delivery of OHIP-covered eye care by \$173 million a year; and

“Whereas COVID-19 forced optometrists to close their doors, resulting in a 75%-plus drop in revenue; and

1510

“Whereas optometrists will see patient volumes reduced between 40% and 60%, resulting in more than two million comprehensive eye exams being wiped out over the next 12 months; and

“Whereas communities across Ontario are in danger of losing access to optometric care;

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

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately establish a timetable and a process for renewed negotiations concerning optometry fees.”

I agree with this petition and affix my signature.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Jamie West: This petition is entitled “Increase Grants Not Loans, Access for All, Protect Student Rights.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas students in Ontario pay some of the highest tuition fees in the country and carry the heaviest debt loads, even with the recently announced 10% reduction; and

“Whereas many students will now be forced to take on more loans rather than previously available non-repayable grants; and

“Whereas the Ontario government has failed to take action on the chronic underfunding of colleges and universities; and

“Whereas students must have an autonomous voice that is independent of administration and government to advocate on our behalf; and

“Whereas the proposed ‘Student Choice Initiative’ undermines students’ ability to take collective action;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“—provide more grants, not loans;

“—eliminate tuition fees for all students;

“—increase public funding for public education;

“—protect students’ independent voices; and

“—defend the right to organize.”

I want to thank Laurentian University for collecting these signatures. I’ll affix my signature and provide it to the Clerk.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I have a petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas every child with autism deserves access to sufficient treatment and support so that they can live to their fullest potential;

“Whereas the Ontario Autism Program was badly broken under the Liberals, and the changes introduced by the Conservatives have made it worse;

“Whereas the new funding caps are based on age and income, and not the clinical needs of the child;

“Whereas Ontario needs a true investment in evidence-based autism services that meets the needs of autistic children and their families;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to invest in equitable, needs-based autism services for all children who need them.”

Thank you. I support this petition, add my signature and take it to the usher to deliver to the desk.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Doly Begum: I have a “Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas optometrists now subsidize the delivery of OHIP-covered eye care by \$173 million a year; and

“Whereas COVID-19 forced optometrists to close their doors, resulting in a 75%-plus drop in revenue; and

“Whereas optometrists will see patient volumes reduced between 40% and 60%, resulting in more than two million comprehensive eye exams being wiped out over the next 12 months; and

“Whereas communities across Ontario are in danger of losing access to optometric care;

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

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately establish a timetable and a process for renewed negotiations concerning optometry fees.”

I fully support this petition, Mr. Speaker, will assign my signature to it and give it to one of the ushers.

WOMEN’S ISSUES

Ms. Jill Andrew: This petition is called “Fighting for Ontario’s Women.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas years of Liberal inaction on the things that matter, like child care and closing the gender pay gap, has made life harder and more expensive for women and families in Ontario;

“Whereas Conservative cuts to shelters, transitional housing and supports for women fleeing violence, the rollback of the minimum wage, and the firing of thousands of teachers and nurses overwhelmingly hurts Ontario women;

“Whereas Ontario women and families deserve better than a government that takes things from bad to worse. They deserve a government that’s fighting for them and is on their side;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to call on the government to reverse their cuts to the services that women and families rely on and start putting women at the centre of every decision they make.”

I couldn’t agree more. I will sign my signature and hand it over to the usher for tabling.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I have yet another petition on the same issue, from a different group this time.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas optometrists now subsidize the delivery of OHIP-covered eye care by \$173 million a year; and

“Whereas COVID-19 forced optometrists to close their doors, resulting in a 75%-plus drop in revenue; and

“Whereas optometrists will see patient volumes reduced between 40% and 60%, resulting in more than two million comprehensive eye exams being wiped out over the next 12 months; and

“Whereas communities across Ontario are in danger of losing access to optometric care;

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

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately establish a timetable and a process for renewed negotiations concerning optometry fees.”

I sign the petition and give it to the usher.

INJURED WORKERS

Mr. Jamie West: A petition to the Legislative Assembly: “Workers’ Comp is a Right.”

“Whereas about 200,000 to 300,000 people in Ontario are injured on the job every year;

“Whereas over a century ago, workers in Ontario who were injured on the job gave up the right to sue their employers, in exchange for a system that would provide them with just compensation;

“Whereas decades of cost-cutting have pushed injured workers into poverty and onto publicly funded social assistance programs, and have gradually curtailed the rights of injured workers;

“Whereas injured workers have the right to quality and timely medical care, compensation for lost wages and protection from discrimination;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to change the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act to accomplish the following for injured workers in Ontario:

“Eliminate the practice of ‘deeming’ or ‘determining,’ which bases compensation on phantom jobs that injured workers do not actually have;

“Ensure that the WSIB prioritizes and respects the medical opinions of the health care providers who treat the injured worker directly;

“Prevent compensation from being reduced or denied based on ‘pre-existing conditions’ that never affected the worker’s ability to function prior to the work injury.”

I support this petition, will affix my signature and provide it to the Clerk.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to thank the family council network for their advocacy on the 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 acuity and the growing number of ... 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 of four hours per resident per day, adjusted for acuity level and case mix.”

I fully support this petition, sign it and pass it to the usher to deliver to the table.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank the Ontario Federation of Labour for this petition entitled “Don’t Take Away Social and Economic Rights for Women and Marginalized People.”

“Whereas Bill 47 erased many of the legislative gains achieved through Bill 148, the fairer labour laws and working conditions that had a particularly positive impact on women and marginalized people;

“Whereas statistics show that women, particularly women of colour, are most likely to be employed in precarious work, and the Bill 47 amendments to the Employment Standards Act, 2000 and Labour Relations Act, 1995 create conditions that lead to a growth in precarious employment while also eliminating protections for millions of Ontario workers;

“Whereas Bill 66 further erodes women’s and marginalized people’s social and economic rights; and

“Whereas the Ford government continues to remove, cancel or freeze funding for other supports, programs and regulations that would increase women’s equality in the workforce and beyond;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to....

“—reinstate paid sick days, the scheduled increase to a \$15 minimum wage, legislation to increase pay transparency, regulations that support equal pay for equal work, and all other worker protections gained under the Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act;

“—reverse changes to daycare regulations that allow more children per caregiver;

“—reverse the retroactive cuts to funding for the Ontario College of Midwives;

“—reinstate funding increases to sexual assault centres;

“—restore the round table on violence against women; and

“—restore the child and youth advocate commissioner’s office.”

I support this petition. I'll affix my signature and provide it to the Clerk.

1520

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 24, 2020, on the motion for time allocation of the following bill:

Bill 213, An Act to reduce burdens on people and businesses by enacting, amending and repealing various Acts and revoking a regulation / *Projet de loi 213, Loi visant à alléger le fardeau administratif qui pèse sur la population et les entreprises en édictant, modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois et en abrogeant un règlement.*

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I know that my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo wants to speak to this as well, so I'm going to leave some time on the clock for her.

There are a couple of points that I would like to make regarding Bill 213 and the time allocation. First of all, on the issue of time allocation: It's an omnibus bill that deals with quite a few schedules that change a number of things, and you'd think the government would have taken the time to give adequate time for the public to have its say. I've made this point before, and I'm not going to belabour it all day today, but it really doesn't serve the public well, it doesn't serve this Legislature well, when we don't give adequate time for the public, first of all, to be informed that there are going to be hearings and that the hearings are going to have X number of days—to allow those particular hearings to happen. Giving short shift to the amount of time that the people of Ontario get in order to even know this is on the radar, that it's going to committee—by the time they find out it has gone to committee, often, the way these time allocation motions are written, you end up with, the bill is already dealt with at committee and people are finding out after the fact.

When I first got here, there was always adequate time between the time of second reading and third reading for people to have a bill go to a committee and to have their say, and that strengthened the legislative process. It gave members a larger ability to do their jobs—because members go back to their stakeholder groups or they go back to their ridings and talk to those people and say, “By the way, this particular bill that deals with subject matter X, whatever it is, is coming before committee. I know that you've contacted our office about these issues before. If you want to present, please contact the Clerk of the Committee in order to be able to present.” People would come before the committee and have their say. Members got an opportunity to do their job. And then when we got to clause-by-clause, which is where you amend bills once you're in committee and committees finish taking hearings, we actually had some meaningful discussion and meaningful amendments, more so than we have today—because now it's very quickly that bills go through the

House, and often things are in bills and not flagged because the public doesn't get a chance to participate the way they used to, especially those people in the public and organizations that are directly affected by the legislation in question. So that's the first thing.

One of the sections in this bill deals with insurance and liability of insurance. One of the things that we could have tried to do in this bill, if we had proper time in committee—and I've checked, in fact, it is within the scope of this particular bill to do so—is to find a way to make sure that small businesses and small contractors are not refused insurance or put into the facility market in a way that is as easy as it is now. Many contractors and many businesses—and all of our constituency offices and MPPs are getting the same calls—are finding that they're not able to renew their insurance in order to be able to do the business that they did the year before.

For example, I got calls from contractors in my riding who do snow removal. There are a number of contractors who have machines that they use in the summer in order to do excavation and roadwork—different things that need to be done in the summer when it comes to construction—and some of that equipment could be repurposed in the winter in order to be able to do snow removal. So they go to the hospital, they go to the school board, they go to the city—they deal with various public and private owners of property in order to offer their services. One of the things that the insurance companies did this year, they said, “Unless you have revenue of \$750,000 a year, we will not insure you.” Well, that disqualifies a whole bunch of small independent contractors who utilize the winter as a way of being able to supplement their income and keep themselves into business throughout the summer. Because the summer season is not long enough for them to properly make the kind of living that they should, pay down their equipment, do the repairs that have to be done and have the revenue for that, they use snow removal as one of the ways to be able to build up their business so that they can afford to maintain their equipment, pay their staff and do what has to be done.

Imagine these small contractors that are told, “No, you can't get insurance because you're not a big guy.” So now, what we've got are insurance companies that are essentially telling us that unless you're a big, large multinational, you shouldn't do business in Ontario—or a big, large national or a big, large corporation in Ontario. I don't think that's right. I think all of us understand that small businesses are the backbone of our economy, and we need to find ways of being able to support those particular businesses in a way that allows them to keep their doors open.

I think that's the overall criticism that I would have with this particular Bill 213. What we end up with is that the government put this bill forward as a way of being able to deal with some of the challenges that all of us face when it comes to the COVID crisis. I think all of us understand there are challenges and that we need to find ways of being able to reduce some of those challenges for individuals, businesses and institutions. But the government has got far

more inside this legislation that has absolutely nothing to do with COVID and has everything to do with what they believe in as far as their own ideological beliefs of what should or shouldn't happen in Ontario. Plus, we haven't dealt with some of the real issues that businesses and others have raised with us when it comes to supporting the small business sector. And that goes without saying.

One more point I want to make, and this is in regard to the schedule 2 that the government has in the bill. I listened intently yesterday as the debate was ongoing here in the Legislature on the opposition day motion. Interestingly, the government, for whatever reason, did not muster up the votes in order to defeat that motion, so I have to read from that that the government is not completely solid behind the Premier's proposal.

The first thing is that what's troubling with what the government is trying to do here is that you have this Christian college that's trying to get university status to be able to grant degrees. It turns out that this particular college and this particular individual who runs the college—he essentially worked on behalf of now Premier Ford's election campaign as party leader and ran a voting station within his premises. Now, you don't have to believe in conspiracy theories to understand that there is obviously some kind of relationship between the Premier and this particular Christian college and the individual, Mr. McVety. And so, just on the level of that, that the government would bring in a bill that allows degree-granting status to be given to this institution is troubling, just on the basis of that alone.

But the government is moving forward. They're sending this bill into committee. Unless their plan is to, once we get to clause-by-clause, withdraw schedule 2—and I hope that is the case. Maybe they will. I doubt it, but maybe they will. It should be withdrawn just on the basis of that.

Imagine if I was a member of the government and I was to do that and the Tories were in opposition. They'd be swinging off these chandeliers, Mr. Speaker. I remember Tories in opposition. They were really good at swinging off chandeliers. They would be making the accusation that there's a quid pro quo between the government—in this case, the Premier—and the actual proponent who's going to actually get degree-granting status. I don't think that's a big leap, quite frankly. On the basis of that, I think the government should rethink where it's at.

The other part of this is that the government, in its argument yesterday, said, "Oh, yes, but this legislation—don't worry. It's only once they go through the PEQAB process and there's a recommendation to allow them the status to grant degrees that this legislation will kick in." Well, no. If you read the legislation, the commencement clause says upon "proclamation"—like whenever the government decides. So it's not outside of the realm of possibility that the government decides to do this no matter what PEQAB does.

1530

But here's the point: The government talks about process and says, "Oh, we're just following the process,"

and, "Allow PEQAB to do its thing," and that this legislation will grant them the degree status should they make it through the PEQAB process. This assembly, this Legislature, retains the right to say yes or no to any proposal made by the public or made by an agency such as PEQAB. We, as a government and as a Legislature, don't have to accept a recommendation by PEQAB. If this Legislature feels that it's wrong to do so, this Legislature can decide not to grant university status to this institution and it would be perfectly within its right, because that's how the Legislature works.

In fact, we do it all the time. The government, for example, didn't like the process that the Liberals put in place in order to accelerate and pass certain green projects—windmills and others—in Ontario, and one of the first things that the government did when it came to this House was to pass legislation that undid previous deals that the Liberals had put in place in regard to certain wind projects here in Ontario. I don't agree with what they did, but they utilized the power of their majority in this Legislature to do differently than what the government previously had decreed they wanted to have done.

So for the government to argue, "We're just following process," like you've got to follow the process and you need to respect the process—this government in its very own actions since coming to office has not followed process when it comes to all kinds of things, such as what happened with those particular wind energy projects that were cancelled at the beginning or the change to the elections in the city of Toronto, when the city of Toronto was in the middle of a municipal election and the provincial government, under the Premier, decided to change the electoral system. In the middle of an election, they utilized their parliamentary majority in order to change what the electoral process of the day was.

This government can't have it both ways. They can't argue, "Oh, we're only following process." They only follow process when they want to. They're not following process, quite frankly, in all cases. In fact, very little do they follow process when it comes to what they want to do.

The Conservatives have demonstrated under Premier Ford and this cabinet and this caucus that once they decide that, ideologically, they've got to move in a certain direction, they will break a process or they will create their own process in order to get to where they've got to go and utilize their parliamentary majority to get there.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, I just have to rise and use the remaining time that we have as members of this Legislature to express my firm disdain for the government in terms of bringing forward schedule 2 as part of Bill 213 under the cover of COVID—just so that you can pay back a favour to the Premier's friend. It's just wrong.

I'm standing on this side of the House with so many people who have stood up for these issues. Whether it's Islamophobia or homophobia, hatred in any form is wrong. We should not be supporting that through

legislation. I just wanted to put that on record for Bill 213. I will be voting against it.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: The last time I stood in this House to speak to Bill 213, which, ironically, is called the Better for People, Smarter for Business Act, it was to do the one-hour lead. That just happened a short time ago. I raised a number of concerns with the disconnect between the title of this bill and what is contained within this bill if the goal is actually to address, really, the deficit of leadership on the business file to date in the province of Ontario, given our current state of pandemic with COVID-19.

As you know, I've been on this file since the very beginning. I think I've written more letters to the finance minister, the Minister of Economic Development, even the Minister of Education and, of course, of late, to the minister of the PSE file, the post-secondary institutions, than I actually have ever done so. Because the feedback from my community of Waterloo, where we have two excellent post-secondary educational institutions, the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier, and Conestoga College—which, of course, you will know that my children actually attend.

One is apprenticing as an electrician and one is studying visual merchandising. One of them goes to the basement in the morning and one of them goes to the attic in the course of the day. I tell them to have a good commute on the way to school every day, because everything is online.

But coming from a riding like Waterloo, where education standards—this is a community that's been described as a barn-raising community because people come together. They pool their knowledge, they apply that knowledge and then they make lives better.

I have to say, the feedback on Bill 213 has been astounding, mostly, of course, as you will know, from schedule 2, but also from a very high-tech, business-oriented community that was looking towards this government for some leadership through this legislation. So the fact that feedback is still coming in to me as the member of provincial Parliament for that riding and the government is time-allocating Bill 213 and fast-tracking it, accelerating it—in spite of the fact that yesterday, a motion passed in this Legislature condemning schedule 2 of Bill 213.

This morning, earlier in the scrums, I was asked, "Were you surprised by that?" I said, "I recognize that my colleagues, who I have served in this House now for eight years—many have been squirming under the fact that we have been addressing the state of affairs with schedule 2, the special interest and treatment of Mr. Charles McVety, in the middle of a health and economic crisis in the province of Ontario." People from Waterloo, quite rightly, have asked me, "Why is this a priority for this government?" And I have no good answer for them, which is a sad state of affairs because the government, in turn, also cannot answer that question.

So yesterday, under the leadership of our leader and, of course, the member from Kitchener Centre, who took the

lead on our opposition day motion, which really called out the government for embedding schedule 2 into Bill 213, which is not better for people and smarter for business—that motion, I was so proud of my colleagues, I have to tell you. These are pretty tough times, and if you are a very connected MPP with your constituents, you hear on a regular basis from people who are losing their businesses, who are losing their homes, who have lost their child care, who are wondering how they're going to make ends meet at the end of the month. These are the pressing concerns of the people of Ontario, and this government really laid bare their priorities by putting schedule 2 and giving special treatment to Mr. Charles McVety.

And you know what? I have asked several questions, as has my good friend and colleague from Kitchener Centre. When you look at what this particular individual has said—it is a matter of public record—about our Muslim community, about our trans community, about our LGBTQ community, and ignoring the overt and harmful comments of racism by this one individual who heads up the Christian college and now is looking to be able to grant science degrees, for some reason, this government, in some back room, decided that this was a priority, right here and right now in the history of this province, is quite astounding to most people.

So my office has been inundating me with their concerns. They have many concerns, also including the budget and the gaps in that budget. But Bill 213 is couched as a red tape reduction bill. I can tell you right now, the primary interest of the small and medium enterprises in Ontario is: Where is the government?

There was an announcement of \$300 million. They announced \$300 million is coming for five weeks. Five weeks, businesses called my offices: "How do we access this money? What are the rules of engagement? Where is this portal that I can have this one-stop shopping in? And why is this Premier consistently talking about how important we are, and then not validating that importance with action?"

1540

Most of us would be here day and night to try to create a better position for this province to respond to the economic crisis and the public health crisis, and for some unknown reason, the government has literally turned a blind eye to the fact that one's public health and the public health measures are directly connected and tied to our economic prosperity. Bill 213 was one of the pillars of the plan that they rolled out. I'm not sure who's writing these press releases for the government. People in this province are not interested in little dribs and drabs. They need to see a vision, and they need to have confidence in the government that the money will flow.

Right now, I'm in correspondence with a business owner from Waterloo. His name is Ryan. I've asked questions on his behalf a number of times. He has thus far been designated as a movie theatre, a casino and a water park.

So the clarity around who can be open and who cannot be open in the province is a real challenge for businesses, who are trying to navigate, obviously, their very survival.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business, yesterday, called the fact that Walmart and Costco can have all of these non-essential items for sale and be open—and massive lines. I don't know, Mr. Speaker, if you've seen the lines outside some of these big box stores, but it is not to any kind of health code. This sense of panic has really been created by this government, by not rolling out in a very systemic and clear way the rules of engagement and how you navigate this public health crisis.

I think that most of us are now very familiar with the main street businesses that have been suffering. They suffered through the first lockdown. This is why the anger and the emotion is so high in the second lockdown—because the government learned nothing from that first lockdown. When you have big box stores open, where people can buy flowers, books and TVs, and you're shutting down and locking down these small businesses in Peel and in Toronto, the double standard is absolutely heartbreaking for businesses. If you watch the news, if you pay attention, these small and medium-sized enterprises are at the breaking point, because they see people moving forward with their lives and shopping at big box stores.

And to have the Premier say in a press conference yesterday, “Well, I took a call from the president of Walmart, and he says we have to stay open”—in what world, in what democracy would the Premier of a province openly admit that he is taking orders from the CEO of Walmart? How does that inspire confidence in the direction that the province is going?

Why time-allocate a piece of legislation like Bill 213? Why even craft a piece of legislation like Bill 213, with a poison pill for special interests like Charles McVety in it? I've said this in the past—and much ado was made about the fact that the Premier gave these little desk ornaments to every new PC MPP that said, “For the people.” It didn't say, “For Walmart.” It didn't say, “For big box stores.” It didn't say, “Big corporations first.”

Most MPPs, I would think, have some kind of connection to their main street businesses. They know that those people have mortgaged their homes. They know that they have sacrificed time with family. They know that they have put their heart and their soul into those businesses. And then to roll out a lockdown twice—and for Peel and for Toronto, this is especially hurtful, because people are actually just moving outside of those zones, as well. To see people posting pictures of getting flowers and books and TVs during the middle of a pandemic, while Main Street is shuttered up, is actually a very emotional point for those businesses—and I know that I'm not the only one who is hearing this.

I want to thank the CFIB for raising the point that you have inherently built in an unfair, unlevel playing field, and you have knowingly done it. To see Bill 213, which is supposed to be an economic recovery bill, come to the floor of the Legislature, move through very, very quickly, Mr. Speaker—most of Ontario is really just catching up to this—and you've got this very loud noise factor with the Charles McVety special interest component, that does not build confidence in our economy or in the state of our

public health. These mixed messages are very damaging, I would argue, for the people of this province. Most of us are hearing this. I know that my colleagues on the PC side are hearing this as well.

Then to have our motion passed yesterday—we should be very happy that it passed, because it was a recognition that the government was going in the wrong direction. Only 27 PC MPPs showed up to support the direction of the government. The rest stayed in their offices, but they did come out later on to vote for the budget. This sends, I would argue, a very harmful message to people in Ontario.

I understand that some members are very uncomfortable with this direction. But I would say that when we take an oath to serve the people of this province—we all take it—we take it on whatever religious book that we honour. We actually say a prayer every morning in this House. We're called to put the interests of others before our own interests. We're called to this kind of service by saying that we are going to make sure that our intentions here are in the interests of the people of the province of Ontario.

In no way, shape or form does including schedule 2 in Bill 213 benefit the people of this province. In fact, we have successfully argued that it is quite damaging to the people of this province. It is not a priority, not in a pandemic or any other time, and nobody is buying what the minister for post-secondary institutions is saying about procedural fairness. No one is buying it. He should stop selling it. It's a non-starter.

All we are left with right now is a government who supported the motion condemning schedule 2, and today, they are accelerating that motion. That is how disrespectful the PC government is to the people of this province. When you actually vote in support by perhaps not showing up, abstaining your vote—I don't know; it happens in this House. But the fact that that motion passed yesterday in a public debate, open and transparent, and yet today the government has called and accelerated and time-allocated Bill 213—it's really a long list now of events that demonstrate your disdain for the people of this province.

I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that by the time the people—we're hearing delegations on this bill on Friday and Monday of this week, and they have until 5 o'clock tomorrow to register. That is the disdain that you have for our democracy. I would say that right now, the state of our economy is in great disrepair. I would argue that the moral compass, if there ever was one with this government, is broken. And I would argue, and successfully so, that time-allocating Bill 213 with schedule 2 contained within it is a breach of trust that I think you will pay for in a long time coming.

I'm going to cede the rest of my time to the member from Toronto—St. Paul's.

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

Ms. Jill Andrew: I just wanted to put on record Eleanor, who I've spoken about in this House before—she is the small business owner of Mabel's Fables in our community. I wanted to read to you Eleanor's letter to the

Legislature: “Many small retailers like my own independent bookstore count on holiday sales to pay the bills in the bleak days of January and February. To lock our doors now is another unfortunate decision that will see not only many more empty storefronts, but gutted malls and main streets, come spring. You can almost hear the retail one-per-centers, the Costcos, the Walmarts, the Amazons, rubbing their hands together in glee.”

1550

I will not be able to finish, because I see that the time is running out, but what I want to end with is the last word: “Small businesses keep hearing from this government that they are the backbone of the economy, except now our backbones have been thrown under the bus once again.”

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Ms. Khanjin has moved—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I’m sorry. Further debate? Further debate?

As I was saying, Ms. Khanjin has moved government notice of motion number 98 relating to the allocation of time on Bill 213, An Act to reduce burdens on people and businesses by enacting, amending and repealing various Acts and revoking a regulation. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say “aye.”

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

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, unless I receive a deferral slip, the bells will ring—breaking news to the Speaker’s desk:

“Pursuant to standing order 30(h), I request that the vote on government notice of motion number 98 be deferred until deferred votes on Wednesday, November 25.” It’s signed by Lorne Coe, chief government whip.

Vote deferred.

2020 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 19, 2020, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

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

Mr. Stan Cho: It’s always a pleasure to rise in this House. I’m honoured today to talk about the continuous work our government is doing around the clock to ensure that the people of Ontario are protected and supported throughout COVID-19.

Speaker, the measures in this budget are far more than just dollars and cents. They represent concrete actions that this government is taking to protect and support Ontarians as we move through this storm while preparing for the challenges and opportunities ahead.

I’ve mentioned in my previous remarks that there will be a day, and I hope it’s very soon, that COVID-19 is in our rear-view mirror. When that day is here, every jurisdiction around this planet will be competing for that competitive edge. So we must be balanced. We must be

balanced in making sure that we are protecting and supporting our people and businesses throughout this pandemic, but we must also be ready to move quickly for when the storm has passed us and the world is competing for that edge.

Over the past nine months, our government has heard from businesses and individuals in every corner of this province. We have heard of consultations and done consultations throughout communities across Ontario and read thousands of pages of submissions. There is not an individual, a family, a business or an organization that has not been impacted by COVID-19. We have been listening, responding and preparing for what I have said is around the corner.

From the beginning of this pandemic, this government has committed \$15.2 billion to crucial health investments, because protecting the health and safety of the people we serve is priority number one. We have committed \$13.5 billion to support people, communities and jobs, because we know that, as we face these challenging times together, no one can be left behind. We’ve supported 141 hospitals and health care facilities, 626 long-term-care homes and added thousands of new hospital beds and built the most robust testing network in the country.

In September, we prepared for the inevitable second wave by investing \$2.8 billion to improve hospital capacity, expand testing and case management, launch the largest flu shot campaign in our province’s history and clear the backlog of surgeries in our hospitals created by this pandemic. We have supported vulnerable Ontarians through the Ontario Social Services Relief Fund, offset costs for PPE for businesses and much more. But it’s clear that the fight isn’t over.

As this pandemic continues to move at a breakneck pace, our response must be just as swift, but it must be agile.

I remind my colleagues in this Legislature that this budget commits \$7.2 billion in new health measures, compounded by \$2.4 billion to continue assisting the most vulnerable in our society, to ensure that no one is left behind. This budget would commit an additional \$380 million to support parents with children and youth who are struggling with the added cost of remote and hybrid learning.

Our government would invest \$30 million to the Seniors’ Home Safety Tax Credit, which would help seniors cover the costs of life-changing renovations that will make their homes safer and more accessible.

We would also invest \$100 million over two years to support community tourism, cultural and sport organizations, which have been hit especially hard during COVID-19.

Speaker, this government knows that small businesses are the backbone of our economy. They create valuable jobs, connect Ontarians with goods and services, and are oftentimes at the heart of our local communities. But this government also knows that small businesses have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

As I’ve said before in this House, this government kept businesses open for as long as it was safe to do so, and

when it wasn't, we ensured that they had direct supports to make ends meet and weather this storm. With the most recent decisions to enact necessary public health measures, that approach remains the same.

Just last week, our government announced that it will be doubling its support for small businesses, making \$600 million available to assist eligible businesses with fixed costs, including property taxes and energy bills. These funds will strengthen support for small businesses as we do what is necessary to keep Ontarians healthy, while building on other measures for small businesses already outlined in this budget.

Speaker, I feel it's important to mention here, as well, that since March we have heard the opposition talk about the government sitting on billions of dollars, unused funds, and from the beginning of this pandemic, we stood, in the government benches, and said how important it was to make sure that we had a fiscal plan that was not only supporting our necessary line ministries throughout this pandemic but also putting away the funds that would be needed for an uncertain global situation. That's exactly what this government did. We put aside the largest general contingency fund in our province's history—and throw on top of that the largest reserve funding that we've had in our province's history.

There's some very important wording in this budget, as well. I'll point to page 194, in note 9, which says that these contingency funds, these rainy day funds, are separate from the line items that fund health care, that fund long-term care, which are at historic levels. I encourage all members to read through the out years, as well, listed on several parts, through page 183—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Niagara Falls, come to order, please.

Mr. Stan Cho: If the member for Niagara Falls doesn't have a copy, I would love to send him one.

On page 183, through the line items, you see the multiple out years—not just this fiscal; the next fiscal, the one after, and the one after that. You see nothing but increases to health care. You see nothing but increases to long-term care.

Interjection.

Mr. Stan Cho: The member from Timmins calls this spin—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): That would be a prop you're holding, sir.

Mr. Stan Cho: We call this budget, Mr. Speaker, adaptability, prudence, because in addition to that record spending, which the members opposite now mock, for some reason—this is in black and white. This is clear funding increases to those very vital services all Ontarians rely on.

In addition, we have that record contingency funding. It's that contingency that has allowed our government to react very quickly to an ever-changing situation.

If the members opposite are going to disagree with the mathematics of this budget, what they may not be able to disagree with—and some of them have many decades of

experience in this Legislature—is the fact that government, unfortunately, moves slower than the pace of the private sector, slower than the people of this province would like or deserve. So it wouldn't make sense for our government, in an uncertain global situation such as COVID-19, to have to go through the regular government processes in order to approve funding for very crucial initiatives. I'll point to one, for example. When the federal government approached us earlier this year and said, "We're introducing a commercial rent relief program, and we need you to be a 40% equity partner," we were able to say yes and put the funding toward that program very quickly, because we had the people and jobs contingency set aside. We didn't have to go through that regular government process.

When our hard-working front-line workers said to our government, "We need additional PPE," we were able to respond very quickly with 900 million gloves, six million face shields, 50 million gowns, just like this, because we had put aside the largest health contingency in our province's history.

1600

Some of the members opposite have shown us an FAO report, saying, "This proves that your government has not spent those billions of dollars you put aside for the contingency." I want to remind the members that we appreciate the hard work of the FAO, but it is a first quarter snapshot. I hope the member for Scarborough–Guildwood pays attention to this point, because the FAO's report is a first quarter snapshot, a moment in time of our government's finances, and if the member wants to see an up-to-date moment, let's go, please, to page 173, two thirds of the page down—I'll be happy to send the member from Scarborough–Guildwood a copy of this page. Page 173, two thirds of the way down, you'll see three lineups—please open it, yes, 173; I'll give you a second. You'll see three drawdowns two thirds of the page down: drawdown on standard contingency, drawdown on health contingency, drawdown on the people and jobs contingency. And you'll see the line number associated with that.

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

Mr. Stan Cho: Speaker, if that member then goes to page 187, at the bottom of the page, she will see remaining contingencies: \$2.6 billion. A reminder, too, to the member, Speaker, through you, that there are four months remaining on this fiscal year. That is objective evidence that our government is spending those contingencies in an adaptable and prudent manner.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: It's lots of time.

Mr. Stan Cho: Again, the Scarborough member says, "It's lots of time, lots of time." We've been able to react very quickly and adaptively—prudently—to those needs of our community as we go through this pandemic. This government has demonstrated we are committed to making sure that we move through this pandemic in a responsible way, and if that member has not yet found the note, I'll be happy to share it with her afterwards.

Speaker, these measures in this budget are not a matter of convenience; they are a matter of conviction. We have weathered the past nine months by weathering it together at all levels of government, public service, health officials, business owners and community leaders. I encourage the members opposite to work with our government to make sure we continue that blanket approach, that coordinated approach of support that all Ontarians not only deserve but count on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. I hope there were no children listening, knowing that now there's four months left in the year and Santa Claus won't be coming for extra time, but other than that—

Mr. Stan Cho: I meant fiscal year.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Yes, fiscal year. Thank you for clearing that up.

The member for Timmins has an opportunity to pose some questions to the member from Willowdale.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: To the honourable member: I listened to his speech intently and I have disagreement with much in it.

But the question I have is simply this: It's that your government has decided to assist larger box stores to remain open in the areas of Peel and Toronto, at the same time as shutting down all the local retailers. Now, there's a debate to be had: How should that be done in regard to making sure people are safe? But I think it's fairly clear that a lot of local retailers—because their government is not providing them with the type of support they need in order to survive this latest closure that's going to go on for at least 28 days. Why is it that your government has a rule for large box stores, where you can actually end up with more infection because there are larger crowds, than having a rule that applies somewhat equally to smaller retailers and making sure that the small businesses in Ontario—

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

Mr. Stan Cho: I appreciate the member from Timmins bringing up an important issue, and I want to remind that member that these stores, regardless of size, must sell essential goods or services in order to remain open in the zones that are affected by the restricted measures.

Now, Speaker, these are not measures that the Premier just made up willy-nilly. These are measures that were recommended by the health team. The Premier, from the very beginning of this pandemic, to his credit, made a promise to the people of this province that he—

Interjections.

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

Mr. Stan Cho: —would listen to the medical experts who are leading the shutdown discussions, the restrictions that we are all adhering to.

That is why this Premier has continued to make sure we listen to the doctors in conjunction with the supports we've provided from all levels of government. That's why the federal government has provided the help with the rent and with the wages, and we filled in the gaps there with our

fixed costs to help with property taxes, to help with hydro relief. Many of these measures, Speaker, to the member in Timmins—and many of the businesses in Timmins who will benefit from this will benefit from these reductions in tax permanently, so that we can recover and be prosperous once again.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: Mr. Speaker, through to you to the member from Willowdale, I have to say I'm a little bit confused. If I could, through you, Mr. Speaker, let's pretend the member from Willowdale is speaking to a constituent, and her name is Barbara Stevenson, and she's asking—we're hearing from the opposition that we're cutting and cutting and cutting: cutting health care, cutting education, cutting long-term care. Our budget says that we're spending more and spending more and spending more. I was wondering if, as if to a constituent, the member from Willowdale could explain that a little bit further: What's actually happening with the budget?

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you to the member from Brantford—Brant for that important question, and to Barbara Stevenson. To the member from Niagara Falls, who was saying that that accusation is true somehow, I would direct their attention to page 183 of our budget. Page 183 has the top line expenditure items—which doesn't include the COVID-19 spending, I'll remind you. If you look to the number 2 note, which says that—

Interjections.

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

Mr. Stan Cho: —for COVID-19 and the contingencies is separate.

You will notice that the health fiscal year of spending says \$63.7 billion for the 2019-20 year; next fiscal, \$64.6 billion; the year after that, \$67 billion; and the year after that, the final year of this particular budget, it's at \$68.5 billion.

Let's not just stop there. Let's look at the education sector: this fiscal, \$30.2 billion; next fiscal, \$31 billion; the fiscal after that, \$31.1 billion; the fiscal after that, \$31.3 billion. These are billions of dollars.

So I would say to Barbara Stevenson and to all members of this Legislature, this government has listened and made sure that we protect the programs and services that every Ontarian relies on.

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

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I have been listening to the member from Willowdale talk about the budget. We know that we are in the middle of a pandemic. This budget should be a budget for investing in workers and investing in communities. We know that our schools—small sizes. The communities have been asking to cap them at 15. This budget doesn't include that.

He says that his budget is adaptable. He is of the conviction. Is he prepared to invest in my community? Because we have been neglected the last 15 years, and now, the last three years, the neglect continues. Are you

prepared to put more resources, capping our school class sizes and putting more money for contact tracing and testing?

Mr. Stan Cho: There are a couple of questions in there, and it's an important question, because that's our government highlight that we are investing continuously in education.

As I just mentioned in my previous response, there are increases to education funding every single fiscal year for the next four-year plan. This is in the budget, Speaker. This is in addition to the Safe Restart program. This is in addition to the \$1.3 billion in the education system that will help rebuild schools, to build new schools in that very member's riding. This is in addition to the \$50 million spent on improving ventilation in our school system at a time we need it most.

The member from York South–Weston mentions the important businesses in his riding, many of which I have visited, as my grandparents live not far from that member's riding. That's why our government announced \$600 million in direct supports. This is relief for property taxes, for hydro rates so that those funds can be directed towards creating new jobs. We're going to continue to support the businesses in York South–Weston and throughout the province of Ontario.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I wanted to say to the member from Willowdale, I am capable and I have read the budget and the budget bill, and on page 186, you have a heading called "prudence." It carries over to page 187. Prudence simply means that you've built in billions of dollars within the budget and you haven't decided when and how you're going to be spending it. In your own budget, it says there's \$2.6 billion still remaining in the COVID contingency fund. I'm just wondering why you chose to sit on that, versus allocating money for the average four hours of care in long-term care to hire more PSWs, to lower class sizes in education, to do more contact tracing and testing that is so desperately needed to the point that we're now in lockdown in Peel and Toronto.

Mr. Stan Cho: I have to get to the response very quickly, because there's a lot to unpack in a minute there: \$1.4 billion to expand COVID-19 testing, 600 million face masks, 900 million gloves. That was made available from—

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: What about the \$2.6 billion?

Mr. Stan Cho: I'm answering the member's question, Speaker. I am answering, literally, the member's question that she just posed. Those funds have come out of the COVID contingency fund health fund directly.

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Ms. Catherine Fife: And those are federal funds.

Mr. Stan Cho: That is a provincial fund, and I'm hearing the member from Waterloo saying these are federal funds. They are not, Speaker.

We put a priority on protecting the health and safety of the people we serve. If you look at the line items in this very budget, you'll see that the remaining contingencies

are only 20% of the original amount that we announced, yet there's four months to go in the fiscal year. Now, quickly on math here, that's 75% of the year gone, yet 80% of the funds spent. And if that is going to be the measure of success, the speed in which those contingency funds are spent, then I would assert to the member opposite that we are directly in line with the fiscal year.

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

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I listened intently to my colleague's remarks, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance. I've been struck from the first time I read this budget by how well balanced it is between the three pillars of this budget: to protect, support and lay the foundation for recovery. I wondered if the parliamentary assistant could perhaps elaborate on these three themes and why they were so important for our economic action plan here at this time in this pandemic.

Mr. Stan Cho: I really appreciate that question from the member from Ottawa West–Nepean, because it talks about that balance that I led off the discussion with this afternoon: that balance that there's no bigger priority for this government than to protect the health and safety of the people we serve. That's why those first two pillars in this budget were to protect and to support: protect, \$15.2 billion; support for individuals and businesses, \$13.5 billion.

But the member brings up a very important point: balance. Yes, we must protect and support our health care system and our education system currently; but there will be a day, and I really look forward to that day, when we can have COVID-19 behind us; when it will be a distant memory, where we can all congregate at Christmas and say, "Do you remember 2020? Do you remember how weird that was?" We need to lay down that foundation for success now, Speaker. That's why many of the assistances that we see for individuals and small businesses are permanent measures, permanent reductions, in overhead costs, in taxes: to make sure that when we do recover—again, I hope that day is soon—we will be ahead of the rest of the world.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate? I recognize the member for Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How are you today?

I'm going to talk more about my riding, on what's not in the budget. So I'd really appreciate all my colleagues listening, because Niagara is a pretty important part of the province.

It's my pleasure to rise today and talk about the government's pandemic budget. There's a lot here, so I hope the government will listen closely, because we have a number of issues in Niagara that need immediate attention. Let me begin with one of the most pressing issues in Niagara, and one which I've written to the Premier about. Simply put, it needs to be said: Niagara restaurants and bars need help. They're owned by hard-working entrepreneurs who are the backbone of our community—and they need our help.

Two weeks ago, the chief public health officer in Niagara used his power under section 22 of the health prevention act to limit restaurants to patrons only if they were from the same household. His order limited it to six. A few days later, the provincial government ordered it limited to four. You can imagine—take this away, a lot of the business the restaurants need to survive.

Mr. Speaker, no one doubts that the chief medical health officer has the right to do this, although it's the only one that's been done in the province of Ontario. He felt it was necessary. He does oversee the health regulations in Niagara, but he does not have the power to ensure that restaurants have the financial support they need to remain afloat. The Premier has that power. The Premier has the power to ensure that every struggling and scared restaurant owner in Niagara has the financial support they need—not to go into foreclosure, into debt or have to lay off any staff.

Niagara needs this specifically because we are the only region in the province whose public health department had made these moves independently. So we're asking today, Premier Ford, to recognize that restaurants need help and move quickly to save them. The same issue is being faced by establishments in Niagara West—Sam Oosterhoff's riding—as well.

Mr. Speaker, I know last week when I tried to raise this issue, the Minister of Tourism attacked me by saying I hadn't done enough for tourism. Anyone involved in the tourist industry from Niagara—my riding—knows that isn't true. I leave it to her to wonder why she felt the need to say that.

And there's proof: Five months ago, Mr. Speaker, I introduced Bill 199, the travel Ontario tax credit. The premise is pretty simple: We kick-start tourism in Ontario by offering a tax credit. My bill says that when you take a vacation, you submit your bills, and as long as you're from Ontario and you travel in Ontario, you'll get your taxes written down for the first \$1,000 you spend. This bill would give people a needed vacation—of course, when it's safe to do so—and kick-start the tourist industry that was hit hardest first and will be the last to come up. Above all, it would kick-start tourism from the ground up by focusing on the consumer first.

How do I know the government read this bill? How do I know that, Mr. Speaker? Not only did they pass it on first reading, but they put a form of it into their own budget. It's in their own budget. They can tell us we haven't been working hard for months to get our tourist industry off the ground, but what I just told you is proof.

I want to talk about this for a second because they made a very important change that I hope they will amend. My bill said that when you go on vacation, you get the first \$1,000 back no matter what. How they did it in their budget was they said that you can only get reimbursed for up to 20% of the costs of travel. That means that you would need to spend almost \$5,000 to get \$1,000 back. It makes absolutely no sense, Mr. Speaker.

For most hard-working families I know, a \$5,000 vacation is out of reach, particularly coming out of a pandemic, when people have lost their jobs. I think most

people who have a few kids can expect to spend a few thousand dollars on a weekend vacation once you factor in gas, hotel rooms and attractions, and you can visit safely. I'm not sure why the government made the change, but I hope they will change it back. Let's give people the first \$1,000 off and make it easier for working families and average families to travel, whether it's going up north to see the beautiful north or to see the nation's capital, Ottawa, or to visit the casinos in your riding of Windsor, Mr. Speaker, or exploring Toronto or, above all, coming to the world's number one tourist destination, Niagara Falls.

I want to talk about the insurance issue—again in my riding, but it goes right across the province of Ontario. Do you know that the restaurant owners, with the insurance companies, are paying double and triple the amount on their insurance rates, at a time when they don't have customers, when their doors are being closed? I've talked to the finance minister about this, and I'll give him credit: I think he's listening. "I own a restaurant. My insurance was \$6,000. Do you know what it's gone to?" Listen to this, colleagues: "Over \$20,000 during a pandemic, when your place is half full, when you're told you can only utilize half your restaurant. Somebody has to take the insurance companies on."

The other thing that they need in Niagara for the hotel owners—because you know there are 40,000 jobs tied to tourism in Niagara Falls. Did everybody hear that? That's 40,000 jobs. They need low interest rates. Right now, they're paying 4.5% to 6.5% on the money when they have no customers; nobody is filling their hotels. I've asked this government to make sure they can get low interest rates, and the government did it. They can't say that they can't do it, Mr. Speaker, because I know at Niagara Parks, they lent Niagara Parks \$25 million at an interest rate of 1% so they could do an attractor—an attractor that's going to open in a year or a year and a half, and they've got three years to pay it back. That's exactly what our hotel owners need. If you can do it for Niagara Parks, why can't you do it for the rest of the business community?

The one that we're addressing—I won't talk a lot on it, because I've got a lot of stuff I want to get through here—is property taxes. We need to allow municipalities to not collect the property taxes—not defer them. There's no sense in deferring them, because if I had no money in June and I've had no business up till now and you're locking me down, I'm not going to have any money in three months. So it's not about deferring property taxes.

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Niagara Falls is so much more than the Falls—and I hope, once it's safe to move around again, people will come to a place where it's safe with their families. We also have Crystal Beach, Ridgeway, Fort Erie. So many families come down in the summer and enjoy small businesses near the beach and sometimes rent a small cottage for a weekend. We can see a great deal of growth in Ridgeway and Crystal Beach, and we want to ensure that when it's safe to do so—please come down.

Whether you're down on Clifton Hill seeing the attractions or trying out a wonderful bed and breakfast and

wine tour in Niagara-on-the-Lake, my riding has something for everyone. But we need support.

Fort Erie has the most beautiful racetrack in North America. I've been there myself. I've lost a lot of money there, but I still enjoy going. The horses are unbelievable. But they still need an attraction so that we can keep the jobs there. They need a casino.

Ridgeway and Crystal Beach have unique shops that, under normal circumstances, attract people from all over the world.

Speaking of Niagara-on-the-Lake—I'd also like to speak about our wine industry. I know that in this budget the government froze the planned tax increases on the industry, which I know is welcome news for some of the big players in the wine industry. However—did you ever notice there's always a "however" with me when I give them a compliment?—the budget is missing one of the most basic asks of the industry for the last several years: eliminating the 6.1% basic tax. I've put forward two bills now to have this tax eliminated. It's unfair that large foreign wineries do not pay it, and it really hurts our small and medium-sized wineries. We're at a point, if you know this, Mr. Speaker, where as many as 20% may have to go out of business. They need the government to act on that. I know that many wineries in the member for Niagara West's riding—and I've talked to him about this, although he doesn't talk about this as often as he should—would appreciate the government taking action on this. Our wineries are just another example of all that Niagara has to offer in tourism.

So in a few weeks or months, once we get this under control and we can assure you it's safe in Niagara, come and visit us.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about another piece missing from this budget, and that's funding for our classrooms. At the beginning of this school year, parents, teachers and front-line education staff were screaming at the top of their lungs for this government to lower class sizes before classroom spread became a major problem with the spread of COVID-19. Well, guess what? It turns out that they were right. Since that point, we now know we've had—listen to this—over 600 schools with outbreaks in the province and over 30 in Niagara schools right now, in my own area, not just my riding. You heard that right: Over 30 schools in Niagara have had outbreaks. As we try to clamp down on cases in Niagara, it's impossible when schools could become a major spreader of the virus. This is putting educational workers at risk, who are just trying to educate our children and our grandkids. It's putting parents and grandparents at risk when their kids come home. A lot of times—we can relate to this—our grandparents are taking care of our kids after school. They're coming from school to their grandparents—and, with COVID-19, who knows?

We know a vaccine is coming, and it would make us safer, until it is released, to lower class sizes to 15 kids per class. Mr. Speaker, I know you agree with me; I know you can't say you do, because you're non-partisan. There isn't enough money allocated in the budget to reduce class sizes

to 15 kids and make our classrooms safer for our children, our educators, our front-line staff and all our family members—when the kids come home, whether they're coming home to us as parents or coming home to their grandparents.

We have a golden opportunity to get this right. School is about to close for Christmas break. We're going to get a two-week reset here. When we restart, we can do this. We can do it right. This budget must change to include the proper funding to allow smaller class sizes, school ventilation systems to be cleaned and upgraded, and more cleaning staff. If we do those things now, we can ensure that we don't get another 600 or 700 outbreaks from the schools in 2021. Our kids can't wait. Our families can't wait. We can fix this here today. I hope those across the way are listening—I'm checking it out; I'm not so sure, but I looked—and make a change to this budget that includes that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk to perhaps the most important thing this budget misses entirely: long-term care. There are no new commitments to increase funding from \$40 million to proactively move residents from three or four beds in a ward—none. The Conservative government claims that there have been no cuts to planned long-term-care spending, but there is approximately a \$100-million cut in the overall long-term-care budget from March 2020 to the fall budget.

Critically, this bill does not put aside money for a guaranteed four hours of hands-on care in long-term care. If now is not the time to get the long-term-care crisis fixed, then, I ask all my colleagues, when is? Instead of passing a bill to protect Mike Harris and Ernie Eves from being sued by families in the long-term-care homes they oversee, why not pass the Time to Care Act? For 10 years, people have been saying loud and clear that long-term care is in a crisis, that seniors are being neglected. I'll repeat that: Seniors are being neglected. You know what's worse than being neglected? Anybody know? Yell it out at me.

Interjection: Death.

Mr. Wayne Gates: They're dying. They're dying in our long-term-care homes. We're not doing enough. I've said this before. Pay attention. You can fix it. You've got a majority government. They're your parents too. They're your grandparents. What are we doing?

One of the biggest solutions we have before us is mandating four hours of minimum care. That will ensure that no senior sits in soiled diapers for days, crying for help. That will ensure no parent or grandparent goes days without food or without care. That could be in the budget. That would make you feel good because you'd know you were doing something right.

Mr. Speaker, it's hard for me to say this: 2,200 seniors have died in long-term care and retirement homes since COVID-19—2,200. Most could have been prevented. Most could have been prevented if we—and I'm saying "we." I'm not saying "those guys." I'm not saying "those Liberals who could have done a lot more when they were in power." I'm saying us. We have to do more, because every day—every day—I turn on CP24 or CTV, and every

day there's a long-term-care facility with another outbreak; another long-term-care facility where somebody has died. We're not doing enough. And you didn't do enough when you had the opportunity in this budget.

When we're speaking about health care—how much time have I got? Four minutes? There's another project that I'd like to talk about that needs to be in here. It's the new Niagara Falls hospital and our MRI wait times. The Niagara Falls hospital that we currently have is falling apart. There's been no investment in it in for a long time because we've been told we're getting a brand new hospital in Niagara Falls. It's been six years. We need to get the hospital built.

Our MRI wait times in Niagara—think about this: We have two machines for all of Niagara. I think Hamilton has eight. One of the machines, in the St. Catharines hospital, breaks down on a regular basis, so we really have one machine for our MRIs. We've asked this government—I've sent a letter over to the health minister. The NHS has said it: They're not asking to buy the machine. They're asking that their responsibility is to give them the funding so they can operate the machine. The time to get an MRI in Niagara today during COVID is over 400 days. That's a disgrace.

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It is mentioned under pre-existing projects, but if we're going to spend on health care, then let's move this forward now. And besides the need, there's another major reason why we need the hospital, quite frankly. Do you know what that is, Mr. Speaker? The jobs that it would create. Coming out of a pandemic, what do we need? We need to put people to work. We need to put young people to work—the 40,000 people, the number of people who were laid off.

I hear their government talk about skilled trades all the time. I don't know if anybody else ever heard them, but I have. I just want to prove that I listen to what they say. I don't always agree with what they say, but I certainly do listen. This is what it would do: It would protect and create thousands of skilled trade jobs. And something you guys talk about and haven't really done a lot about: apprenticeships. Can you imagine the apprenticeships we could do if we had a project that takes four or four and a half years to build, and the number of skilled trades to get hired, the number of apprenticeships that we'd need? When they did the St. Catharines hospital, they had over 100 apprentices—women, young people. We need that hospital built.

I'm going to try to get through these. I've only got a minute left, and I've got a few other things that I may want to talk to. This one here, I've got to talk to real quick: I want to talk quickly about the environment in Niagara and a piece that needs to be removed from this bill immediately. Anyone from Niagara remembers the controversy our region had with the last board of the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, so I won't rehash that here. What is clear, though, is that the people of Niagara wanted changes to the governance of that board, and they worked very hard to make sure those changes happened.

What we now have is a citizen-led board that is mostly comprised of citizen appointees who make sure that everything that happens there is transparent and accountable. Above all, they make sure that the decisions of the board best protect our local environment and natural heritage, not big developers. Of course, in the Ford administration, we've seen the Premier try to open up our protected greenbelt to develop it more than once.

So I'm going to finish—I won't be able to get through it all. But I'm certainly going to finish by saying we must protect the NPCA. We must leave all the citizens who are on that board today and not get rid of them and give it back to the government. It makes absolutely no sense. Nothing is more important, outside of getting rid of COVID-19, quite frankly, than protecting our environment for our kids and our grandkids.

Thanks for giving me a few minutes of your time.

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

Mr. Stan Cho: I want to direct that member's attention to page 194—and this is important—footnote 9, which says, “For presentation purposes in the ... budget ... one-time COVID-19-related spending ... within the Ministry of Long-Term Care”—long-term care is bucketed separately. “This change in presentation does not impact ministry allocations....”

That's important, because if you look at page 193, and you look at the long-term-care spending, you have \$4.163 billion this fiscal, \$4.329 billion next fiscal, \$4.423 billion in the fiscal after that, and \$4.535 billion in the following fiscal year. These are increases of hundreds of millions of dollars on the standing financing, so how do we square this when the member is claiming \$100 million was cut from the budget when it's clear that it was not?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I certainly do appreciate the question, but what I'm going to tell you—what are you doing for long-term care? Today, 2,100 people—seniors, parents—have died in long-term care, and why is that? You had to bring in the military. Do you remember this? He's not watching right now, but I'll speak to the Speaker, then, because here's what happened: The military had to come in to tell us how bad long-term care was. So if you're going to spend in long-term care, where should it go? It should go to care.

The problem that we have in long-term care in the province of Ontario is that we have for-profit long-term-care facilities. And did you know that three privately run long-term-care homes—\$1.5 billion in profit went to shareholders. It went to CEOs. And do you know where it didn't go, Mr. Speaker? Do you know where it didn't go? It didn't go to care for our parents and our grandparents.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: I listened very carefully to my colleague from Niagara Falls. He mentioned tourism, so I wanted to share about a female entrepreneur in my riding, Rinkee Ahmed, who is actually facing a difficult time right now because her travel agency, Skymark Travel, had to recently close because of the pandemic. Since then, she

hasn't been able to have an earning, and as a tenant—yesterday, I was there with her at Dentonia Park when she was protesting against evictions, because she is one of those people who are worried about the loss of her income but a loss of her home as well.

I wanted to ask my colleague who spoke about tourism, do you think that this plan right here provides enough support to people like Rinkee and many others, especially women entrepreneurs across this province?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I certainly do appreciate the question, and the answer is no. That's why I just did a 20-minute speech on what's going on with small businesses.

As you know, the tourist sector has been hit extremely hard and those who sell vacations—there's no vacations out there. Does the government have an obligation to make sure that the entrepreneurs, small businesses, are being taken care of in the form of grants? Absolutely. Should they make sure that they're being taken care of so that they can come out on the other side of COVID-19? Absolutely.

The question becomes, why aren't they doing this? Why is that not happening? Why are we losing our small and medium-sized businesses in the province of Ontario so that places like—it's not nice to say, but Walmart and Costco are operating—

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: Pardon?

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay. I think I responded enough. Thank you.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: I listened intently to the presentation from the member from Niagara. He touched on a number of subjects, one of which was skills and skills training. It's an area in this budget where there's a government investment of an additional \$180 million in employment services and training programs to connect workers across the province, including those who live in Niagara, and directed to those industries most affected by COVID, facing a skills shortage. Would the member agree that that level of investment will make a difference to those workers, including those in Niagara looking for work in the skilled trades area?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I think I've already answered your question—but I'll do it again—because it was in my presentation.

What I'm saying very clearly is that it's important to invest in infrastructure. Once you invest in infrastructure, whether that's building schools, whether that's building hospitals, who is going to perform that work? Right now, as you know—not in every single classification—we have a shortage of skilled trades. There is a shortage of skilled trades.

Given an opportunity by investing in infrastructure, we can put people back to work. For people who lost their jobs in the tourist sector in Niagara Falls, it would be very, very helpful if we had programs in place where they could get

an apprenticeship that's sponsored by that particular employer. An employer would say, "I'm going to take five apprentices and I'm going to utilize the government money to get them into an apprenticeship program."

I'm saying that the hospital in Niagara Falls is the best way to get people to work right away in apprenticeships—

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

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you as well to the member from Niagara Falls. One of the things you spoke about—and you covered a lot of things in 20 minutes—was the importance of four hours of hands-on care. The NDP has tabled this twice under the Liberals, and we've tabled it recently under the Conservatives. The member from Willowdale kind of scoffed at it. He says, "Not true. We are going to do it."

My question to you is: When the Conservatives were faced with the challenge of protecting for-profit long-term care, they rammed through a bill in about two weeks. Why is it, when it comes to protecting long-term care in the middle of a pandemic, where we've killed over 2,000 people in Ontario, that the game plan for adding four hours of hands-on care is five years?

Mr. Wayne Gates: That's a great question. The problem that we have, quite frankly, is—that's the problem we have in long-term care. We don't have enough PSWs, we don't have enough RNs, we don't have enough resources. What they're doing—and I'm going to say this again, and I know they hate to hear it, but it's true: when you are taking \$1.5 billion out of our health care and giving it to a corporation that then gives it to, as we know, a shareholder, a CEO and, in some cases, the former Premier of Ontario, Mr. Harris. That's what's going on, and what should happen is that all that money that's going there should go to hiring PSWs.

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Take a look at what Quebec did. They hired 10,000, almost overnight, to try to get out of their problems that they have in long-term care. Why wouldn't we do that? Why are we waiting five years? People are dying in our long-term-care facilities every single day. You wake up tomorrow and there will be another 10 people in a long-term-care or retirement home who have died.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Next question? The member for Brantford—Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that, and I appreciate debating the member from Niagara Falls. He's always very impassioned in his advocating for the people in the peninsula.

I was curious: A year ago, we were asked questions on a daily basis by the opposition about how horrible online education was, how this would destroy public education in the province of Ontario. Today, and on a daily basis, we get questions saying, "Why don't we keep more kids at home? Why aren't we doing more online education with our students?" I'm just wondering where exactly he's at on that. Is he for online education or against online education? Because, as you know, we're investing more money into online education in the budget this year.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Well, I appreciate the question. I'm going to tell you exactly where I am. I believe that if we're going to have our kids go to school, we should have 15 kids in a classroom. We shouldn't have what's going on in Windsor today, where they're shutting the school down because they have such a big outbreak, and now they have another one in Windsor. Why are we risking our kids' lives and our teachers' lives by having too many students in a classroom?

Mr. Will Bouma: So you're for online education?

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: He gets to ask the question and I get to answer, right? That's how it works? I just wanted to let you know that. You asked me the question; I'm answering, and I think that's fair, reasonable and something that I should do.

But at the end of the day, I'm saying that if you want to protect our kids and the educators in those schools, you have 15 students in a classroom. Why is it so hard for your government to understand that, as we continually have more and more breakouts of COVID-19 with our kids and with our educators? Just last week, one of the educators died—67 years old. No fault of her own; she just went to work.

That's what should happen, that's where I'm at, and that's where I'm going to stay until you guys understand: 15 kids in a classroom will save lives. That's where we're at.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I'm, of course, very pleased to rise in this House on behalf of the people of Scarborough–Guildwood to talk about this debate on the government's budget measures. I cannot overstate enough—I've said it before when speaking to the work on the budget—that this is a critical budget for Ontarians. We are responding to this global pandemic with COVID-19 and the resulting economic fallout. And it is a historic moment, but yet again, this government has missed the mark. It is too little, too late.

Frankly, Speaker, this budget is a huge disappointment. If we do not win the fight against the pandemic, we can't begin to recover the economy, and this budget does not go far enough to deliver on the protection and the supports that Ontarians need for this fight or to recover after COVID-19 and the vaccine has arrived.

The Premier and the finance minister have overstated the amount of support that the government is providing in the budget. They claim to be investing \$45 billion, with \$18.7 billion being spent directly on COVID responses, but the numbers tell a different story. At least \$2.6 billion is still sitting in contingencies. It's in the government's own document, on page 187. With two thirds of the fiscal year behind us and with the second wave of positive infections at new record highs, which is forcing Toronto and Peel back into lockdown, what is this government waiting for? What more does it need to see?

With small businesses reeling, they have done every thing that we have asked them to do, and now they face

the greatest uncertainty: a cold, long winter ahead. The Olde Stone Cottage Pub in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood said that while they have done their utmost best during wave 1, including setting up their patio and purchasing outdoor fireplaces so they can extend the patio season in chilly weather, they aren't sure that with a second lockdown they will be able to keep going.

Local businesses have had to close their doors once again during the second-wave lockdown in Peel and Toronto, this while big box stores stay brightly open, just as the holiday season is picking up. We all know that this is the time for retail shopping. Yet across these regions, independent retailers have been forced to close their main street storefronts and are only able to offer delivery or curbside pickup while Walmart and Joe Fresh are allowed to offer their full array of goods during the holiday season. It's clear that independent businesses are put at a serious disadvantage by this unfair arrangement in the government's ill-thought-out plan. The Premier's inaction has allowed large stores like the Bay to circumvent the lockdown and to go against the spirit of public health restrictions. I saw a post by Michael Wood in Ottawa asking the same question just yesterday.

Small businesses should not be at a disadvantage for doing their part to keep our communities safe. Independent businesses are being forced to compete with big box stores that are allowed to remain open because they are selling essential goods. And they are, but they are also offering a large selection of non-essential goods. In other jurisdictions in Canada, we've seen non-essential sections of big box stores roped off to prevent in-person shopping for non-essentials and to create a fairer, more level playing field for all retailers, especially our independent stores.

What is the government doing to support local businesses like Olde Stone Cottage? The answer is: not enough. Federal transfers account for another \$7 billion of the government's COVID-19 support, leaving the province with \$9.1 billion of its own money spent so far. Of course, much of the province's support for the COVID-19 response plan has been in the form of tax deferrals. We know that. The President of the Treasury Board has said that he wants to collect 100% of it, and they have already begun collecting, this despite the fact we are in a second wave and there is a current lockdown in certain regions.

From the outside, it looks very much like this government is continuing to lean heavily on the federal government to save the day. The FAO reports that the federal government is spending \$102.8 billion in Ontario with direct supports, with an additional \$7 billion in transfers, meaning that the federal government is footing 92% of the bill while the province is providing the remaining 8%. I know that this is a small improvement since the last report by the FAO, which had said that the feds were supporting 97% and the province 3%, but my point here is that it is not enough; it's not happening fast enough for the speed at which the virus is taking over communities. I believe that the Premier can and should do more.

Speaker, this budget is not just about the numbers. It's about people, the people of Ontario, and stepping up to

support people through this pandemic so that they can get through it safely, and yes, so that the economy can rebound.

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But this isn't happening in our long-term-care settings. In this area, the government is not stepping up. They had an opportunity to do that during this budget, but they've missed the boat, because in this budget, there is no funding attached to the promise of four hours' average of care. There is no funding attached for the hiring of tens of thousands of personal support workers. There is no funding attached for the increase in pay for our front-line workers. This, despite the government knowing about the issues in long-term care and the abysmal record that they have had so far in handling the pandemic in these settings. The government had time to include 44 schedules in Bill 229, but nothing to reflect the most urgent and vulnerable needs in this province for our dear seniors, Speaker; a huge missed opportunity.

Another missed opportunity in this budget is that it shamefully neglects Ontario's students, parents and education staff by failing to provide new funding to respond to the COVID-19 pressures and to reduce class sizes to keep students and education workers safe. I want to speak specifically to the needs of those who are marginalized and in vulnerable communities, because these gaps will likely continue to increase without additional funding and support to target resources to students who need them the most in the communities that are the most at risk from community spread of COVID-19.

Every single day in my community in Scarborough, there is an additional outbreak in schools, and this is unacceptable. Sadly, these students are at risk of falling behind without additional supports from teachers, without school nutrition programs, without the devices and the connectivity that they need to keep learning throughout the pandemic. In this budget there is no new funding for education during a health pandemic, and that is a shame.

Finally, Speaker, I want to touch on conservation and the environment, because I've heard this issue over and over again in my community of Scarborough-Guildwood, which is a watershed community. The environment is of particular importance. Anyone who cares about the environment or conservation knows that there's good reason to worry. This government's track record on the environment is shameful. The Auditor General has said that: that they lack a plan and a focus on the environment. This government is continuing its path of weakening environmental protections. This path continues not just in schedule 6 with those conservation authorities, but in schedule 40 of Bill 229, which weakens the public consultation component and management planning for Ontario's parks and conservation areas. It also ascribes more power to the minister and away from community management of our parks and our conservation areas, all at the same time that the government is creating a divide with urban and rural, by weakening conservation authorities' power to carry out their mandates, by weakening the authority of those boards, by literally taking away their

fiduciary responsibilities to serve on those boards and setting up municipalities and the community for a fight. This is shameful.

The budget is a betrayal of parents, of grandparents who sadly have been dying in our nursing homes, and their families are grieving. This government owes them an apology. This government owes them action. It is a betrayal for our kids and our teachers and education workers who are stuffed into crowded classrooms, whose families are being exposed to greater risk each and every day. What about those children who come home, like in my community, to multi-generational families living in small high-rises? Where do they go to self-isolate?

So, Speaker, I can't support this motion or this government's budget, because I believe that they can and should do better for the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We now have an opportunity for questions.

Mr. Lorne Coe: In my riding, in the north part of it, in Myrtle Station, there's a lot of farmers up there I regularly engage with. One of the continuing issues up there is broadband access, or lack thereof. If I just move a little bit further down to the north part of Baldwin Street, up in Brooklin, down at the centre of the town, the businesses have got the same issues. They've been looking for years and years for action on the part of the government to deal with and solve that problem. Well, our government has finally stood up: \$680 million over four years. That's certainly going to make a difference to small businesses up in Brooklin, Myrtle Station, Ashburn and other parts of Whitby.

My question to the member opposite: Does she support that level of investment in broadband and the effect it's going to have in her riding as well?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I just think it's a bit of a ridiculous question, because we know that our communities need broadband. But why did you not spend any money that was allocated for the last two years on broadband? Why did you not do anything? It's just sitting there in the budget, unspent. The fact that you've put something in the budget does not give me confidence that you're going to spend it, despite the fact that there is a need for broadband in our rural and northern—as well as our urban communities like Scarborough-Guildwood that have said, “We need broadband connectivity for our small businesses, for the last mile.”

So, yes, there is broadband in our communities, but if we can't afford to connect with it, then it's not doing us any good. I do believe in universal broadband for everyone in our province who needs it, but I need the government to take action.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm just going to say something: Hospitals' combined deficit right now is \$850 million from COVID, and there's nothing in this budget that gives hospitals the funding they need to cover that incredible, incredible deficit.

I have a bit of a passion for long-term care, because we've had some terrible, terrible outbreaks in Niagara—not just in my riding but all of Niagara. So I'm going to ask the member: Why did your government not pass the Time to Care Act when you had a majority government?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank the member from Niagara for his question and also for the passion that he brings to the Legislature when he speaks up for his constituents.

I want to address the first part of your question, because I think one of the things that is very disappointing to me in this budget is the government's lack of investments in our health care system. The funding for hospital care and acute care barely keeps up with the rate of inflation. At a time when we are in a health pandemic, you would think that this government would understand that they need to do more.

The minister stood up in the House the other day and said, "We're at 100% capacity." Well, we're in a pandemic, and we also have our regular needs in our acute care system. That's the concern that I have. When it comes to long-term care, what we have said is that, absolutely, governments of all stripes need to do more for our seniors and our elderly in long-term care, and I would support—

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

The next question.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you to the member for the very compelling presentation you made about some of the measures that are not in the bill. I agree with you that it's too little, too late.

I want to point the member to some of the stuff that is in the budget but that is not necessarily oriented towards the budget. There's nothing in the budget, for example, to fight climate change and improve the state of our environment. In fact, we have the opposite: We have measures in the budget that don't belong in the budget that will weaken the measures of protection that exist for the environment. We have that in schedule 6, which weakens the power of the conservation authorities, which no longer have any authority. We also have, in the same vein, in schedule 40, an added minister's discretion to bypass public consultation.

You've been around for a while, and we know that this government doesn't like public consultation because we clearly see that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Back to the member from Scarborough–Guildwood to respond to, somewhere in there, a hidden question that she ran out of time on.

1700

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you so much. I want to thank my colleague from Ottawa–Vanier for the work that you are doing to champion and to raise a voice for the environment in this Legislature, because it is clear—the Auditor General has said that—that the government has no plan for the environment, and it's actually not a priority or a focus for the government.

What is a priority is going after our protected watersheds and our protected lands, and seeking to pave over those very precious resources that we have for future generations. This does not do us any good. So in schedule 40, when I see that the government wants to avoid consultations by saying that any consultation that has been done at any time is good enough, that's a red flag for me, because we know that this is about expediting, perhaps, development or other things at the expense and at the cost of our environment, which is at the cost of our future, which no one wants to—

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

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I listened to the remarks from my colleague from Scarborough–Guildwood, and I must say, Mr. Speaker, I'm not a big fan of inflammatory language in this chamber. It's sometimes disappointing when you hear things like, "This budget is a betrayal," because it would be very easy for me to stand up and say that the former Liberal government's inaction on long-term care and broadband was a betrayal, but I'm not going to do that.

I think we need to talk about some of the collaborative things that we all agree on, and so my question to the member from Scarborough–Guildwood: In the budget, we announced the Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit, and I'm hearing from so many constituents who are excited about this. Could you perhaps elaborate on how this is going to be really positive for a lot of the seniors in your riding?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank the member from Ottawa West–Nepean. I have heard about the seniors' home renovation tax credit from one person in my riding. I'm still waiting for the information to send to them so that they can understand how they can access that support.

It's good for the government to put things in budgets, and I've seen many examples of this. Certainly you have some supports for electricity, but it's currently not being accessed because people don't know how to access it. You have supports for small business, but how do people access that support? We don't know. We don't have that information. It's not easily understood. It's like the supports for pandemic emergency relief for ODSP and OW, where you had to go through your case worker to receive access rather than it just being applied to those individuals who need it the most—

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

Ms. Jill Andrew: We know that had the government listened to public health warnings and not lifted public health measures against public health expert guidelines, many of our small businesses probably wouldn't have been in a lockdown situation now. If the government had done what they had to do back in March, many of our small businesses that have shuttered, like Eleanor of Mabel's Fables, would not have shuttered.

I'm interested in hearing from the member what the impact of a lacklustre Conservative government that has not provided accessible and direct funds to small business owners, how that has affected her in her riding—BIPOC

small business owners, women small business owners, who we know are disproportionately impacted. Pretty much the government hasn't acted for small businesses, and that's why we're in lockdown again. How are you working to support your small businesses?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I thank the member so much for that question. I think it's very important, all the aspects that you've touched on in your comments leading up to the question, because this economic recession has disproportionately impacted Black, Indigenous, Arab Ontarians, people of colour—disproportionately. And there is nothing that really speaks to the economic impact, the job supports for those individuals. It's a big missed opportunity.

The government has implemented—first of all, they did not have preparedness in place for a second wave plan, and we see that. Where are the people for testing and contact tracing who would have been trained during the summer months when, yes, the infection rate had gone down—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: It's a pleasure to rise to talk on this budget motion and on this budget, Ontario's action plan. I had the chance to participate in a debate on the budget last week and had a chance to elaborate on the really positive aspects that are contained in this budget and to commend the Minister of Finance and the parliamentary assistant for finance for their leadership in pivoting at a time of crisis, to pivot towards the supports we needed to see out of this budget.

I've got to thank again—because he's here in the chamber today—the member for Willowdale, who has done a phenomenal job in his capacity as parliamentary assistant. You know, Mr. Speaker, rarely have I seen a parliamentary assistant for finance who has been everywhere. This week he is again Zooming into Ottawa for another Zoom round table with small business owners, to talk with them, to hear about their concerns. I'm looking forward to taking part in that Zoom round table. It builds upon consultations that he has already participated in, pre-budget consultations—consultations through the finance committee, on which I have the pleasure and honour of serving as Vice-Chair, and that is so critical to make sure that we are listening to Ontarians at this time of great need and tremendous, tumultuous change that is happening on a daily basis here in our province.

I think, Speaker, I have an appreciation for the work that the team at the Ministry of Finance has done. I had the great pleasure early in my career of working for five years for the federal finance minister, working on five federal budgets coming out of the Great Recession in 2008. I know how much work goes into that, how important it is to hear from multiple stakeholders, whether it's caucus members, stakeholder associations, businesses, individual Canadians or Ontarians, and then trying to bring all of that together and figure out how we spend these billions of dollars to maximum impact.

I was commenting earlier with the member from Barrie–Innisfil and she and I, prior to being elected, both

worked together at the same time on budget 2015 for the federal government. We recall somewhat fondly staying up overnight the night before the budget, toiling away in the office, pulling everything together because that's the kind of effort it takes to pull together a budget.

Again, I thank the full team from the Ministry of Finance for the work they've done on this.

Now, I'd like to pivot, Speaker, to talk a little bit about the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. As I mentioned, I've had the great privilege and honour of serving as Vice-Chair of this committee since my election in June 2018. As part of that committee, one of the things that I think is the most exciting piece about that committee is that it's one of the standing committees here at the Ontario Legislature that regularly gets a chance to go out and consult with Ontarians. We do our annual pre-budget consultations, where we travel around the province and hear directly from constituents on the ground.

This past summer, we had the chance to pivot quickly and get the finance committee active, working on our pandemic response. The finance committee conducted an unprecedented amount of hearings, using the virtual technology of Zoom to touch base with Ontario small businesses from a variety of sectors. Whether they were small businesses, folks in the renovation and construction industry, the housing industry, the infrastructure industry, the tourism culture, sport and heritage industries, we heard from so many passionate Ontarians who are concerned about the public health situation and had ideas on how we can best respond and react.

I really would like to commend all of the MPPs in this chamber who took part in those consultations, because they were sometimes gruelling. We were doing four or five days in a row, 9 a.m. till 6 p.m., listening to deputation after deputation and hearing from them, but every member of this chamber stepped up and we had a tremendous amount of participation.

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Over the course of those hearings, we heard lots of ideas. I was tremendously pleased to see that in this budget, Ontario's action plan, our 2020 budget, we responded to many of those suggestions that came forward from those finance committee consultations. That's what we all want to see as legislators. We all want to see that when we get a chance to consult with Ontarians and they come forward with a good, strong idea, we're able to act on it and we're able to show them that we are listening, that we hear them and that we want to help them get through this incredibly challenging time.

I'll go through some examples for you, Speaker. Time and time again, we've heard from many in the renovation sector, who talked to us about the need to try to stimulate their sector at this particular time. A lot of them referenced something that was done in the federal government, the Home Renovation Tax Credit, which helped spur some economic activity after that 2008 recession. A lot of them talked to us and said, "Is this something that you can look at bringing back provincially?" Not only did they talk

about the economic benefit of how this could spur some job activity and some projects for them, but they also talked about the spillover benefit it has on bringing some companies out from the underground economy—which is obviously a beneficial piece as well for all of us, to have these folks doing jobs above board, over the table, paying their taxes and making sure folks get access to these tax credits.

We heard this from countless business owners. I can name one in particular from my riding: A small business owner, Mike Aubrey, presented and talked about how a home renovation-style tax credit could be a great support for his renovation business. I was really proud, after the budget, to be able to let small business owners like Mike Aubrey know that we have brought in the Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit.

It's not quite the same as the Home Renovation Tax Credit. What the great minds at the Ministry of Finance sat down and looked at it, they said, "Okay, let's look at a couple of different challenges we're facing. One is spurring economic activity, one is bringing stuff out from the underground economy, but a third problem that we can tackle at the same time is helping seniors stay in their homes longer," which is such an important goal for all of us here. I think we share this goal, to try to allow seniors to stay in their home longer. So out of these three challenges emerged the Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit.

I've heard from so many constituents in Ottawa West—Nepean—which, incidentally, has the largest seniors population in Ottawa—that these seniors are excited about this, and the small business owners are excited about it as well, because here is an opportunity to take advantage of this tax credit, to do something beneficial to help seniors and to help spur our economic recovery. I'm thrilled to see that come out of those consultations, and there it is in Ontario's action plan.

Another one that we can talk about is the staycation tax credit, and declaring 2021 as the year of the staycation. The first part of our consultations through the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs was with the tourism, culture, sport and heritage sectors. Time and time again, they talked about two things: They wanted support from the government in terms of a marketing campaign to get people confident and returning to the tourism sector, when it is safe to do so, and then they also wanted a financial incentive to encourage people to re-engage with this critical sector of the economy. Here, we bring those pieces together in our budget in the form of declaring 2021 the year of the staycation and introducing this phenomenal staycation tax credit, which will allow Ontarians to claim a portion of their travel-related costs on their taxes.

Of course, we're going to have to wait and bring this into force at a time when it's safe to travel, because right now, we don't particularly want people rushing to travel. But I know, even within my household, my family and I were chatting and saying, "You know what? Maybe next year we can look at visiting Niagara Falls, or maybe we can look at visiting Blue Mountain." Perhaps we'll have to get the member for Niagara Falls and the member for

Simcoe—Grey on a Zoom call, and they can both do a pitch on where folks should go, but there are lots of great, great places in Ontario where folks can visit and have a chance to take advantage of this staycation tax credit. Again, I'm thrilled to see this emerge out of those consultations that the standing committee held, and then straight into Ontario's action plan.

Another one that's critical to talk about is broadband. I cannot tell you how many times, Speaker, we heard about the urgent need to get broadband up and running across the province. This came from business owners from almost every single sector—and it wasn't just business owners, Speaker. We have heard about this in the health care sector, the education sector and at the ministry I have the pleasure of serving at, social services. All of these places need us to get that broadband infrastructure up to a level that we would expect for the 21st century, for 2020, and so we heard this in the consultations time and time again.

Here in the budget, we see a record investment on broadband: \$1 billion going in from the provincial government to bolster our broadband network. It's not going to be an easy task—I have no doubt that there are multitudes of logistical challenges that will have to be overcome—but it's something that we need to prioritize because, again, we've heard it from so many people. In the future, if we're unfortunate enough to have to go through another experience like we've been through this year with the COVID-19 pandemic, where people are required to shelter in space, are required to stay at home, are required to not go out and engage in socializing etc.—if we were ever to face a situation like that again, we need our broadband network to be able to meet that challenge, to allow people to conduct their business virtually, to have a strong virtual presence online, to be able to meet customers and do virtual tours.

We need our Ontario residents to be able to consult with doctors and health care professionals using virtual technology. We need our teachers to be able to harness the vast resources and innovation that are present in the virtual and tech space in education. All of this sits on this crux of having strong broadband. Again, we heard this from Ontarians, and there again, in Ontario's action plan, we see it acted upon.

Another piece that we heard about quite often in our consultation, Speaker, was the need for hydro relief. This, of course, predates the consultations that were held by the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. We have been hearing about hydro rates way, way back into the previous government. Certainly, for myself, it was something that I heard about countless times during the election campaign back in 2018. Here again in the budget, we see that acted upon. We see hydro relief being provided to our industrial and commercial users of 14% and 16% respectively in terms of reductions, and that's of course going to help on one of those three pillars, which my colleague the parliamentary assistant referenced earlier, of protecting Ontarians by bolstering our health care spending etc.; supporting Ontarians by supporting families, individuals and businesses; and then that third piece, laying the foundation for our recovery.

By providing some hydro relief, we're helping to lay that foundation for recovery, because I know, Speaker, that we will emerge out of this. There is some tremendously positive news coming out lately from a number of researchers and companies that are showing that vaccines are being developed and tested and showing some positive early results, so we will emerge out of this, Speaker. I'm confident in the ingenuity of humanity and our resiliency. When we do, having that foundation in place there, through measures like reduced hydro rates, will help lay the framework for that recovery.

Speaker, I'd like to pivot a little bit. I've spoken a little bit about my hat as Vice-Chair on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. I'd like to pivot for a moment to talk about my role as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

1720 Speaker, as you know and as many in this chamber know, making sure that we have a strong developmental services sector is a critical priority for me. This is obviously a challenging file. There are ongoing challenges day in and day out that we need to respond to. But I was really pleased that this year, in this budget, we did two things for the developmental sector that I had advocated for and that I had heard from in my numerous conversations with folks from the developmental sector. The first is that we annualized stabilization funding, giving our developmental services sector more predictability and stability. Secondly, we also did the first major investment in the developmental services sector in many, many years, an investment of \$361 million.

I'd like to quote Brad Saunders, the CEO of Community Living Toronto, one of our developmental services sector agencies. Mr. Saunders said, today's "budget announcements represent a significant step forward toward a modern, future-oriented developmental services sector.... Thousands of individuals and families will benefit from new funding and service opportunities, and the agencies that support them will be able to do our work on a more stable and secure footing." I have a whole slew of quotes here. I could continue on, but I'll leave those for now.

All that to say that there is still significant work to be done in the developmental services sector. I'm the first to say that. But we always have to celebrate each step along the way, and budget 2020 was a significant step along that way. It announced this annualized stabilization. It announced new funding, and that, in conjunction with the consultations that are ongoing to reform the developmental services sector, I believe, are going to lead us in a really positive direction that will benefit the thousands of Ontarians with developmental disabilities, like my brother, and their families. So, again, I commend the Minister of Finance and his team for taking this important action under that bucket of support, that second of our three pillars in Ontario's action plan.

The last thing that I want to talk about was that I wanted to speak a little bit about long-term care. Of course, long-term care was something that was a key discussion for all of us during the election, and it has been an ongoing

discussion throughout the COVID-19 pandemic as we've seen many horrifying cases across our long-term-care system. However, our government has been responding to this situation and working to set us up on a better footing going forward.

I had the pleasure of attending an announcement last week in Ottawa with the Minister of Long-Term Care and the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries where we announced 256 new long-term-care spaces at the Riverside hospital in partnership with Schlegel Villages. That is a huge step forward to bring together the innovative team at Schlegel, who are doing just remarkable things in terms of caring for our aging population, to be able to bring them into Ottawa to establish a Schlegel Villages right there. These new spaces are going to be so important to supporting our seniors in the long term.

The funding announcement also announced that Carlingview Manor in my riding, which, of course, has seen tremendous challenges throughout COVID—and my heart goes out to the families who have been impacted at Carlingview Manor. But some good news in the future: Carlingview Manor is getting a new facility. They are going to be getting 17 new beds and 47 upgraded beds at a brand new facility, and so, again, taking those next steps that we need to see in long-term care to build a long-term-care system that Ontarians deserve. I was really thrilled to see that investment.

Just to summarize in my last 30 seconds, this budget was, I know, the response to a tremendous amount of consultations. I thank the ministry for putting together such a strong document, and I'm pleased to see the balance between those three pillars of protecting the things that matter most, our health care and our long-term care; supporting individuals, families and businesses, including through our support to the developmental services sector; and laying that foundation to recovery, which will be so critically important.

Thank you, Speaker. It's been a pleasure to rise on this issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for questions. The first question goes to the member from Scarborough Southwest.

Ms. Doly Begum: Mr. Speaker, we don't just need a recovery, we need a she-covey. Small business owners like Rinkee Ahmed, a female entrepreneur in my riding who owned a successful small business, a travel agency, Skymark Travel, had to close up shop due to COVID-19. It goes without saying that her industry was hit hard by COVID-19 due to the dangers of travelling right now.

People like Rinkee are doing the right thing, but in doing so, an entrepreneur like Rinkee is losing her income and her business. If this government cares so much about supporting small businesses, why have they not committed a dollar amount to programs that support female business owners? Women like Rinkee and other women and men business owners need support, Mr. Speaker. They require commitment from this government.

As I listen to this member, we need a recovery that centres women in business, in education and in health care.

As he speaks about small businesses and the support, why can't we have support for people like Rinkee—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The member for Ottawa West–Nepean to respond.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I would like to thank the member opposite for the question. We, of course, know that women have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, both at home and in the workforce. Our government is actively working to get more women and girls into the workforce, and COVID has, of course, only made this work all the more important.

Our government, thanks to the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development, is investing \$37 million to help more than 15,000 people upgrade their skills and train for new jobs. We're also investing \$43 million to expand youth training programs so that young women and their peers can learn more about amazing job opportunities, including in the skilled trades. I also will note that since January, the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues has been holding round tables with women from across the province in order to gain insight on how we can best support women's full economic participation.

Still a lot of work yet to do; a lot of positive steps in this budget, and I look forward to continuing to work on this very critical issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Whitby has a question.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker, and to the member from Ottawa West–Nepean. I spoke earlier about the \$180-million investment in employment services and training programs, but in the budget we also launched another significant strategy, Speaker. It's the skilled trades strategy, and it's unprecedented.

You'll know that over the last 15 years, there was a large skills mismatch that occurred in the province of Ontario with the previous government. Well, we're addressing that. We're addressing that with not only the \$181 million, but the skilled trades strategy. Could the member please talk about what he sees to be the near and mid-term impacts of that strategy?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Thank you so much to the member for Whitby. I know the member for Whitby is a passionate advocate for the skilled trades and ensuring that our next generation is equipped with the tools and skills they need to get the jobs that are going to be available in the future.

Through Ontario's action plan, we have seen the government investing an additional \$181 million in employment services and training programs to connect workers in the industries most affected by COVID-19 with industries facing a skills shortage. This also includes \$100 million through Employment Ontario for skills training and \$60 million to help support workers acquire in-demand skills rapidly to support a faster transition to a new job. We're also launching an unprecedented skilled trades strategy: breaking the stigma, simplifying the system and encouraging employer participation in training and apprenticeships.

Mr. Speaker, this conversation for me started in the curriculum consultations that our government held when we first got elected, and it has continued through Ontario's action plan that we—

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: I want to rise because the member raised stay vacations, and I'm going to say this again: My Bill 199 is far better than what's been put in this budget. It allows families who might not be able to afford a \$5,000 vacation to take a vacation and get a \$1,000 credit. I need your government to take a look at that.

1730

But I always listen to you guys talk about consulting. You're big on consulting, and I congratulate you. You guys love to consult. Well, I want to ask you a question. Who did you consult with in Niagara—name one person, other than Sam—to get rid of citizen appointments on the NPCA that is going to jeopardize our wetlands in Niagara? Who did you consult with?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): To the member from Ottawa West–Nepean.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the member opposite knows that I love the region of Niagara. One of my close family friends owned the closest bed and breakfast to the Falls for a number of years, so I had the chance to visit his beautiful riding many times throughout the years, visit Clifton Hill and all the natural wonders.

As I mentioned earlier, Speaker, I think the staycation tax credit is going to be a huge boost to the local economy there, once people are able to safely travel once again. As I mentioned, I, myself, was recently looking at perhaps next spring or next summer visiting Niagara Falls and taking advantage of that tax credit of 20%. Yes, we can argue about if we could give more relief, if could we do this or if could we do that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Conclude the response, please.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: At the end of the day, 20% is what's being offered through this staycation tax credit, and I think that's definitely going to help businesses, because that's what we heard from many of them through our Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Brantford–Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was with great pleasure that I got to listen to the member from Ottawa West–Nepean in his debate this afternoon.

It seems to me that in the House we are left with two options: We can either just throw the taxpayers' money, our children's money and our grandchildren's money at problems, hoping that they will go away in the midst of COVID-19, or we can take a careful, measured approach to protect, support and recover.

I was wondering if you could discuss that a little bit further and the measures that we're taking in this budget to accomplish those goals in a structured, measured way to take care of the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Back to the member from Ottawa West–Nepean.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciate the question from the member for Brantford–Brant. As I mentioned in my remarks, I think it's so critical that we balance those three pillars of protect, support and recover. In the "protect" section, we are making unprecedented investments in health care. Just recently, Speaker, I had the chance to join the Minister of Health, the Premier and the Minister of Finance at the Ottawa general hospital to announce 254 new beds for hospitals across Ottawa. That's the sort of thing we're doing to protect Ontarians, protect our health care.

In "support," we have wonderful supports like the Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit that I spoke about at length in my remarks. That's going to help support our seniors, support our job creators.

And then, in "recover," we have these measures, like reducing our hydro rates, that are going to make sure Ontario is the sort of place where people want to come, start a job, raise a family, put down roots and create jobs. So I'm thrilled—

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

Ms. Jill Andrew: I've heard from members in my community who are artists and cultural workers. I know that my friend and colleague over in York South–Weston also has a thriving arts and culture community. We understand that the OAC, the Ontario Arts Council, has received one-time, \$25-million support by this government during COVID-19, even though, of course, we've heard from the arts community that the OAC's budget should be doubled, but the problem is, this OAC funding is only for organizations. What artists are worried about is that organizations and management and administrative things will be covered but not individual artists.

I'm just wondering if the member from the government side can discuss what specific direct funding is available for artists in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Ottawa West–Nepean to respond.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Excellent. Thank you so much. As the member for Toronto–St. Paul's noted, our government is providing one-time funding of \$25 million for Ontario's arts institutions to help cover operating losses incurred as a result of COVID-19. But beyond that, we also have the \$100-million Community Building Fund that will support tourism, culture and sports organizations, all of which are facing significant pressures due to this pandemic. Funding will be available through the Ontario Trillium Foundation and will help organizations like museums, theatres, fairs and cultural institutions sustain—

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

Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: As always, it's a pleasure to stand in my place and bring the voices of the people of Kitchener-Waterloo to this Ontario Legislature. I welcome the opportunity to actually register some opposition to the

way that this piece of legislation has been crafted on behalf of constituents and groups that have reached out to me in my capacity as the critic for economic development, research and innovation, and even international trade.

I want to start with education because, actually, it was education that first brought me to politics. In my estimation, education is always worth fighting for, and there have been many fights—one would say many battles—on the education front.

As it relates to the budget, though, we see investment in Ontario in a very different way. As has been pointed out on page 187 of the government's own budget bill, they are still holding back money, still holding back \$2.3 billion for a rainy day. I wish to tell the government, on behalf of the businesses and the educators and the health care workers and the people who are waiting for care, that they feel like it is a rainy day. They feel like it is raining. The investment needed to happen well before now.

We would love for the government to put that money into play on behalf of the people of this province. Much of that funding has already come from the federal government. It's actually earmarked for specific investment in the province of Ontario, but that is not what's happening right now. This is a fact. It's contained within your own budget. I wish to register the dismay that people are feeling about how this government is putting money into certain investments, but not others.

I want you to know that investing in education is always a good investment, especially within an economy that is right now trying to pivot to respond to this global crisis. And the jurisdictions, the countries, the states that are quick to adapt and put the commercialization of research—which we've already invested in—into play, they will be the most successful economies. They will recover quicker.

I'm going to get to this a little bit later on. When you leave 51% of the population behind—the women of this province; that's what I'm referring to—then your economic recovery will be slower on almost every front. The research and the evidence are very clear. This budget misses the mark on an inclusive economy, and when I say "inclusive," at the very minimum, I'm saying "including women in the success of this province."

I want to start by congratulating the new president of the University of Waterloo. His name is Vivek Goel, and he will be replacing Feridun Hamdullahpur at the University of Waterloo. I recently had a meeting with him. They, of course, as an educational institution, pay very close attention to what happens here at Queen's Park, and they wanted me to register some of their concerns that they have with the budget—but also opportunities, because that's the kind of community I come from. They're willing to come to the table and offer solutions. We will obviously be trying to make this budget bill a better bill with informed opinions from places like the University of Waterloo.

This is what they say. They would like to see a budget that "works to ensure that the province has a workforce of lifelong learners, poised to drive innovation and navigate

our changing economy, including through continuing university education.” They go on to say, “We appreciate the support the federal government has provided and would encourage more efforts from the province to help employers hire current students, particularly through forms of co-op education and work-integrated learning.”

Our former critic on this issue is Ms. Sattler from London West. She brought forward a piece of legislation. The smart investment to get students that real-life experience is work-integrated learning and co-operative education. We need to double down on that right now. We need to incentivize those opportunities for students.

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They also say, “Invest in entrepreneurship programs on post-secondary campuses.” This knowledge transfer sometimes stays on the campus, sometimes comes off the campus. They’re making the point that this is an important relationship to the economy.

“Our students and researchers are innovative and have a track record of seizing opportunities to improve and adapt to future economic realities. Eleven companies at Velocity, the University of Waterloo’s flagship entrepreneurship program and the most productive incubator of Canada, have pivoted to address COVID-19 needs, from the innovative testing procedures to mask filtration to supply chain distribution.”

They would like the government to leverage our post-secondary institutions to adapt to COVID-19 and to be responsive from a future economic perspective. It makes a lot of sense. I leave this with the government.

Right now, of course, the minister for post-secondary education is actively on his feet every day in this House defending McVety. This speaks to the priorities and missed opportunities of this government. I would rather see the minister talking about how we can get the future generation into future jobs that actually benefit the people of this province. That’s where we would be investing our energy, and that is where we would be investing our money.

Speaking of money, the state of affairs of our post-secondary institutions—as you know, I have the University of Waterloo, Wilfred Laurier and Conestoga College. Ontario, to date, is the least-funded jurisdiction in the country for post-secondary education.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: We’re number 10.

Ms. Catherine Fife: We’re the bottom of the heap. We have cheaped out on investing in post-secondary education to our detriment—to our detriment, Mr. Speaker. We are not going to get back to balance through austerity. We actually have to be strategic about where we invest. I make this point to the government because this budget has huge gaps in it from a progressive perspective.

I met with OCUFA, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations. They’re the voice of 17,000 full-time and contract university faculty and academic librarians in 30 faculty associations across Ontario. So 30 ridings have these institutions. The faculty to date have remained underfunded from a contract perspective. They still lurch from contract to contract. This

is what they said. They said that “our university campuses are the largest temp agencies in the province.” These are faculty members who get a certain fee per course. Basically, they’re precarious workers. I think that we can do better in the province of Ontario. I feel like it is truly a sad day when our campuses are being staffed, essentially, by temp workers because we are so underfunding post-secondary education.

I have been very vocal as the critic for economic development on the role that women can play in returning the province back to economic prosperity. I think that we have to be mindful that this pandemic and COVID-19 has certainly—women have felt the brunt of this pandemic. They were the first to lose their jobs, pointing to the fact that many women work in precarious part-time contract work and in the service sector.

This comes from RBC Economics. This was their current analysis just from last week, and this is what they say: “In a matter of weeks during the spring, COVID-19 rolled back the clock on three decades of advances in women’s labour force participation, setting Canada’s economy up for a slower recovery than might otherwise be the case. Despite notable rebounds in overall employment and GDP in recent months, the pandemic continues to cloud the future for many industries in which women had significant representation. What’s more, the pandemic has made the family responsibilities that women typically shoulder that much heavier.” How do we actually bring some equality and some balance to this unequal situation that women find themselves in? I’m going to tell you. Is it in the budget? No, it’s not in the budget, but I’m going to still tell you. Because child care investments, investing in early learning and care—in good times, the return for every \$1 that we invest in early learning and care is a \$7 return on that investment. Women are more productive. They actually gain new skills. They up-train. They up-skill their training. They are part of the economy and the fabric of this province.

To date in the province of Ontario, 142 child care centres have closed. Perhaps there’s more; there may be an update. But it’s actually happening on a daily and weekly basis. This government has literally decided, “You know what? We’re going to project some advanced money in the future, but we’re not going to take care of the child care centres that we currently have right now.”

What a missed opportunity to signal to 51% of the population in Ontario that you understand the challenges and the barriers that women face—because they are systemic. There is a systemic issue with women accessing capital if they’re entrepreneurs, accessing funding to go to school, and then now, of course, accessing child care. So this has been a colossal missed opportunity to boost the economy, to invest in early learning and care, including those jobs of ECEs, predominantly female-led jobs.

Women are exposed to the hardest-hit industries and overrepresented in industries less conducive to working remotely. Women exiting the labour force face the risk of erosion of skills, which may further exacerbate the gender wage gap that existed prior to the pandemic. I would

encourage the government—there was so much data, research and evidence at your disposal as you were crafting this budget. The fact that you have missed this opportunity to support women is truly very disappointing. Listen, women in the province of Ontario right now are not looking at this government in a very favourable light. A signal to them that they are actually part of the equation and part of the solution to our economic recovery would have gone a long way.

The Decent Work and Health Network has also made the point that the pandemic has exposed the urgency of addressing gaps in paid sick days as a matter of racial, gender, disability and economic justice. I know sometimes the government—their eyes glaze over when we start using this language, but it's important for us to recognize that there's a whole segment of the workforce that is further disenfranchised during this pandemic. Low-wage and racialized workers who are more likely to be denied paid sick days have faced higher rates of COVID-19 and greater negative economic impacts during the crisis. The most recent data available reveals that 58% of the workers and over 70% of the workers making less than \$25,000 have no access to paid sick days.

Making less than \$25,000: I don't know if you saw this last week, Mr. Speaker, but the federal member from Peterborough got caught on a hot-mike moment in the federal Legislature. She was trying to figure out what questions the committee was going to ask her and she was like, "What do I make? Do I make \$250,000? Is that right?" Can you imagine not knowing how much money you make? My mother—she's from Peterborough—I think the average earnings in the riding of Peterborough is something like \$37,000, because there's a number of seniors in there. She makes nine times as much money as the average constituent, and she's so flippant about it. So it was not a good moment; it was not a good look. But it also should be a warning to all of us to be sure not to brag about how much money you make.

I will point out that this Legislature has been frozen now for 12 years, our salaries. I had very little sympathy for the federal member from Peterborough at that time.

Workplaces with precarious jobs have become hot spots for COVID-19, including long-term-care homes, farms, meat processing plants, nail salons and grocery stores. The pandemic has clearly established precarious work, including the lack of paid sick days, as a public health hazard. These gaps are especially dangerous for workers with chronic health or immunocompromised conditions, and for persons with disabilities, seniors, children and patients who rely on workers to provide care and support.

The Decent Work and Health Network has done a very good job of pointing out to the government that we actually are not all in this together. There is a whole component of society that is missing the opportunity.

I asked the question about supports for businesses. It does appear to me that this government is turning their back on business because the system that you have created to access funds is not a simple system. Ctrl V in Waterloo

has applied for everything. They got some deferment. They have no employees, so the WSIB piece was not very good.

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The administrative hurdles that you've created to access the much-announced funding for businesses is not the best way to design a support-of-business program. You actually have really just aggravated a number of businesses who now also understand that the debt they are facing has just been pushed a little bit more down the road. Those debts are not going to be paid, be they deferred taxes or what have you. So I think it's important for us to recognize that.

Does the budget address a huge gap in the workforce that also has a very direct connection to public health? Because when people are sick and they have no paid sick days, they go to work, Mr. Speaker. They go to work because they have no choice.

One of the testimonials from the Decent Work and Health Network is Felix. He's a grocery store worker, and he says, "The pandemic is still here. We [still] don't have paid sick days. This intensifies the pressure to not miss a day. At my grocery store, we are almost all racialized workers and we take the TTC to work. On the bus there's no way to socially distance. Sometimes I'm literally face to face with people and at work I come into contact with over 200 people a day. I'm worried I'm going to get sick. If I get sick I have to stay home without pay and that means losing my financial security. I worry about things like paying rent. We need paid sick days as a security and so we're not expected to come in" to work "sick."

Now, is this a reasonable request during a health crisis, during a pandemic, especially when the federal government has actually indicated that they will pay for the 10 days? All this government has to do is put that money into play. Where would they put it into play? In the budget. Did they do it? Of course they did not.

The ideology and recognizing that marginalized folks in our communities who have no choice but to go to work sick is impacting the overall economy of the province—what would it take? Would it take the Premier spending a day on the TTC and working at a grocery store as Felix has? If he's feeling under the weather, he still has to go to work, he still comes in contact with 200-plus people, and you wonder why our numbers are going up in the province of Ontario.

This disconnect that this government has with the reality that people in this province are facing is astounding to me. If there was ever an opportunity to actually address this gap, it would be in budget 2020-21. When the finance minister stood in his place and said lots of nice words, those words are not backed up with actual finances. They're not backed up with numbers. And when he had the gall to mansplain the budget to me and tell me to get to the end of it and maybe there's some money there—I've been here for eight years. I know where the money is, and I know where it's not. There's nothing in here for the racialized, marginalized workers in the province of Ontario, because if you cared about those people and you

cared about the health and well-being of people in this province, you would have paid sick days and they would be in this budget.

The final thing—and I only have two minutes—is that you've put in schedule 6 of this budget, around the conservation authorities, and the conservation authorities—the Grand River Conservation Authority had an emergency meeting yesterday. They forwarded their concerns to the Premier. I'm copied on it. I'll make sure to get that on the record, but I want to say: "Conservation Authority Says Ontario's COVID-19 Budget Bill Would 'Negate' Its Fundamental Role." You know what's bad for the economy? Flooding, Flooding and high insurance rates are bad for the economy, Mr. Speaker.

"The head of the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) says Ontario's proposed overhaul of conservation authorities would weaken environmental protections and put more power into the hands of private developers, while negating its fundamental role."

The Progressive Conservative government introduced this bill. It's "an omnibus bill ... among other things" and it "seeks to change the way Ontario's 36 conservation authorities regulate development along flood plains.

"The proposed changes underscore a push by" the Premier's "government to dismantle Ontario's environmental regulations and protections, including eliminating cap-and-trade, loosening air pollution laws and allowing developers to sidestep endangered species protections."

Do you know what's bad for the economy? Pollution. Pollution is also bad for the economy. This comes from Ian Wilcox: "There's a reason we're concerned. [The changes] seem to bypass or negate our fundamental role, which is watershed management."

There has been a huge lack of consultation on this: "We were not informed conservation authorities would be part of this bill, so it was a bit of a shock. In our opinion, it really has nothing to do with the stated purpose of that omnibus bill."

So you've done this now a number of times. We're kind of used to it from the Liberals, but you're just overtly throwing in pieces of legislation and schedules that undermine the very fabric of this province. I would argue, and successfully, that they are also bad for the economy. A budget bill should support the people, not continue to undermine them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for maybe two questions and responses. The first question is to the member from Brantford–Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that, and I appreciate the comments from the member for Waterloo.

There are so many things I'd like to ask about, but it was her last few comments that really got me going. I have a friend who's trying to rebuild some buildings in downtown Paris, Ontario. As the member may or may not know, downtown Paris is all falling down because it's built on 15 or 20 feet of topsoil. The TRCA pulled out a

33-year policy, which is completely not in keeping with provincial policy whatsoever, that won't allow him to actually redevelop that area, in character and keeping—and make the project viable by being able to build a few more units that are existing there now. You have an organization that's unaccountable, with no appeal route.

Is the member supportive of someone trying to do something good for a small town and not having a leave to appeal?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm just going to go back to what the Thames Valley conservation authority said: You're making an argument that "the bill cuts so-called government red tape that they say gets in the way of private industry's ability to create jobs which are needed more than ever to prevent a pandemic...."

"What the government wants conservation authorities to do is to stick to what it calls their 'core business.'"

This is what Wilcox says: "I would I argue they need to go back and read their history because conservation authorities were created to deal with soil erosion, deforestation, water quality issues, providing public spaces."

That's good for the economy. Pollution is not good for the economy.

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

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you very much, Speaker, and thank you as well to the member for Waterloo, who did a fantastic job debating this. She talked about missed opportunities. I know the member from Waterloo was part of the 400 consultations through the summer with business communities about what they need during COVID. With the lockdown in Peel and Toronto and elsewhere, I wondered if any one of those businesses during the summer consultation said, "Please close my small business a week before Black Friday and allow Walmart to stay open."

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from Sudbury. I mean, I think that this just adds insult to injury. That's what businesses have been saying to us. Especially when you consider the fact that the Premier stood up and said that he took a personal phone call from the CEO of Walmart and the Walmart CEO convinced him they must stay open. This fundamentally is unfair to main street businesses. And you intentionally did this.

So this is something that must be rectified, Mr. Speaker. It must be rectified. Because these are the small businesses that actually make sure our economy stays open. They paid the price in the first lockdown. You shouldn't put them in the same position and on an uneven playing field with Walmart. It's just not fair.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We don't have time for more questions and responses because it's now time to move into private members' public business.

Debate deemed adjourned.

Report continues in volume B.

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Oosterhoff, Sam (PC) Pang, Billy (PC) Park, Lindsey (PC) Parsa, Michael (PC) Pettapiece, Randy (PC) Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Rod (PC) Piccini, David (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest Markham—Unionville Durham Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill Perth—Wellington Ajax Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP) Rasheed, Kaleed (PC) Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Humber River—Black Creek Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie, du Développement du Nord et des Mines Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Roberts, Jeremy (PC) Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa- Ouest—Nepean Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Sabawy, Sheref (PC) Sandhu, Amarjot (PC) Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associé délégué au dossier des Petites Entreprises et de la Réduction des formalités administratives Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Schreiner, Mike (GRN) Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC) Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Guelph Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Simard, Amanda (LIB) Singh, Gurratan (NDP) Singh, Sara (NDP)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell Brampton East / Brampton-Est Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC) Smith, Dave (PC) Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook Peterborough—Kawartha Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP) Stiles, Marit (NDP) Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	St. Catharines Davenport Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Associate Minister of Transportation (GTA) / Ministre associée des Transports (RGT) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Tabuns, Peter (NDP) Tangri, Nina (PC) Taylor, Monique (NDP) Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC) Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Toronto—Danforth Mississauga—Streetsville Hamilton Mountain Scarborough—Rouge Park Huron—Bruce	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC) Vanthof, John (NDP)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Walker, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Associate Minister of Energy / Ministre associé de l'Énergie Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakubski, Hon. / L'hon. John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Yurek, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Wayne Gates
Lorne Coe, Rudy Cuzzetto
Wayne Gates, Randy Hillier
Andrea Khanjin, Jane McKenna
Judith Monteith-Farrell, Michael Parsa
Randy Pettapiece, Donna Skelly
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeremy Roberts
Ian Arthur, Stan Cho
Mitzie Hunter, Logan Kanapathi
Sol Mamakwa, David Piccini
Jeremy Roberts, Amarjot Sandhu
Sandy Shaw, Dave Smith
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Julia Douglas

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Mike Schreiner
Robert Bailey, Jessica Bell
Goldie Ghamari, Chris Glover
Mike Harris, Daryl Kramp
Sheref Sabawy, Amarjot Sandhu
Mike Schreiner, Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

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Robin Martin, Norman Miller
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Marit Stiles, Nina Tangri
John Vanthof
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Roman Baber, Will Bouma
Lucille Collard, Parm Gill
Natalia Kusendova, Suze Morrison
Lindsey Park, Gurratan Singh
Nina Tangri, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

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permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vijay Thanigasalam
Rima Berns-McGown, Michael Coteau
Faisal Hassan, Logan Kanapathi
Jim McDonell, Christina Maria Mitas
Sam Oosterhoff, Kaleed Rasheed
Sara Singh, Donna Skelly
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
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Toby Barrett, Stephen Blais
Stan Cho, Stephen Crawford
Catherine Fife, France Gélinas
Christine Hogarth, Daryl Kramp
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John Fraser, Christine Hogarth
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